



**Fidelity Committee
of the
Tri-City Joint Mayors' Task Force on Homelessness
Remote Meeting Via Microsoft Teams
April 15, 2021
6:00 PM**

MAYORS

Mayor Caroline McCarley
Mayor Robert Carrier
Mayor Dana Hilliard

Rochester Members

Jeremy Hutchinson
(Chairman)

Barbara Holstein

Dover Members

Charles Reynolds

Betsey Andrews Parker

Somersworth Members

Todd Marsh
(Vice Chairman)

Dina Gagnon

Others Present. Lindsey Williams, Dover Council. Julian Long, Rochester Economic Development. Karen Weston, Dover.

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Vice Chair Todd Marsh informally called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM. It was determined that there was not a quorum present and the Chairman was not present at the time. Those gathered decided to hold an informal session and discuss updates. The preamble appeared with the agenda as follows:

Good Evening, as Chairperson of the Fidelity Committee, I am declaring that an emergency exists and I am invoking the provisions of RSA 91-A:2, III (b). Federal, state, and local officials have determined that gatherings of 10 or more people pose a substantial risk to our community in its continuing efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. In concurring with their determination, I also find that this meeting is imperative to the continued operation of City government and

services, which are vital to public safety and confidence during this emergency. As such, this meeting will be conducted without a quorum of this body physically present in the same location.

At this time, I also welcome members of the public accessing this meeting remotely. Even though this meeting is being conducted in a unique manner under unusual circumstances, the usual rules of conduct and decorum apply. Any person found to be disrupting this meeting will be asked to cease the disruption. Should the disruptive behavior continue thereafter, that person will be removed from this meeting.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote.

Let's start the meeting by taking a Roll Call attendance. When each member states their name also please state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to-Know law.

There was not a formal roll call taken. The following members were present: Barbara Holstein, Charlie Reynolds, Vice Chair Todd Marsh, Chairman Jeremy Hutchinson (6:12 PM). Betsey Andrews Parker and Dina Ganon were excused.

2. Public Input (3-minute maximum and/or submit a statement)

There was no public input received and

3. Communications from the Mayors

Vice Chair Marsh reported that Mayor Hilliard had passed along some information he wanted discussed in the absence of the 3 mayors from the meeting. He stated that the Mayors had participated in a meeting on the prior Monday at Somersworth City Hall; including emergency services, welfare directors, and the Tri-city managers. There was an appreciation expressed for the great deal of work and effort which had gone into the Willand warming center, but acknowledgment that winter would come again soon and plans needed to be made. There was a verbal consensus to maintain the warming center for next winter with the desire to expand seasonal services to 7-nights as opposed to only opening for emergency weather situations. The consensus was that this warming center should continue for one more year with a plan to reassess.

4. Communications from the Chairs

Chairman Hutchinson reported that the Assistant Director of NH Homeland Security who is also the Emergency Manager for the State of NH had contacted him with interest in the Fidelity Committee. He said he is looking to potentially get involved and see if there is a way he can help in the future.

Vice Chair Marsh said he had continued to participate in the Governor's State Planning Committee as a member of the housing instability and homeless systems subgroup as well as the Homeless systems action and supportive services subgroup. He spoke briefly about the work being

done. He said a recurring theme is supportive housing support, including flexibility with use of Medicaid funds to pay for this service. He spoke of not only providing means to people needing this support, but the capacity to deliver these services. He said they are looking at a system wide-approach to supportive housing. Although there are services available to assist financially, there needs to be services to maintain support once people are in housing.

5. Update from local welfare

Vice Chair Marsh said that requests for financial assistance have been much slower than anticipated. He surmised that this is due to a combination of the Government stimulus checks, increased unemployment wages, and other government COVID relief funds. He stated that local welfare has actually seen cancelled appointments when clients no longer need the services. Dave Balian, Dover welfare, agreed that this has been the case State-wide.

Mr. Balian stated that at the Willand Center, they performed an informal assessment of the needs of each client coming in. There was a day program set up at CAP to assist with these individual needs and provide services. Due to this program, a lot of pressure was taken off local welfare and some clients were actually taken out of the system because they no longer needed welfare assistance.

Mr. Balian referenced a grant of \$1 million which had been received for use with operations at the Willand center. The total cost to open and operate was around \$763,000. With the remaining funds, they purchased a trailer which contains 3 bathrooms and 3 showers, a laundry trailer with 6 washers and dryers, and a full kitchen trailer. He reported that one of the issues they ran into was that the lines freeze in cold weather unless the trailers are run constantly which was not cost effective. There was a portable generator purchased to run these trailers as well. Mr. Balian said he has been tasked with trying to find uses for these trailers. He has approached SOS, Waypoint, Tri-City Coop and other organizations to get ideas for these resources. They intend to find a spot to locate these trailers with access to water and sewer hookup and run the trailers several times a week; however, they are not committed to leaving them in one spot and are open to suggestions on alternate uses throughout the Tri-Cities.

Chairman Hutchinson asked how the trailers would need to be transported and hauled. Mr. Balian said there is a ball hitch on each trailer, but a truck would be needed to haul them from location to location. Mr. Balian said there may be funds available to pay for operations of these trailers and there has been interest shown for those willing to staff the trailers. He gave specifics on the interior of the kitchen trailer and stated that it has its own standalone generator as well as its own fresh water tank and gray water tank. All 3 trailers have propane tanks for heating water and other operations.

