

Western MA Task Force Meeting Minutes - 5/12/22

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Office of Rep. Duffy, Keith Benoit, City of Northampton, Tom Bernard, Berkshire United Way, Alexis Breitenreicher, Valley CDC, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Rep. Patricia Duffy, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Denise Jordan, Springfield Housing Authority, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Jen Metsch, Office of Sen. Lesser, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Katie O'Leary, Office of Rep. Domb, Merridith O'Leary, Northampton Health Department, Rep. Jake Oliveira, Kelly O'Reilly, Office of Rep. Carey, Marissa Otero, Office of Sen. Velis, Keleigh Pereira, Three County CoC, Alice Proctor, Franklin County Opioid Task Force, Phil Ringwood, DIAL/SELF, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Cherie Spinks, Office of Rep. Puppolo, Joyce Tavon, MHSA, Kelly Turley, Mass Coalition for the Homeless, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves, Rep. Susannah Whipps, Susan Worgaftik, Greening Greenfield, Dave Ziomek, Town of Amherst

Shelter Updates:

North Adams: hotel use is winding down for now - will be down to 6 rooms in June (at highest point had 26 rooms), but extended funding from DHCD through March 2023 will provide for some additional resources (still sorting out what that will look like)

Pittsfield: continuing with St. Joe's High School - averaging approx. 40 guests (with capacity for 50)

Greenfield: Wells Street shelter is full at 30 beds

Northampton: moved out of First Churches, continuing with Grove Street with 19 beds and 14 beds at Interfaith cot shelter - full

Amherst: closed Lutheran Church on 5/1; extended Unitarian until 5/16; on 5/16, guests there will move into Knights Inn. Continuing with University Motor Lodge 20 beds.

winding down on hotels in North Adams - 44 people served, up to 26 at a time, most have gone on to housing/safe location - down to 6 rooms in June - finished by June 30.

Holyoke: status quo with 45 rooms at Motel 6

Springfield: status quo at Friends of the Homeless

Community Foundation of Western MA funds used for emergency hotel stays (but currently paused to confirm remaining funds) and also used to purchase camping supplies for people who need them.

Discussion of I&R needs in Western MA:

Josh Cuddy of EOHHS asked for Western MA feedback regarding I&R needs and covid prevalence among shelter guests. Report back: a few cases, currently able to shelter them at Knights Inn but that will no longer be available on 6/1. Would prefer to have I&R located in Western MA.

Right now: there is a 25 bed I&R overseen by Boston Healthcare for the Homeless. The site is able to support statewide eligible and there is some capacity for statewide transport that we are working to bolster. Referrals are currently through their main line 857-654-1000

Rental assistance update:

Way Finders: served 4,400 households in April for a total of \$8.6 million distributed. Currently less than 300 ERAP applications remain to be processed; 1,200 RAFT applications are currently open. Seeing a lot of utility shut-offs for tenants and homeowners (Housing Assistance Fund (HAF) does not cover utilities. Also seeing current rental arrearage amounts so high they exceed possible coverage. And seeing families denied due to the loss of income eligibility with the end of ERAP (80% of AMI instead of 50% AMI RAFT standard).

FY23 Budget Update:

Kelly Turley of Mass. Coalition for the Homeless offered a brief summary of the final House budget provisions and the Senate Ways and Means proposed budget. See summary [here](#).

Mass Coalition for the Homeless and Mass Law Reform Institute and others are advocating to win additional investments in more flexible rental assistance (consistent with ERAP guidelines). Please join the sign-on letters to legislative leaders. Organizational sign-on is [HERE](#); individual petition is [HERE](#).

Next week will be an important time to push for co-sponsorship of key amendments. Stay tuned via [Network blog](#) for updates.

City/Town Collaboration:

At the most recent Network convening of the city/town regional collaboration working group, it was decided that this group will work towards a regional blueprint for meeting shelter needs across the region. The goal is for cities/towns to be in a position to help inform and guide providers responding to the individual shelter procurement bid. The next meeting is next week and we will keep providers posted and report back at our next full regional meeting.

Congrats on a great Network annual event! Read all about it [here](#) and thanks to all who made it great!

Next meeting date: Tuesday, June 14, 9 am