

Western MA Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes - 7/14/22

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Office of Rep. Duffy, Keleigh BenEzra, Three County CoC, Alexis Breiteneicher, Valley CDC, Kevin Chambers, Office of Senator Velis, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Paige Dolinski, Office of Rep. Mark, Rep. Mindy Domb, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Rick Hart, Friends of Hampshire County Homeless, Lamari Jackson, Office of Sen. Gomez, Denise Jordan, Springfield Housing Authority, Michele LaFleur, Three County CoC, Meredith Lewis, Community Foundation of Western MA, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield/Hampden CoC, Tim McCarthy, Craig's Doors, Rachel McMahan, Office of Rep. Whipps, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Theresa Nicholson, CHD, Kelly O'Reilly, Office of Rep. Carey, Eileen Peltier, Berkshire Housing Development Corp., Keth Rhone, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Phil Ringwood, DIAL/SELF, Rep. Lindsay Sadosa, Pamela Schwartz, Network Director, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Joyce Tavon, Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Susan Worgaftik, Greening Greenfield, Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke

NEW HUD funding for unsheltered homelessness: Gerry McCafferty reported on a new funding opportunity from HUD to address unsheltered and rural homelessness. For the Hampden CoC, it is eligible to apply for \$5 million for unsheltered homelessness (over a 3 year period). The funding can pay for both the planning around how best to use the resources - possibilities include outreach services, supportive housing, rapid rehousing, etc. - and then actually funding the projects (through a local competition). Conversations are happening now around the planning, including outreach with health care resources since coordination is expected. The full proposal (including proposed grantees) is due on October 20. It is expected to be very competitive given the extent of unsheltered homelessness across the nation.

Keleigh Pereira of the Three County CoC reported on the CoC's evaluation of this opportunity (\$1.9m maximum available for unsheltered; \$500,000 for Franklin County rural) and determined that given the focus on communities with over 1,000 sheltered people (last point in time count found 50 unsheltered people in the 3 county region), it would not be a productive use of time to apply. Similarly, for the rural grant, which could only serve Franklin County (the only county that qualifies), given the capacity issues and other demands of the CoC, the decision was made not to apply as of this time. It was also decided that the CoC will revisit this decision when the annual HUD NOFO is released - if there is extensive alignment in timeline, reporting and planning requirements, the CoC will revisit whether submitting an application makes sense.

Shelter Updates:

North Adams: Louison House sheltered 21 people total in July. Currently utilizing 6 rooms for 12 people. They have identified at least 5 people sleeping outside. Still seeing a very high need for shelter, particularly in the face of an increase in building condemnations.

Pittsfield: ServiceNet continues to operate out of St. Joe's High School with approx. 40 people nightly.

Northampton: ServiceNet continuing to operate out of its two locations, Grove Street (19 people) and the interfaith shelter (occupancy of 8-14 people)

Greenfield: ServiceNet continues to operate its 30 bed shelter at Wells Street. Full with a small waiting list.

Amherst: Craig's Doors entered into an agreement with Knights Inn so that their hotel shelter will continue to provide beds for 30 people through Oct. 31, at which time congregate shelter will be opened at Immanuel Lutheran Church. Great work negotiating for the Knights Inn! The University Motor Lodge's contract will run through 6/23 and shelter 35 people. Through extensive outreach, encampment numbers have declined from roughly 20 to 8. Continuing to offer case management and support at the encampments. In June, 4 chronically homeless people were housed.

Holyoke: Center for Human Development remains full at Motel 6 (47 beds); seeing the prevalence of substance use addiction as a major challenge, supporting people in detox; their 40 bed low-threshold housing is expected to come on line October 1. There is an encampment near Walgreens; outreach is underway.

Springfield: Friends of the Homeless continues to provide shelter to roughly 100 men and 30 women (numbers still high for summer). They have housed 80 people through their low-threshold housing program.

City updates:

Holyoke/Chicopee/Westfield is allocating funding through their Home-ARP Holyoke will hire a housing navigator to connect with all the providers in the next couple of months; Chicopee will create new units for PSH; also funding mobile outreach by housing navigators; Westfield will allocate 75% of its allocation into unit development and use the remainder for supportive services.

Pittsfield's designated ARPA funds will be allocated to a homelessness responses that include more units and supportive services. An announcement to be made on Monday.

Eviction Prevention:

Way Finders: in June served 3,300 households, \$5.2 million

For all of FY23: served 14,000 households; a total of \$90 million

Still averaging 90-100 applications/day; turn-around time is expected to increase given lay-offs due to the end of federal funding. Seeing a large number of utility shut-offs; seeing arrears greater than what RAFT will cover; seeing over-income (RAFT limited at 50% of AMI; federal ERAP allowed for 80% AMI); seeing homeowners coming in with utility arrearages (that the Housing Assistance Fund (HAF) does not cover); seeing people with HUD's Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs) not able to use them for lack of available and affordable housing; seeing HomeBASE running out with no additional resources available and the likelihood of eviction.

Berkshire Regional Housing Authority: echoed the observations noted by Way Finders. Biggest challenge is available housing. Encouraging people to get in the office as soon as the arrears begin in order to increase chances of coverage. Seeing a reduction in turn-around time from 6 weeks to 4 (is able to maintain same level of staffing).

Pamela noted that the end of the federally funded Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) substantially contributed to these gaps and the increased risk of eviction and has been

the basis of the Network's advocacy to the Legislature to close the gap by allocating ARPA funds for this purpose. Thanks to our legislators who supported this funding proposal and we will continue the work to address the urgent need.

Housing Developments:

New Permanent Supportive Housing at 5 Franklin Street, Northampton will open in August with 16 beds. VERY exciting! There will be an Open House on Tuesday, August 2, at 5 pm. See invitation [here](#).

Valley CDC continues to pursue development of the Econo-Lodge in Hadley. Based on discussions with town officials, they will likely need a Chapter 40B zoning permit (Comprehensive Permit) vs. a 40A permit, which means a significantly longer permitting process. But the effort continues.

Louison House is developing 7 units of housing in North Adams for youth and young adults.

Announcement:

The Community Foundation of Western MA is hosting community partner gatherings in late July and early August. [Go HERE](#) for more info.

Next meeting date: Tuesday, August 9, 9 am