

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force for Housing First Minutes - 2/8/22

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Rep. Duffy's Office, Alexis Breiteneicher, Valley CDC, Nathan Chung, City of Northampton, Senator Jo Comerford, Corinne Coryat, Rep. Blais' Office, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Lisa Fletcher-Udell, Rep. Farley-Bouvier's Office, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Koby Gardner-Levine, Congressman McGovern's office, Gina Govoni, Franklin County Regional Housing, Lamari Jackson, Senator Gomez' Office, Jeff Harness, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Rick Hart, Friends of Homeless Hampshire County, Jenn Hohn, City of North Adams, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Jay Levy, Eliot Services, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield/Hampden CoC, Tim McCarthy, Craig's Doors, Deb McLaughlin, Opioid Task Force of Franklin County/North Quabbin, Jennifer Metsch, Senator Lesser's Office, Dave McNeil, Rep. González' Office, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Theresa Nicholson, Center for Human Development, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Katie O'Leary, Rep. Domb's Office, Armando Olivares, Senator Gomez's Office, Rep. Jake Oliveira, Kelly O'Reilly, Rep. Carey's Office, Marissa Otero, Senator Velis' Office, Rep. Kelly Pease, Phil Ringwood, DIAL/SELF, Keleigh Pereira, 3 County CoC, Jane Ralph, Construct, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Joyce Tavon, MHSA, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Susan Worgaftik, Greening Greenfield, Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke,

Shelter Updates

Holyoke: NEW "pop-up" shelter taking place, thanks to Mayor Garcia's leadership in collaboration with many partners across Holyoke, including OneHolyoke, Providence Ministries, Center for Human Development (CHD), among others. This past weekend was the 4th pop-up, serving 17 individuals on Sat. night and 16 on Sunday night, many of whom were new to providers. CHD assisted with case management and housing assistance (4 individuals entered detox programs from shelter). Work is underway to establish a more permanent site with Providence Ministries, now looking at possible funding sources. ***A big round of virtual applause and gratitude to the City of Holyoke and all partners for making this happen.***

Springfield (Friends of the Homeless): Numbers are high, seeing 175-180 night (note: served under 1,000 unique individuals in shelter this past year). Good news: with new low-threshold housing program and the great work of the FOH team, 23 people were housed in the month of January.

Amherst (Craig's Doors) is working on opening an additional 14 beds for women at the Unitarian Society in Amherst, hopefully available in the next 10 days. This would free up space at the Lutheran Church and create less demand for overflow emergency hotel rooms.

Hotel earmarks via Senator Comerford: Hampshire County's \$25,000 earmark for overflow hotel rooms (administered by Craig's Doors) has been spent down - served 47 individuals over the last 2 months. Franklin County's \$25,000 earmark (administered by CHD) has seen comparatively lower demand due to more complex factors (not to be confused with lack of need in the region, only a question of the demand for these particular hotel dollars at this particular

time in and around Greenfield). CHD utilized \$5,000 of the Franklin County earmark to extend hotel stay nights for 2 days in Hampshire County so guests did not have to vacate in the freezing temperatures. Questions arose around the decision making to shift funds from one county to another for this purpose. Pamela (and others) explained that this was a decision made by CHD based on the time-sensitive assessment of the most urgent need across the two counties, with the support of all partners involved in administering emergency shelter, with DHCD's approval. Pamela will facilitate additional follow-up conversation on this topic as needed .

Northampton, First Churches (ServiceNet): Overflow capacity at First Churches is available.

Greenfield, Wells Street (ServiceNet): Overflow capacity is available.

Pittsfield, St. Joe's (ServiceNet): Typical capacity is around 40 (with room for 50).

Good news: ServiceNet shared they are housing 3-5 individuals monthly out of shelter.

North Adams (Louison House): With their earmark via Sen Hinds and support from MHSA, they are providing emergency shelter at hotel in Adams - full since end of December, serving 28 people. Also using 2 additional motel rooms in Williamstown. Their transitional housing in Adams is also full.

Point in Time Count Update: HUD's mandated Point in Time Count is taking place on Feb. 23. This count determines "how many people are homeless" and comprises the data that is sent to HUD which in turn is sent to Congress which in turn provides the basis for measuring need and funding, i.e., it is extremely important to get as accurate a count as possible. The greatest challenge is obtaining the count of unsheltered people (those in shelter are readily counted). For Hampden County, the street count is organized by Dave Havens at Mental Health Association (dhavens@mhainc.org). For Three County, the contact is Michele LaFleur (mlafleur@communityaction.us). Participation and assistance is strongly encouraged!

Rental Assistance Updates

Way Finders (Hampden/Hampshire Counties: 3,900 households served for the month of January; continuing to see 100-120 applications/day; process time is 7-8 weeks.

