

Ellen G. Groh, Executive Director

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Concord Coalition to End Homelessness  
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To: Concord Plan to End Homelessness Steering Committee members  
From: Ellen Groh, CCEH Director  
Date: December 10, 2015

Re: Update on Plan to End Homelessness

### **Cold Weather Strategy Response**

Things have been moving extremely rapidly over the last few weeks, and just moments ago I received word that the Mayor has successfully negotiated the use of the St. Peter's Church activity center for use as a 60 bed cold weather shelter this winter. The Friends Program has agreed to manage it. It is unclear whether they want the input/assistance of the Warming Center Steering Committee that had been formed. This is intended an interim solution, and St. Peter's is for sale and is not likely to be available next year.

I was aware that the Mayor was aggressively pursuing this, but he wanted to keep it quiet so as not to raise any false hopes if it did not work out, so CCEH continued to push ahead with the Warming Center solution. (see below.) I'm waiting to hear from Jerry Madden at Friends to get more details on what he would like from CCEH and other providers to support this effort. I am amazed the Mayor was able to pull this together at the last minute and I applaud his efforts! Funding had previously been committed by the NHCF, and we have been in conversation with Concord Hospital about possible funding, and the Mayor has an anonymous source of funding, so hopefully these sources will fill the need.

### **Background:**

Since the last Steering Committee meeting, CCEH put a lot of work and energy into finding or creating a safety net of last resort for the winter. I approached several public facilities that were already open overnight (police, fire, Concord Hospital) to see if any would be able to serve as a "warming center," where people who "fall through the cracks" could go to be out of the cold during the night, even if it meant sitting up in chairs rather than being in bed. None of the agencies felt they had the capacity to fill this role.

The most vulnerable people are those who are unwilling to seek assistance from City Human Services, or who have sought assistance in the past but not followed through with the requirements expected of them, or who have not followed the rules and/or caused damage to hotel rooms in the past. It is difficult to predict the number of people who fall into this category,

since many of those who used the Cold Weather Shelters in the past came from other towns, and would hopefully not come to Concord if they knew there was no Cold Weather Shelter.

In early November, Tom Fredenburg, owner of the Resource Center building at 238 N. Main Street, informed CCEH that the upstairs had been cleared by the City for use as a 16 bed shelter. Given the importance of ensuring that everyone in need of a warm place have something available, CCEH advocated for the creation of a winter haven/warming center in that space rather than a 16 bed shelter. CCEH and the mayor called a "Strategy Summit" and invited all the services providers, Steering Committee members for the Plan to End Homelessness, funders, and government agencies to work out a way to make use of the space for a winter response. The session was facilitated by Ellen Koenig of Full Circle Consulting, as a donation of her time. Over 40 people attended with only one week's notice, which is a testament to the community's compassion and commitment. CCEH strongly advocated for the warming center approach because with a 16 bed limit, we could not ensure that no one would be left out in the cold. Other towns would still be likely to send people to Concord in hopes of getting one of the limited beds. A warming center would not be as attractive, so less people would come from out of town and it would be easier to divert people to options within their own support network.

Out of this meeting, a group stepped forward to work on creating the Warming Center, including Family Promise, Friendly Kitchen, CAP (Community Action Program), Concord Hospital, Riverbend and CCEH. Granite United Way agreed to be the fiscal agent if certain conditions were met. NHCH had an anonymous donor for \$20,000 to support the effort. Caleb Keller stepped forward to coordinate finding and supervising the overnight, awake, staff. Mike Lafontaine stepped forward to help facilitate the entire process.

**Moving Forward:**

This was a chaotic, stressful few weeks trying to get a safety net in place. The experience reinforced for me the gap that exists in Concord regarding homeless people with active addictions: there is currently no shelter in Concord that serves this population. Even if Housing First were entirely successful, and we had all the vacancies and rental assistance that were needed to reach "functional zero", (where all people experiencing homelessness are permanently housed within 4-8 weeks of becoming homeless or seeking assistance,) there would still be a need for a low barrier safety net, at least in the winter months. While CCEH still sees Housing First as the top priority to end homelessness, we must find a way to address this gap so we are not in this position again next winter.

THANK YOU for your time and energy on this Steering Committee!

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