

Steering Committee
Concord's Plan to End Homelessness
Meeting 4/14/15
2 pm- 4 pm
Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce
49 South Main Street

Minutes
Approved June 16, 2015

Present:

Ellen Groh; CCEH (also taking minutes)

Visitors/presenters

Billy and Sandy Boulanger- Corban Center, feed homeless at Centerpoint

Lorrie Dale- McKenna house

Steering Committee Members:

Bill Davis

Peter Evers

Tim Sink

Ruth Perencevich

Jackie Whatmough

Claudia Walker

Pamela Puleo

Ron White (arrived late and left a little early)

Steve Duprey (arrived late)

Absent Steering Committee Members:

Byron Champlin

Lew Feldstein

Robert Hirschfeld

Nicole Shultz-Price

Meeting called to order by Bill Davis.

Approval of February 17, 2015 minutes- Tim moves, Jackie seconds. Approved.

Update on McKenna House expansion from Lorrie Dale and Bill Davis:

Bill is realizing that not everyone understands the program at McKenna. It is an opportunity to get back into society. The planned expansion of McKenna is part of what Steering Committee is hoping to do- relieve problems of individuals and community of people needing home.

McKenna is the only full time shelter in Merrimack County (for individuals). Laconia and Manchester are the closest other shelters. Current capacity for 19 men, 7 women (26 total.) Has been in operation around 34 years. It's a temporary emergency shelter, but really more than that. People staying there are referred to as residents, not guests. It

becomes their home. It's a dry shelter. Drug tests and breathlizer used to ensure compliance with rules. This is important because people are in recovery; it would not be fair to them to have people under influence of drugs or alcohol around.

Residents must do 20 hrs/wk of community service or pay \$10 day. Residents can help at various non-profits, including Salvation Army store for community service. This reinforces that nothing in life is free, and has led to employment for some. No time limit for program. Mandatory case management. Not just a place to lay your head. They run AA, 12 step programs and more. 3 paid employees and a lot of volunteer and resident staff.

They turn away about 10 people a day. Beds fill immediately. People call in on list everyday.

248 came through last year. Length of stay ranged from 1 day to 1 year. You can put anyone in an apartment; the key is keeping them in the apartment. They take folks to look at apartments and connect with services. Want to make sure they are stable. People can always come back to McKenna and see us. They often come back for advice about legal issues, mediator, parenting skills, other. Even those who are asked to leave come back for help. They are a family, a community.

Expansion-

Basement will be storage. Now, residents can only keep 2 plastic bins. Will be able to hold some possessions for folks. Also a classroom space. First floor- the current men's dorm will be dining room. Now, can't all sit and eat at one time. Women are currently on second floor- not handicapped accessible. Increasing capacity to 13 women and will be on first floor and handicapped accessible. Increasing men's beds by 10 (to 29 men) and resident staff in separate area. Dormitory style.

Architect plans are tentative. The process with the Salvation Army – decisions have to go to Portland and then NY for approval.

McKenna is not a rehab center, but it is a dry shelter. Not fair to bring someone in under the influence when others are working to be out of such an environment. Their facility wouldn't be able to handle a population that is drug addicted, or sexual offenders who shouldn't be next to the daycare next door.

You could technically sleep people on floor at Mckenna with the expansion, but important to keep this program in tact, so it would not be appropriate as the winter overflow shelter space.

They've gotten no opposition from neighbors for the expansion; they got letters of support from City and some neighbors.

Capital campaign for the expansion- working on that now. They have internal funds they can use, but have been using interest on those funds for operating costs. So they are trying to raise the \$675,000 cost so they don't have to dive into the trust funds. If there is

no community response to fundraising, they would reconsider the expansion. They are over \$30,000 already on the soft-rollout of capital campaign. They have loyal following of donors and have some larger donors interested.

Pamela- what would Lorrie recommend for filling gap caused by closing of cold weather shelters? Lorrie- Her personal opinion- it was a lot smaller when it first started. In recent years, people came from all over, not just from Concord. Communities need to take care of their own people. If a shelter gets federal funds, they have to accept people from all over. Advises people to go out (safely) to tracks to see the camps where people are now living.

Update on state budgeting process: Ellen requests everyone to contact State Senators. The House budget cut the funding for homeless services by ½. The Senate needs to hear from voices other than the traditional service providers that these services are critical, and request level funding of these services. This is the funding the CCEH applied for to provide caseworker support for the Housing First permanent housing initiative.

Comments: the fact that these cuts affect veterans and families with children will get the attention of the Senators.

Updates from Ellen on Plan: a report was sent out to Steering Committee late last week, along with a copy of a handout that has been used at various public education events (Rotary presentation, Souperfest event.) Ellen went over high points:

Resource Center will move on Friday May 1st. Plan to have shower and laundry. For now, same hours of 9 am -1 pm.