On homeowners assistance, Way Finders supports homeowners to apply for federal funds and to provide counseling sessions and a legal referral to CLA if it is needed. Their contact information for help is 413-233-1621; homeownership@wayfinders.org.

Franklin County Regional: struggling due to staff shortages and sickness, trying to bring processing time down from 9-10 weeks. Also on Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV): noted that people who were issued these vouchers in Sept. are unable to find affordable and available units, at risk of losing the voucher. This is a pervasive problem through the region and state.

Berkshire County (via Construct): reported similar challenges to processing time (estimated 9-10 weeks on turn-around); also noted the challenge in finding units

Evictions and Foreclosures Update:

Thanks to Rose Webster-Smith of Springfield No One Leaves for the data below.

On evictions: a significant rise in no-fault eviction filings as well as overall # of filings. Regionwide (4 counties): 157 active executions; 219 judgments (which can convert to executions); over 100 move-outs in Hampden County alone.

On foreclosures:

Hampden County:

257 Scheduled Foreclosure Auctions
27 Properties in Chapter 13
70 properties bought by 3rd Party Purchasers
65 Properties were sold back to the Bank
2 properties had mortgages discharged or got mods
93 properties are unclear if the auction occurred or not
289 Petitions to Foreclose

Hampshire County:

45 Scheduled Foreclosure Auctions
10 Properties are in Chapter 13
14 Properties Converted to 3rd Party Purchasers
9 Properties sold back to the bank
0 properties had mortgages discharged or received a modification
12 Properties are unclear if the auction occurred or not

Franklin County:

30 Scheduled Foreclosure Auctions
2 Properties in Chapter 13
9 properties bought by 3rd Party Purchasers
14 Properties were sold back to the bank
0 properties had mortgages discharged or got mods
5 properties are unclear if the auction occurred or not
49 Petitions to Foreclose

Berkshire County:

99 Scheduled Foreclosure Auctions
7 are in Chapter 13 Bankruptcy
40 properties bought by 3rd Party Purchasers
23 properties were sold back to the bank
2 properties where either the mortgages were discharged or they got mods
27 properties are unclear if the auctions occurred or not
97 Petitions to Foreclose

The Housing Assistance Fund (HAF) as a resource also has limitations, e.g., people cannot receive assistance for any arrears occurring before January, 2020 (and 28,000 people were in severe default prior to January, 2020).

[The COVID-19 Housing Equity bill](#) would provide the necessary protection to homeowners and tenants right now. The Joint Housing Committee issued an extension until 2/22 for a favorable report (the Committee must report it out favorably by that date for it to stay in play). More advocacy announcements on that to come.

FY23 Budget Update: The Governor released his proposed FY23 budget last week. Regarding individual homelessness, his budget proposes an increase of \$25.4 million (from \$58m to \$83m). This is partly to fund the procurement process (all shelters will be put out to bid), and to even out the bed unit rates across the state (this is good for Western MA which has some of the lower rates) and partly to sustain some of what has been stood up during the pandemic. This last factor could also serve our region since it has done such a great job expanding capacity in response to the need. Shelter advocates through the Coalition for Homeless Individuals have already noted that while this increase is good, it's not enough to meet the demand and actual costs. Stay tuned for additional advocacy around that, as well as more information around the Network priorities overall.

Also of note: The Governor's Budget includes \$80 million for RAFT, which advocates immediately recognize will not be sufficient to meet the extraordinary demand as federal funds are depleted. The statewide advocacy request is likely to be \$250 million.

The Mass Coalition for the Homeless provided us with their budget chart with the Governor's recommendations here: <https://tinyurl.com/mchfy23>

The Network Steering Committee is meeting next week on its FY23 budget priorities and will bring these to our next meeting on 3/10.

Legislation Update: The Joint Rule 10 day was 2/2 - the date by which legislative committees needed to determine next steps of its bills - reported out favorably, extended, or "sent to study" (which means not in play for the remainder of this legislative session). [See here](#) for a quick snapshot of the Network priority bills and how they fared. Much more advocacy to come!

Announcement: The new Executive Director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness is Jeff Olivet, a person this region knows very well as he has consulted with our two CoC's and trained many of our partners around racial equity work over these past 3 years. Read all about it [here](#). Congratulations to Jeff, congratulations to all of us - he will serve our cause exceedingly well!

Network Annual Event, May 6! [REGISTER HERE](#). DHCD Undersecretary Jennifer Maddox will be joining us, along with Jeff Olivet in his new capacity as Director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, and more. Please get it on your calendar now!

Next meeting date: Thursday, March 10, 9 am. Our agenda will include welcoming our new mayors and sharing our FY23 budget priorities with our legislators.