

Western MA Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes – 11/15/22

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Keleigh BenEzra, Three County CoC, Keith Benoit, City of Northampton, Tom Bernard, Berkshire United Way, Rep. Natalie Blais, Alexis Breitenreicher, Valley CDC, Karen Carmona, Opioid Task Force, Jen Civello, Berkshire Housing, Stefan Cejic, Office of Senator Lesser, Senator Jo Comerford, Corinne Coryat, Office of Rep. Blais, Kevin Chambers, Office of Senator Velis, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, , Cathi Emery, Opioid Taskforce, Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Erin Forbush, Service Net, Michaela Grady, Westfield CDBG Coordinator, Robert Goetting, Opioid Task Force Brad Gordon, Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, Rick Hart, Hampshire County Friends of the Homeless, Randy Herk, OTF Connect, Clare Higgins, Community Action Pioneer Valley, Lamari Jackson, Office of Senator Gomez, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Reilly Lee, Office of Congressman Neal, Michele LaFleur, Three County CoC, Meredith Lewis, Community Foundation of Western MA, Jay Levy, Elliot, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Bill Miller, CSO, Taylor McAndrew, Hampshire HOPE / Northampton DHHS, Tim McCarthy, Craig's Doors, Deb McLaughlin, Franklin County Opioid Task Force, Rachel McMahaon, Office of Rep. Whipps, Gilad Meron, Northampton Resilience Hub, Bill Miller, CSO, Earl Miller, CRESS, Theresa Nicholson, Center for Human Development, Merridith O'Leary, City of Northampton, Kelly O'Reilly, Office of Carey's, Lizzy Ortiz, C3ACO, Liz Plouffe, City of Easthampton, Rep. Kelly Pease, Keith Rhone, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Lionel Romain, CEDAC, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Cherie Spinks, Office of Rep. Puppolo, Lily Stowe-Alekman, Office of Rep. Domb, Joyce Tavon, MHSA, Amanda Watson, Franklin Housing, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Susan Worgaftik, Rep Sussanah Whipps, Greening Greenfield, Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke

Introducing our new Network Assistant: Welcome Farida Bature!

Transition at the Three County CoC and thanks to Keleigh Benezra! Keleigh is leaving her position as director of the Three County CoC to become Director of Housing and Shelter for Hampshire and Franklin County for Clinical and Support Options (CSO). She has been a remarkable leader for the region and an incredible support for the Network itself. Thank you, Keleigh, and we look forward to continuing to work together in your new capacity!

Congratulations to our new legislators and our re-elected legislators!

Welcome to newly elected legislators Senator-Elect Paul Mark, Senator-Elect Oliveira, Rep-Elect Aaron Saunders and Rep-Elect Shirley Arriega and congratulations to all our continuing legislators for their re-elections. We look forward to continuing the work together!

Shelter and Housing updates

Springfield - Friends of the Homeless (FOH): FOH will continue to provide shelter at its Springfield site (175 bed capacity, full since August) and starting next Spring will be expanding to operate shelters in Greenfield and Northampton.

Expressed concern about people being discharged from facilities, even from the eastern part of the state, seeking shelter in Springfield. Noted FOH is receiving roughly 10 requests each day for shelter. Also noted that shelter capacity is greater than it has ever been in the region and yet there is still not enough to meet demand. This points to the urgent need for more permanent housing solutions.

FOH has also expanded low-threshold housing units in the Valley and housed over 100 individuals since their low-threshold program began (thanks to the MA Dept. of Public Health for the funding resource).

Holyoke - Center for Human Development (CHD): First, noted the extraordinary demand for family shelter as CHD is at capacity and currently shelter 56 families in motels (Haitian families who have been placed in the EA system, many from Boston). DHCD has put out a request to stand up an additional 200 units across the state. Providers must find units.

On the individual side, Motel 6 continues to be full with 48 beds, serving about 53 people. Their low-threshold housing site in Holyoke is close to opening, hopefully by 12/1.

City of Holyoke update: Pop-up shelters will be utilized this year in Holyoke for extremely cold weather. They will be run by Providence Ministries. Holyoke Mayor Garcia is very involved in this issue and working hard for solutions. For providers/offices seeking information and access to the pop-up shelters, contact Alicia Zoeller of the City of Holyoke at: zoellera@holyoke.org. Holyoke by-names' list has identified 120 people (last year at this time, roughly 30 were identified). They are seeing more elderly and medically compromised individuals and more individuals with dementia. Resources are needed to address this need.

