

Western MA Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes - 1/25/24

In attendance: roughly 60 people, including legislators, legislative aides, city and town representatives, dozens of shelter and housing providers and advocates

Shelter updates:

- Springfield: CSO - full and using overflow space on cold notes. Enlisting Network hotel funds for emergency weather, in partnership with Eliot Services. Provided hotel shelter for 14 people so far this season. Systems are working smoothly.
- Holyoke - CHD shelter full, using occasional hotel stays. Providence Ministries is opening a pop-up shelter on the coldest nights, providing an additional 20-30 beds. CHD's triage program is receiving roughly 10-20 calls each day, looking for assistance.
- Northampton - CSO - shelter full, using overflow space on cold nights - not needing use of hotels (esp in view of Craig's Doors hotel support)
- Greenfield - CSO - shelter full, using overflow space when necessary. Working in partnership with Franklin County sheriff on warming center (within CSO space) which has opened for 3 nights so far (actually used by people only one night).
- Amherst - Craig's Doors - shelter full (expanded 2nd floor of Econolodge, doubling capacity to 40 rooms, through 4/1), using overflow space; also using hotels - booked over 90 hotels stays so far (\$7,000 in one cold weekend) - now needing to modify policy to prolong funds (lowering "triggering temperature" from 20 to 10 degrees). Most referrals are coming from Manna Food Pantry. Note: Friends of Hampshire County Homeless has donated funds to Craig's Doors to support emergency hotel stays - this is in addition to state dollars providing the bulk of support
- Pittsfield - ServiceNet - big news that new shelter finally open - congratulations!! - 40 bed capacity. Recognizes need for more capacity. Finding warming space.
- North Berkshire County - Louison House - 42 individuals sheltering, and 13 families, including transitional housing site and use of motels; averaging 2 on overflow cots in Adams transitional shelter. Local church providing warming center. North Adams city funding supporting some extra motel rooms during very cold weather.
- South Berkshires - Construct's service area- previously received 3-4 calls a month for shelter and now received 3-4 calls each week; seeing more individuals sleeping outside.

Discussion of causes in increasing demand for shelter:

First, noting the distinction between the family and individual shelter systems - the migrant issue is overwhelming the family, but that is not the case for the individual system. Major contributing factors are increased rents and lack of tenant protections. It's important to note that many people are getting housed of the homelessness system - i.e., there is a lot of success happening - but new people entering homelessness is greater than the number we are housing. We know what works; we just need the resources to make it happen (e.g., pandemic programs to prevent homelessness worked - they ended - eviction filings are now higher than ever before).

Annual Homelessness Point in Time (PIT) count: The PIT is taking place next Wednesday, 1/31 across both our CoCs, Hampden and Hampshire/Franklin/Berkshire. This count forms the

basis for HUD's public annual homelessness count - and helps determine the federal funding that is available to us.

Volunteers are welcome:

For Springfield: contact Dave Havens of MHA at dhavens@mhainc.org;

For Holyoke: contact Theresa Nicholson at tnicholson@chd.org;

For Three County: contact Michele LaFleur at mlafleur@communityaction.us or Emma Coles at ecoles@communityaction.us.

Prevention/RAFT update:

Hampden/Hampshire - Way Finders - 2nd highest caseload and 2nd highest applications for RAFT in the state. 658 people applied for RAFT last week; 806 the week prior. There are currently 1,100 applications in process and 1,100 waiting to be matched with landlords.

Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority - also seeing high demand, adding a staff person in Orange

Berkshire Housing Development - similar high demand

Also noted was the recent release of MA Housing Partnership's study on evictions, showing that eviction filings are now higher than pre-pandemic rates. [Read more here.](#)

Good Housing News from earlier this week:

- Valley CDC: former Northampton nursing home was awarded state funding to fully rehab building into 60 affordable rental apts from studios to 3 bedrooms across income ranges (30%-100% AMI) with set asides for folks coming out of homelessness. Development is unique because it's adaptive re-use with geothermal for heating and cooling. \$30M all in for the cost.
- Way Finders: received gap-closing funds for 2 projects (which had been previously awarded funds from EOHLC, but construction costs increased prior to financial close, creating a gap). These were: The Plaza Apartments in South Hadley, 60 mixed-income units, in partnership with South Hadley Plaza LLC; and Essex Village in Holyoke, the next phase of their Library Commons project, creating 41 affordable units in downtown Holyoke
- Springfield - First Resource Development Company also received funding to develop 60 units of affordable housing on State Street

Medical respite shelter news: CSO just opened its new medical respite shelter in Northampton at their Industrial Drive address. Will provide 6 month stays for people coming out of hospitalization (referral source is most likely to be the shelters themselves) - 10 beds. Mental Health Association also just opened a medical respite site with 8 beds in Springfield.

FY25 Budget Report:

Governor Healey released her FY25 budget on Jan. 24. Thanks to Abhi Kurve of CHAPA for joining us to provide an overview. You can read [CHAPA's summary here](#). It is a \$56.1 billion budget, which is a 2.9% increase. Due to decreased revenues, there are some cuts and some level

funding (which equals a cut because level does not account for inflation). There are some small increases in some housing programs, but again, not significant given inflation. The individual shelter line-item was level-funded, which means cut! The shelter workforce initiative, which pays more for staff, was zero funded. The Network will be reviewing the budget in more detail and sharing its budget priorities with legislators in upcoming meetings.

Thanks, too, to Kelly Turley of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless for joining us to share more on the FY24 supplemental budget (for this fiscal year) that was introduced alongside the FY25 budget. The supplemental budget is primarily intended to address the EA family shelter crisis, providing an additional \$215 million for family shelter drawn from the state escrow fund. This will clearly be a topic of debate in the Legislature. Right now there are over 600 families on the wait list for shelter and only about half are able to access overflow shelter spaces. The supplemental funding is intended to get the system through FY24 and most of FY25.

Affordable Homes Act hearing: last Jan. 18, hundreds turned out for the Affordable Homes Act hearing. Read all about it at our [blog post here](#).

Next meeting date: Tuesday, Feb. 27