

## **Western MA Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes - December 15, 2022**

*In attendance: Jennie Adamczyk, Providence Ministries, MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Danielle Allard, Office of Senator Gomez, Juan Anderson Burgos, Office of Rep. Duffy, Farida Bature, WMNEH, Keith Benoit, City of Northampton, Tom Bernard, Berkshire United Way, Tana Bloom, FCEHRA Operations Manager of HCEC, Jen Civello, Berkshire Housing, Kevin Chambers, Office of Senator Velis, Sami Cunningham, Shaundell Diaz, Three County COC/CAPV, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, , Cathi Emery, Opioid Taskforce, Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Keith Fairey, Wayfinders, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Erin Forbush, Service Net, Andrea Freeman, Public Health Institute of Western MA, Jared Freedman, Michaela Grady, Westfield CDBG Coordinator, Jon Gould, Gina Govoni, FCEHRA, Rick Hart, Hampshire County Friends of the Homeless, Randy Herk, OTF Connect, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Michele LaFleur, Three County CoC/CAPV, Meredith Lewis, Community Foundation of Western MA, Senator Jennifer Lessor, Carol Lewis, AMAHT, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, 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, Teresa Nicholson, CHD, Lizzy Ortiz, C3ACO, Liz Plouffe, City of Easthampton, Jen Rancourt-Civello, Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Dan Sontag, DMH, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Cherie Spinks, Office of Rep. Puppolo, Kelly Turley, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Lisa Wong, City of South Hadley, Susan Worgaftik, Rep Sussanah Whipps*

### **Shelter updates**

**Springfield - Friends of the Homeless/CSO:** Full to capacity at 175 beds in Springfield. Also noted that CSO was awarded DHCD funding to run the Greenfield and Northampton shelters next year (as of 4/1/23). Working closely with ServiceNet through the transition (ServiceNet did not apply to continue operating these shelters and will continue to manage the Berkshire shelter site). In Greenfield, development plans are underway to expand shelter capacity to 40 beds (currently 30) and develop 36 units of permanent supportive housing. In Northampton, CSO is exploring alternative shelter sites that would allow for a single larger site for the city. CSO thanked ServiceNet for their work in Northampton and Greenfield and looks forward to continuing the partnership through a smooth transition (and ServiceNet reciprocated the sentiments).

**Holyoke – Center for Human Development:** Their 48 bed Motel 6 shelter is always full and serves between 50-54 individuals on a daily basis. CHD is looking forward to the state funded diversion/triage project that will begin 4/1/23 that will offer a 1-800 number for emergency shelter access across all 4 counties, along with emergency hotel funding and transportation services. Their 46 unit low threshold housing program is anticipated to open in mid-January – the delay is a result of construction issues related to sprinkler and heating system. CHD completed an application to the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts for \$50,000 in emergency overflow shelter (motel) funds this winter. Meredith Lewis of the Community Foundation informed the group that the application has gone through the first administrative process for approval and is awaiting a final review. The group gave a warm round of thanks to the Community Foundation for their incredible support of these efforts.

**Amherst - Craig's Doors:** Currently at full capacity at both sites, Immanuel Lutheran Church ( 23 beds), University Motor Lodge (40 beds). Working on obtaining funding for a housing navigator; also in conversation with PVTA regarding a possible partnership that will provide for collective purchasing of discount bus passes. Seeing an increase in covid at the shelter (providing isolation space on site). In good news: today a guest at Craig's Doors who has been residing off and on in the shelter for 10 years will be housed. A hearty round of congratulations was shared.

**Greenfield - Service Net:** This season will continue with 30 beds- at capacity.

**Northampton - Service Net:** This winter they are at capacity between the two shelters (Interfaith Cot and Grove Street) with about 30-32 individuals.

**Pittsfield - Service Net:** At capacity with 50 beds (with some fluctuation). Recently housed 3 individuals.

**North Adams – Louison House:** At full capacity with motel serving 40 individuals with a waitlist. Some guests facing housing barriers due to low credit scores – need to address this further (noted in the chat: anyone that is experiencing subsidized housing denials related to credit score should as a matter of course appeal those denials. Likely to prevail on appeal. There may also be fair housing concerns related to these denials). Also noted youth and young adult housing for 7 youth and young adults is moving along in its development phase – funding is almost secured.

