

Western MA Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes – March 23,2023

In attendance: *MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Keleigh BenEzra, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Juan Anderson Burgos, Office of Rep. Duffy, Farida Bature, WMNEH, Tana Bloom, FCRHRA, Alexis Breitenreicher, Valley CDC, Corrine Coryat, Office of Rep Blais, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Cathi Emery, Opioid Taskforce, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Erin Forbush, Service Net, Andrea Freeman, Public Health Institute, Julia Garvey, Michaela Grady, Westfield CDBG Coordinator, Jon Gould, Office of Senator Paul Mark, Jefferey Harness, Cooley Dickson Hospital, Denise Jordan, Springfield Housing Authority, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Tom Kegelman, Home City Development, Jay Levy, Elliot CHS, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gilad Meron, CAPV, Tim McCarthy, Craig's Doors, Rachel McMahon, Office of Rep. Whipps, Anna Oltman, City of Greenfield-Department of Community and Economic Development, Kelly O'Reilly, Office of Rep. Carey, Lizzy Ortiz, C3ACO Kristen Pease, Opioid taskforce/ Arise Initiative, Maureen Pollock, Montague Planner, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Phil Ringwood, Dial/Self, Keith Rhone, FOH/CSO, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Dan Sontag, DMH, Lily Stowe-Alekman, Office of Rep Domb, Kelly Turley, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Susan Worgaftik, Rep Sussanah Whipps, David Ziomek, Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke Community Development*

Shelter/Housing Updates:

Holyoke: Center for Human Development is close to occupancy for their low threshold housing. The City through its Opioid settlement funds will be posting a position for Homelessness and Housing outreach coordinator. The next rounds of ARPA funds will close on April 14. The applications are available on the city's website and Facebook page.

Amherst (Craig's Doors): At maximum capacity (23 at congregate space; 40 at non-congregate). 5 people have recently moved into permanent housing; openings fill up immediately as there is a long wait-list.

Greenfield (Service Net): At full capacity of 30 with a wait list.

Northampton (Service Net): CSO and ServiceNet are working closely together on the transition that will take place from SN to CSO management as of 4/1/23. The sites and phone numbers will stay the same (2 in Northampton, 1 in Greenfield). If any concerns, please contact Keleigh BenEzra, Shelter and Housing Director for Hampshire/Franklin Counties for CSO: Keleigh.BenEzra@csoinc.org

Independent Housing Solutions in Northampton: The 16 bed permanent supportive housing is open; thus far 8 individuals have moved in – all previously sleeping rough for a very long time with serious medical conditions. Extremely meaningful for all involved; special thanks to the case managers and Dr. Jessica Bossie for all the support to make this happen.

Pittsfield(Service Net): Continues to operate individual shelter at St. Joe's High School. Will be moving into new shelter space in the next few months. The current shelter is over capacity (usual capacity is 50) with numbers as high as 70 at times.

North Adams (Louison House): Currently with 32 individuals in emergency shelter while the usual capacity is for 16. The calls are increasing even though the weather is warmer.

The have previously had flexible funding which has allowed them to shelter families. As of April 1, they will only be funded to provide individual shelter and will no longer be able to shelter families. Aiming to open a new permanent site in the next 3 months (an agreement for a new site is in place) which will end the use of motels for emergency shelter.

Youth homelessness update: Young adult providers are seeing an increase in youth and young adult homelessness.

Family homelessness: The demand for family shelter continues to rise – 600 families now in hotels statewide to address the increase – awaiting passage of State Supplemental budget to allow for more shelter expansion.

Eviction Protection: Eviction protections under Chapter 257 will expire on March 31 (the protection requires the pause of an eviction process until a rental assistance application has been processed). An organization sign-on letter circulated – note Western MA comprised 18% of all signers statewide! – and now the Mass. Coalition for the Homeless is circulating an individual sign-on petition. Please **go here** to sign on and please relay to your networks. And thanks to our legislators for their advocacy to make this extension happen.

<https://tinyurl.com/ch257action>

Network Legislative Priorities Update: Following the Network's meetings with the legislative delegation on Feb. 27, the Network Steering Committee revisited the Network priorities to discuss further priority-setting among them. First, the Committee's Racial Equity Work Group convened to make recommendations around Network prioritization. Its recommendations were reviewed and the Steering Committee agreed on the following top 9 priorities:

- Bill of rights for individuals experiencing homelessness
- Access to Counsel
- Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act
- Local Option for Affordable Housing – Real Estate Transfer Fee
- Local Option for Rent Stabilization
- Foreclosure Prevention Program
- Access to ID
- Emergency Assistance Omnibus
- Supportive Housing Subsidy Pool Program

Of particular note is the reordering of the HOMES/Eviction Record Sealing bill. While the goal of eviction record sealing continues to be a highest Network priority, the bill proposed in this Legislative Session must be significantly amended in order to accomplish its intended goals. Under the current proposal, the tenant must petition the court to have their eviction record sealed (the prior bill's iteration required sealing upon filing of eviction with unsealing only occurring if tenant lost the case). Additional timelines for sealing under the current bill are long and place an undue burden on tenants to obtain sealing. This bill remains on the Network priority list in recognition of the critical importance of eviction record sealing and in the hopes that this bill will be significantly amended.

Please see the updated legislative priorities [HERE](#).

Network's FY24 Budget Priorities: The Network is pleased to provide its FY24 budget priorities [HERE](#). These priorities will be the basis for the Network's advocacy in the upcoming House and Senate budget processes (final budget for FY24 – from 7/1/23 – 6/30/24 – will be signed into law by 7/10). Thanks to our legislators for considering and advocating for these budget requests. Please stay connected to the advocacy process by subscribing to our Network blog.

Hadley Econo-Lodge Update: The Valley CDC provided the update on the Hadley Zoning Board's denial of the Valley CDC's permit request convert the Econo-Lodge into 50 affordable and deeply affordable units (25 set aside for people exiting homelessness). They denied the permit without allowing public comment, despite a room full of people at the ready to support the development. There is energy among some residents and committees in Hadley to organize, as well as exploration of alternative routes for development. Thanks to Senator Comerford and Rep. Carey for their active support of the project. If people know people who live in Hadley or have thoughts or questions about this effort, please contact Alexis Breitenbeicher, Executive Director of Valley CDC, at ab@valleycdc.org. You can read more at the Gazette article [here](#).

Elder Homelessness Budget Priority: Thanks to Kelly Turley of the Mass. Coalition for the Homeless for presenting on the new campaign to address the rise in elder homelessness. The Network and Eliot Services are part of the statewide Advisory Committee on this campaign as this issue of increasing elder homelessness is prevalent across our region as well (the closing of 4 Hampden County nursing homes poses an acute threat to elder housing stability). The FY24 proposal includes a \$10million investment to create a bridge subsidy program under the Executive Office of Elder Affairs in collaboration with DHCD that would provide older vulnerable adults support while awaiting a longer term subsidy. Factsheet on this campaign is [HERE](#); any questions, please contact Kelly at kelly@mahomeless.org

Network Annual Gathering: May 12! Please see the [Annual Gathering invitation here](#)

Announcements:

- **East Gables affordable housing**, Amherst – Applications for lottery now open – go HERE: <https://www.hmrproperties.com/property/east-gables-amherst-massachusetts/>
- **Knox Residences, Springfield housing** with project based vouchers and accessible units. Applications accepted 4/3- 4/21 - Knox Residence 1 [HERE](#) and Knox Residence 2 [HERE](#).

Next Meeting Date: Thursday, May 4, 2023