The Network is seeking additional emergency funds from the Community Foundation of Western MA to provide a bridge of support until the new funding for CHD's diversion and outreach program begins in April, 2023. CHD's new program will provide a 1-800 number for people seeking shelter and will provide emergency transportation and motel accommodation while diverting from shelter. Theresa noted the invaluable support of the Community Foundation's emergency funding last year that informed the structure of the program that is state funded for next year.

Amherst – Craig's Doors: Shelter is also full, also seeing more elderly with complex challenges. The transition from the Knight's Inn to the Immanuel Lutheran Church went smoothly (23 beds). University Motor Lodge is also mostly at capacity with 39-44 individuals. Craig's Doors is utilizing its resource center to provide more localized diversion and triage. Noted a positive meeting with Cooley Dickinson Hospital re: discharges from hospital to shelter. Everyone determined to work together to find most appropriate placement. Recognizing the severe gap in appropriate options.

Eliot Services also noted that their outreach workers are seeing more elderly people who are unsheltered.

From the "chat" – one resource for elders: MA Adult Foster Care system. Learn more here: <https://www.mass.gov/regulations/130-CMR-40800-adult-foster-care>

COVID-19 Isolation and Quarantine needs: Knights Inn in Hadley is open to accepting individuals with covid-19 who need isolation and recovery. Please contact Tim McCarthy, Executive Director of Craig's Doors, if you have a need for this resource: tim@craigsdoors.org.

Service Net (Northampton, Greenfield, Pittsfield): Northampton: 19 at Grove street shelter; and 14+ at the Interfaith Cot shelter, mostly full.

Greenfield: Wells Street Shelter is full with 30 beds.

Pittsfield: Continues to operate out of the St. Joe's High School this winter. Have the capacity for 50 people but probably at about 45 as of now. Starting this week they will be operating 24/7 at the shelter

North Adams – Louisong House: Full with 16 beds and 38 people, some units have families in them. Seeing many families who cannot get EA (deemed ineligible despite being homeless). Transitional shelter is also full.

Valley CDC: Continuing the work towards acquiring the EconoLodge in Hadley (50 units, 25 of which will have a homelessness preference). Must obtain a permit from the town of Hadley, which is still in question.

Safe Haven RFR: The MA Dept. of Mental Health released the RFR for a new Safe Havens program in Hampden County last week. Big thanks to our Western MA legislators who helped bring this opportunity to fruition. The bidders' conference is November 29 and applications are due December 28. See the RFR here: <https://www.commbuys.com/bs0/external/bidDetail.sdo?docId=BD-23-1022-DMH08-8220A-80223&external=true&parentUrl=close>

RAFT updates

Way finders (Hampden/Hampshire Counties): DHCD has moved over to a brand new application portal. Way finders has been chosen to pilot a new application portal which just launched on Tuesday. Already 175 applications are in the new system. The new portal requires individuals to apply with an email address and this is an obvious barrier that is being addressed. People seeking assistance can go to Way Finders' offices in Northampton, Holyoke and Springfield, Mon-Fri, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Under this new system, applicants will receive a letter informing a prospective landlord that they have been approved for funding; they can utilize their approval for 60 days and can apply for a 30 day extension.

Franklin County Regional housing: Haven't transitioned to new system yet. Still processing through the backlog; about 120 applications being processed. Limited in ability to provide support since applications are going through central system. Overall still seeing a high number of applicants.

Senator Comerford noted that her office met with other senators and EOHED Secretary Kennealy to discuss the RAFT program and the need for greater protection (e.g., not requiring a Notice to Quit to become eligible). Senator Comerford also noted that the incoming Administration creates an opportunity for advancing advocacy. She also made clear that legislators are available to address individual constituent barriers to EA; happy to lend their voice to the effort to get emergency needs met.

Pamela noted: Boston Globe's recent in-depth article on housing crisis:

<https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Boston-Globe-on-Housing-Crisis-11.12.22.pdf>

Economic development bill - what it means for our region

Thanks to our legislators who helped to bring this bill to fruition. Unfortunately, the eviction record sealing bill (HOMES Act), which was in the July version of the bill, did not get adopted in the final

version. However, significant new housing resources were funded. Read more here: <https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/advocacy/2022/housing-update-wins-and-losses-in-the-economic-development-bill/>

Other announcements: Community Action Pioneer Valley is seeking input from their community – please see the survey here: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7045019/Community-Needs-Assessment-Survey-2022>

Next meeting date: Thursday, December 15, 9 am.