#### **RAFT Update:**

A new statewide RAFT application system is now in place. Way Finders piloted it for the first month and as of this week, all RAFT applicants are using it. It allows both tenants and landlords to apply –and enables landlords to qualify only once instead of with each applicant. Tenants can seek approval without having an apartment identified (providing 60 days and then a 30 day renewal to locate an apartment). Tenants must have an email address. TA is provided by HCECs for any applicant who needs it. Providers can also apply on behalf of their clients. Demand is still very high. See the application here: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/how-to-apply-for-raft>

#### **Report out from the Transition Team on Affordable and Abundant Housing:**

Keith Fairey, CEO and President of Way Finders and Co-Chair of Governor-Elect Healey's housing transition team, reported out on the group's work (and also noted other Western Massachusetts reps on the team: Lisa Wong, Town Administrator, Town of South Hadley, Eileen Peltier, CEO & President, Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, Chris Palames, Executive Director, Independent Living Resources. Keith offered the following insight on the team's mission:

- Addressing housing across the spectrum (unhoused, at risk of homeless, median income, workforce, market rate)

- Brainstorming solutions for the immediate, medium and long-term
- Making recommendations for the new administration's actions in the first 100 days (how to come out big and bold on the housing crisis) – will be delivering recommendations prior to inauguration on January
- Encouraged us to weigh in with the team – and by extension the administration – they are looking for comments and hearing Western MA's voice and priorities will make a difference. Go here to access the google form (doesn't need to be fancy – just get your thoughts out there!):

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSccSNM4J\\_fjTFOfz5dy1nUFnyCiSfVWabe9-ImNgGrQZIY0A/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSccSNM4J_fjTFOfz5dy1nUFnyCiSfVWabe9-ImNgGrQZIY0A/viewform).

### **Western MA Housing Coalition:**

Keith also reported on meetings underway since May, 2022, among dozens of housing providers and local communities across the four western counties to discuss how to increase housing production in the region and the legislative and administrative changes necessary to make that happen. This stems from [the report](#) issued earlier in the year on the housing gap analysis, showing a projection of a 19,000 housing unit gap in the region. The group is currently creating a legislative agenda and will keep us posted as advocacy takes shape.

**Berkshire Housing Update:** Jen Civello of Berkshire Housing Development Corporation reported out on the Berkshire County work happening to address its affordable housing shortage. They are working with One Berkshire and the Berkshire County Regional Planning Commission in partnership with CHAPA (as part of their municipal engagement initiative) on an event on Jan. 31, 2023 to share relevant data and brainstorm local responses. Working with 1Berkshire- an economic and tourism organization and the Berkshire regional planning commission is offering a municipal engagement initiative through their work with CHAPA.

**Impact of untenable rent increases:** Juan Anderson-Burgos, Holyoke City Councilor and aide to Rep. Pat Duffy, noted a recent city council meeting at which Holyoke residents brought to the council's attention the explosive rent increases in Holyoke. He noted that private investment companies are buying up buildings and hiking the rents to a point that make housing unaffordable in low-income neighborhoods (and beyond). His concern was echoed across the group.

**Network Policy Update:** Pamela is representing the Network in meetings across statewide coalitions working to advance its legislative priorities in this next session, including right to counsel, eviction record sealing, transfer fee for affordable housing and more. These groups are meeting in the hopes of organizing a "housing platform" that includes all these issues (and more) and presents a united group of asks before the Legislature. Please stay tuned.

### **Other news:**

A coalition of housing organizations just released a study to support the need to expand the Mass. Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) to address the dire need for housing subsidies, showing that roughly 240,000 households would be eligible for MRVP at a cost of \$3.2 billion. This

report offers a basis for the advocacy to come in this legislative session around MRVP expansion. See the report [HERE](#).

The Berkshire Eagle published an in-depth article on the Berkshire housing crisis that is applicable to housing crises everywhere:

[https://www.berkshireeagle.com/news/local/berkshire-county-housing-crisis-is-getting-worse/article\\_ed34bdd0-7289-11ed-9c68-3f3795109d98.html](https://www.berkshireeagle.com/news/local/berkshire-county-housing-crisis-is-getting-worse/article_ed34bdd0-7289-11ed-9c68-3f3795109d98.html)

Next meeting date: **Thursday, January 19, 2023 at 9am.**