Response to closing of cold weather shelters:

Ellen went over the 5 “boxes” in the handout showing the 5 components of the strategy we’ve been talking about to respond to closing of Cold Weather Shelters.

Housing First- Proposal has been drafted and is going to John Hoyt at Concord Housing and Redevelopment for creating a preference for Section 8 vouchers for long term homeless people. Rental vouchers are essential to the HF component. It could be straight preference, or some alternating pattern, like every 3rd voucher that becomes available would go to a long term homeless person. Next steps will depend on reaction from Concord Housing staff. The hope is that they work with CCEH to present a final proposal, supported by staff, to the Board of Commissioners.

CCEH still waiting to hear about application for SGIA funds for caseworker support for the Housing First component. If not funded, CCEH will seek out private funds for this component.

Increased Diversion: CCEH applied to City for \$10,000 to increase staff capacity to divert people from entering shelters during winter months (increasing hours by 20 hrs/wk for 6 month period.)

Coordinated Assessment, required by HUD and BHHS, should also help these diversion efforts.

Discussion by Steering Committee about Coordinated assessment and housing first component, and who is making decisions on these things: Bill would like to see a plan of how people are prioritized for HF. Ellen: It will be by length of homelessness and vulnerability, using nationally recognized vulnerability tool. Bill wonders if Housing First component should be set up as a separate entity. Bill thinks Steering Committee is responsible for making sure this happens; i.e., if the HF model needs to be funded separately, and no one steps up to do it, the next step would be for Steering Comm to go back to the City and recommend the City set up an entity to do this.

Ellen: doesn't think the City has the capacity to create a separate entity to bring the Housing First model to Concord. CCEH is working to bring the necessary pieces together, by engaging affordable housing developers, seeking rental vouchers, and seeking funding for caseworker support.

Discussion on role of Steering Committee and role of CCEH. Role of Steering Committee is to advise and monitor progress on Plan's goals.

Discussion about smaller overflow shelter: CCEH has made request through interfaith council to see if any faith organization is willing to serve as host site. Decisions in these organizations take time; CCEH wants to know if many already know it wouldn't be possible, and if any think it is at least a possibility. Next step would be to return to Mayor and City manager to discuss "Plan B"- what is possible location for smaller overflow shelter.

Presentation about Corban Center-

The serve free lunch to people on Saturdays at Centerpoint. They form direct relationships with people who are homeless, use the term "friends" rather than clients.. Help people transition into apts. Based in Epsom. Food is a way to attract people to get to know people on a personal level. They could help get info on how long someone has been homeless. But you need to demand accountability so people can feel needed. 25 to 64 people at lunches. Toxic Charity- a great book to read.

Discussion about approaching County Commissioners, recognizing this is a regional issue, not just a Concord issue.

Comments and discussion:

The County has a tax mechanism. We need to say, the cost of dealing with homelessness issue is x, and each town should be assessed on some per capita basis.

Comment: We need to be careful of what message we are giving to the County- it should not be, send us some money and then it's ok to send all homeless people to Concord. Each community should be helping the homeless people in their own community.

Should have a county-wide committee/task force on homelessness to think about the problem and solutions.

Every city feels they have their own unique issues, but prison and state hospital do make Concord unique. The prison still releases people into homelessness.

Homeless people came to cold weather shelters all the way from Portsmouth. This problem of homeless people being sent to other cities for shelter must be a problem in other states too.

Bill noted Steering Committee has been meeting for 6 months. How do we feel its going? What would you tell someone if they asked what is Steering Committee doing. Pamela said she'd refer to the handout with 5 components.

If county would buy into the idea that this is a county-wide issue, that's important.

When we approach county, important to stress that other counties have more than one shelter, Merrimack county only has one (for individuals.)

Could go to food pantries in other towns and see how many people being served- it would give you an idea of how many in those towns are teetering on edge of homelessness, and might end up in Concord if they lose their housing.

It would be easier for the county delegation to impose a tax to help pay for solutions than for local boards of selectmen to try to raise money in their town budgets.

Fear about creation of Section 8 preference for long term homeless people- you may be creating more homelessness because person who has been waiting so long and got "bumped" in line could be on the edge of homelessness.

Ellen asked who would like to go see Commissioners: Bill, Steve, Tim, (and Ron had left, but has shown interest in this and would probably want to be part of this. Ellen will send a doodle scheduler out for a meeting to hone the message/request to the County commissioners.

Ellen- referenced e-mail sent to Steering Committee members earlier in the day regarding appointing a person with lived experience of homelessness to Steering Committee. CCEH recommended joanne St. Hilaire (j) who currently serves on CCEH board; her bio was sent with the e-mail. Process is to send bio to Mayor Bouley for appointment at next City Council meeting. Everyone in agreement to nominate j to the Steering Committee, and saw no conflict with her serving on CCEH board as well.

Meeting adjourned at 4 pm.