Chairman Hutchinson spoke about the potential of having a rotational schedule for the trailers to travel between the Tri-Cities and doing a trial program to see how it works and how often the trailers are utilized. There was a discussion regarding using the kitchen trailer for meal programs and mobile feeding. Mr. Balian stated that the kitchen trailer has already been reviewed by the health inspector and is in full compliance; all that would be needed is staff with Safe Serve licenses.

The trailer discussion will be placed on the next agenda for further update and discussion.

6. Discussion: Seasons-end wrap up and future plans – Willand Warming Center and Garrison Shelter

The discussion was delayed for this meeting. It will be revisited at a future meeting where Betsey Andrews Parker is present and can give an update.

7. Discussion: Tenant screening and selection [Click Here](#)

Julian Long, Rochester Economic Development, referenced the report which looks at tenant screening practices primarily in Minnesota in the Twin Cities area. He clarified that the report is applicable to the rest of the country as well due to the criteria being used by landlords being fairly universal.

Mr. Long discussed some of the common issues faced by tenants in finding housing; many landlords are looking for tenants whose monthly income equals 3 times their monthly rent. Lower income families are often paying 40%-50% of their income. He also stated that landlords sometimes require review of tenant rental history which may include evictions from the distant past or the start of eviction proceedings which were never completed. Landlords may also require credit and criminal history, which may not always have relevance to whether or not the individual would be a good tenant. The report also mentioned racial disparities and the reasoning these may come into play.

Mr. Long discussed some potential recommendations included in the report, such as “ban the box” (removing the question from rental applications which asks if the applicant has a criminal records). In lieu of entirely removing the question, it may be adjusted to narrow the criteria to only contain convictions from after a certain time period or to remove misdemeanors. Mr. Long said that there is a recommendation for landlords to have more transparency in the process so those looking to rent will have a better idea of whether or not they qualify before they apply. Have landlords consider mitigating circumstances ahead of time. Having people have co-signers on leases if there are issues in their rental history. Increasing landlord and tenant outreach and education. Finally there was a recommendation to consider lowering requirements for income levels to accommodate for lower income households, who while they may not make 3 times the income compared to monthly rent does not indicate that they will not make rent a priority.

Chairman Hutchinson asked for ideas on how the committee could take these recommendations and turn them into actionable items. Vice Chair Marsh said that for an initial step, he recommended public awareness campaigns in regards to tenant rights. He reported that it is not uncommon for clients to come into welfare and state that they have been kicked out of their apartments; however upon further investigation, welfare discovers the client has not received any formal notice, been given a proper timeline, or gone to court. The tenant is not properly educated on their rights. Mr. Marsh also spoke about the issue of transparency in renting. He referenced the large amounts of money which clients need to spend on rental application fees without any guarantee of outcome, which can put them in a position where they are short on funds for other

necessities. Perhaps with increased transparency, money could be saved with not applying for some of these apartments where they would not qualify.

Mr. Marsh suggested perhaps there can be a report to the tri-city councils in regards to tenant rights and landlord education and potentially a press release from the Fidelity Committee with bullet points and further information. He asked if Mr. Long could generate some bullet points to be considered and bring a more structured proposal which the committee can discuss and work toward a press release. Mr. Balian suggested the members and contributors trying to think of information and bullet points which they think should be known and what is needed that the public may not be aware of.

The item was moved forward to the May meeting of the Fidelity Committee for further discussion.

8. Regional data/statistics

Mr. Balian reviewed the data gathered from the Garrison Shelter, which closed as of April 15. The data was broken down to what it cost to operate, including meals, for a total of \$236,000. The day program data was included as well, in which 110 unique individuals showed up to receive assistance. For the Warming center, they served 90 individuals over the times in which they were open for a total of 299 total bed nights. Mr. Balian emphasized the immeasurable amount of money which was saved and the number of lives which were potentially saved by having the Garrison and Willand center open. Many of the clients were able to receive medical care and assistance services which headed off problems before they progressed.

Chairman Hutchinson suggested that there be a wrap-up report of the Garrison Shelter and Willand Warming center to be presented to the Tri-City councils. Vice Chair Marsh agreed that this data would be beneficial for those providing the services as well for future budgeting and funding purposes.

9. Other

No discussion.

10. Closing Public Input

Karen Weston, Dover, asked about the earlier discussion of keeping the Willand warming center open 7-days a week in the future and whether or not it would be a 24-hour facility. Mr. Balian said that it would be an overnight center, likely opening 5 PM and closing the following morning. Ms. Weston asked what would be proposed for more long-term sheltering where the Garrison Shelter would not be open again. Mr. Balian said that the Garrison was only open due to COVID restrictions on other shelters which made it impossible to have the density they had previously had, and to remove the strain on other local shelters. He said that currently there is no long-term plan beyond the warming center and it would be discussed further as the year progresses. Vice Chair Marsh agreed that a more permanent solution is on the radar and would be in future

discussions. Ms. Weston emphasized the importance of not losing focus on this ultimate goal of a permanent shelter, especially when there is funding and grant money available and while the need is still present and the situation still fresh on everyone's mind.

Ms. Weston asked if there were any plans for the summer for cooling centers for the homeless population. Mr. Balian said it had not been discussed at length, but it is on the radar and it will be determined in the near future.

11. Adjournment

Chairman Hutchinson **ADJOURNED** the Fidelity Committee meeting at 7:21 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Cassie Givara
Deputy City Clerk, Rochester