

Western MA Task Force for Housing First - Meeting Minutes - 8/9/22

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Office of Rep. Duffy, Keleigh Benezra, Three County CoC, Keith Benoit, City of Northampton, Alexis Breiteneicher, Valley CDC, Kevin Chambers, Office of Senator Velis, Corinne Coryat, Office of Rep. Blais, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Rep. Patricia Duffy, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Koby Gardner-Levine, Office of Congressman Jim McGovern, Brad Gordon, Berkshire Regional Housing Authority, Gina Govoni, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Jeff Harness, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Rick Hart, Friends of Hampshire County Homeless, Denise Jordan, Springfield Housing Authority, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Carol Lewis, Amherst Affordable Housing Trust, Meredith Lewis, Community Foundation of Western MA, Jay Levy, Eliot Services, Westfield Mayor Mike McCabe, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield/Hampden CoC, Tim McCarthy, Craig's Doors, Rachel McMahon, Office of Rep. Whipps, Theresa Nicholson, Center for Human Development, Merridith O'Leary, City of Northampton, Lizzy Ortiz, C3ACO, Liz Plouffie, City of Easthampton, Lisandra Rosario, Office of Rep. Gonzalez, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Cherie Spinks, Office of Rep. Puppolo, Joyce Tavon, Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance, Kelly Turley, Mass Coalition for the Homeless, Susan Worgahtik, Greening Greenfield,

Shelter Updates:

- **Holyoke (Center for Human Development):** continues to be at capacity at motel; moving forward with finalizing new 46 low-threshold units - should be ready for occupancy by October. Units will be filled through shelter and street outreach.
- **Amherst (Craig's Doors):** at capacity at both sites at the Motor Lodge in Amherst and Knights Inn at Hadley - on 11/1 will transition individuals from Knights Inn to Lutheran Church congregant shelter; anticipating 4 permanent housing placements by the end of the month
- **Northampton (ServiceNet):** availability at both shelters (Interfaith Cot Shelter and Grove Street); continuing re-housing efforts
- **Greenfield (ServiceNet):** at capacity; continuing re-housing efforts
- **Pittsfield (ServiceNet):** approximately 35-40 individuals (capacity is 50) - making great progress in re-housing efforts
- **North Adams (Louison House)** - using 8 rooms at motel for emergency shelter
- **Springfield (Friends of the Homeless/CSO,** as reported by Gerry McCafferty from City of Springfield Housing Dept and Hampden CoC): expressing concern about higher numbers in shelter at the beginning of the month (usually a lower time), uncertain about what that foreshadows. Re-housing at a remarkable rate, making room for new people.

COVID response: Baystate and Mercy Medical Center recently experienced a spike in covid among people experiencing homelessness (no place to discharge). Reached out to Friends of the Homeless/CSO and Catholic Charities and together with DHCD support opened up isolation/quarantine space at area hotel for 20 individuals being discharged from the hospitals. This is a stop-gap measure uniquely intended for these hospital discharges as a way to get through this spike; it is not a systematic statewide response. Acknowledged the excellent collaboration among shelter providers and DHCD to make this happen.

No covid outbreaks reported at other shelters.

Note on Community Foundation funds (administered by CHD): \$5,000 remaining in this emergency fund; some will be allocated to refurbishing camping supplies; remainder will continue to be available on emergency basis via provider recommendation only (contact Theresa Nicholson at CHD at tnicholson@chd.org)

Eviction prevention updates

Hampden/Hampshire County (Way Finders, via email): approximately 2900 applications for the month of July and continue to average about 100 applications/day. Continuing to see a high number of utility shut offs and are turning them around as quickly as possible. While emergency cases get processed in 24-72 hours, non-emergency cases are taking 6-8 weeks. RAFT is now capped at \$10K in a rolling 12-month period and only 1 stipend can be awarded. A Notice to quit (or court summons) is required now for rent arrears. We can no longer accept a ledger showing overdue amounts, we have to have the NTQ or court summons.

Franklin County (Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority): oldest application is now roughly 4 weeks old; will be able to pick back up to full volume as soon as new hires are complete. Acknowledged impact of new requirement to have a Notice to Quit - tenants are applying without it which will result in more denials.

Berkshire County (Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, via email): There were some who predicted the volume of applicants would be reduced after ERAP closed. It has not. Even so, RAFT has brought a shift back to pre-pandemic thinking in that households must have a verifiable crisis to be found eligible. No longer is self-declaration of rent burden acceptable for funding. Landlords are once again being asked to follow the eviction protocol. Applicants must have a 14-day notice to quit at a minimum. When RAFT first rolled out the max award was set at \$7K. With so many households coming out of the pandemic owing very high rent arrears, the mediation team has had their hands full trying to negotiate these balances and arrange repayment agreements on the remaining funds owed. The recent RAFT max increase to \$10K has helped to wash out many mediated cases that were otherwise at a standstill.

It was noted that it was extremely important to emphasize to tenants that receipt of a Notice to Quit does NOT mean they must vacate the apartment! Take note of the HCEC's capacity to advise tenants of their rights and provide problem-solving support for the landlord/tenant.

Pamela also noted the need to track the consequence of this (reinstated) requirement and to plug into statewide advocacy efforts to address the increased housing instability resulting from it.

HUD Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO): Gerry and Keleigh of the Hampden and Three County CoCs respectively announced the next round of application for annual renewal of existing housing programs and competition for new programs. HUD's timeline is notably shorter this year (all applications due 9/30) which means a shorter turn-around for the Request for Proposals for new programs. Stay tuned for additional information from each CoC.

Additionally, the Hampden CoC is responding to the HUD NOFO to respond specifically to unsheltered homelessness (due 10/20). Stay tuned for more community input on this process as well.

FY23 Budget and Legislative Session Updates

Please see [this Network blog post](#) for the report-out on the FY23 budget and the 2021-2022 formal Legislative Session.

Good news on the budget this year - many advances for many housing and homelessness programs, especially with regard to funding for our individual shelter system. Additionally, the HCEC's received a funding boost to assist in the administering of RAFT and other housing programs.

Less good news on legislative outcomes. While we gained more legislator co-sponsorships and statewide attention on many of our priorities - eviction record sealing, right to counsel in evictions, tenant opportunity to purchase act, transfer fee for affordable housing - these bills did not pass. We are well-positioned to continue the effort during the next legislative session in concert with our statewide partners and we will!

Big thanks to our Western MA delegation for their leadership and/or co-sponsorship of many of our priorities. We look forward to continuing the work together.

Announcements:

The Community Foundation of Western MA has issued notice of its Flexible Funding Opportunity - [go HERE](#) for more info - applications are due Sept. 15. Also looking for grant reviewers from across all 3 counties who represent the broad diversity of the region. Please contact Meredith Lewis if interested in learning more or with questions about the grant opportunity at mlewis@communityfoundation.org.

Next meeting date: Thursday, Sept. 15, 9 am (and due to a scheduling conflict on Tuesdays for many legislators, we will experiment with meeting exclusively on Thursdays hereafter)