



**Fidelity Committee
of the
Tri-City Joint Mayors' Task Force on Homelessness
CAPSC
577 Central Avenue, Suite 10
Dover, NH 03820
August 12, 2021
6:00 PM**

MAYORS

Mayor Elaine Lauterborn
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: Susan Danforth, Connections for Health. Former Dover Mayor Karen Weston. Dave Balian, Dover Welfare. Jenny Holmes, Somersworth Mayor's designee. Ariel Hayes, Waypoint. Amy Malone, Waypoint. Milena Lugo, Waypoint. Ashley Desrochers, Strafford County Public Health Network. Emiliano Cabral, Rochester resident. Julian Long, Rochester Economic Development. Dave Carpenter, Dover Planning. Palana Hunt-Hawkins, Rochester City Council.

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chairman Hutchinson called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM. All members were present except for Barbara Holstein, who was excused.

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

It was asked if there was a resource which would let residents know of any upcoming opportunities for COVID vaccines. Ashley Desrochers stated that she had a spreadsheet which

could be distributed showing the vaccine sites throughout the State including locations, times, and sign up information. She also said her organization has the ability to request the State mobile vaccination van, and they can take requests to go to specific locations. There was a brief discussion regarding resources for vaccine hesitancy and overcoming that barrier. Ms. Desrochers stated that there were staff members of Public Health which are able to offer this service and give information, answer questions and allay fears.

3. Communications from the Mayors

There were no mayors present at the meeting.

4. Communications from the Chairs

Vice Chair Marsh reported that Somersworth has hired a new welfare director, Kristen LaPanne, who formerly worked for Community Action.

Chairman Hutchinson opened the floor for discussion on whether or not the Committee should continue meeting in person. He stated that with the most recent data on the Delta variant and the expected increase in cases as we move towards fall and winter, it may be a better option to return to remote meetings. Ms. Desrochers recommended at the very least offering a hybrid format if not returning to full remote meetings. She agreed that based on the data with COVID number and the increased infectiousness with the variant, it was safest to return to connecting remotely. It was agreed that with the given circumstances, it was best to return to Teams meetings for the near future. The next meeting was scheduled for a modified date and time: Thursday, September 16 at 5:30 PM.

4.1 Update: Planning Department(s) recommendation request

Vice Chair Marsh reviewed the request which had been made in December of 2020 from the Fidelity Committee to the Planning Departments of Dover, Rochester in Somersworth. The request had asked the departments to review their ordinances and determine if there were any barriers or challenges to affordable housing in the communities and to look into possible opportunities to develop this type of housing. The Vice Chair distributed the response letters from each of the Tri-City planning departments.

Chairman Hutchinson suggested that the Fidelity Committee could reach out to the directors of each of the Tri-City planning departments and extend an invitation to a future Fidelity Committee meeting to discuss ideas and recommendations.

5. Update: Homeless resource/service trailer location

Chairman Hutchinson gave an overview of this agenda item what had occurred so far at the Rochester City Council level, where the City administration had not been able to find a suitable location for these trailers. He stated that he was told Dover had found a location for the trailers and was comfortable keeping them there indefinitely.

Betsey Andrews Parker reported that Dover welfare has been working with the Salvation Army in order to locate the trailers on their Rochester Property. She stated that the Salvation Army had also offered staffing for the trailers as well as permanent hook-ups for the utilities, and it had seemed like the prior issues had been resolved and the project was moving forward. Ms. Andrews Parker said that the City of Rochester then informed her that the trailers could not be located on the Salvation Army property due to a “permitting issue.” Initially it was thought that this meant it was only a matter of applying for City building permits. She did not anticipate an issue with this because S.U.R. Construction had offered to donate their services to install the utilities, pour a permanent concrete slab, build fencing, winterize the trailers for year-round use, and to ensure code compliance. She stated that she then received a call from a Rochester official clarifying that it was not a matter of obtaining the proper permits, but rather that these resource trailers were not a permitted use in the area where they were being proposed; because the trailers were being considered the same as RVs or campers by the City code and could not be permanently hooked up to City utilities. She was told that the City would not issue a variance for the trailers. Ms. Weston stated that a camper or RV could be considered an auxiliary residence to a home, but a shower or laundry trailer was not comparable. She felt this should be allowed by variance.

Ms. Andrews Parker clarified that due to the work being donated by S.U.R., the trailers would have been out of public view behind a fence and they would not be an obstruction to businesses. She expressed frustration that the City of Rochester could not have worked more closely with the organizations involved to come up with a compromise or solution to move the trailer placement forward. She stated that the trailers are currently located at River Street in Dover, but the area will be under construction by the end of the summer and the trailers will again not have a usable location.

Dave Balian, Dover Welfare, reiterated that these trailers need to be located in an area with a sewer hookup, whether permanent or not, and a water line. He said that staff from at least ten agencies had been investigating and sourcing locations, but there had not been a large enough site found where the proper utilities were in place. He said that the Salvation Army had agreed to let their property be used. Mr. Balian said that he had corresponded back and forth with the Rochester City Manager and the intent seemed to be to move forward under the City Manager’s suggestion of using an emergency variance to get these trailers set up. Mr. Balian said he had done a site walk of the Salvation Army property with the Dover director of Public Works as well as the Rochester Director of City Services to develop a plan on how the project would work moving forward, and there was a plan set in place. Mr. Balian said there was even a nearby lot suggested as a possible alternative if the Salvation Army site could not be used.

Ms. Andrews Parker spoke about the red tape and road blocks she had run into with all three communities and how, although the public facing message was supportive of these types of services, there was not action to make these services available and the buck was being passed around without anything ever being accomplished. She expressed frustration with CAP receiving the majority of the blame and criticism for “not doing anything” or having these services in place and her consideration to not be involved with the Fidelity Committee anymore due to the lack of accountability and involvement from the three municipalities.

There was a discussion regarding the McConnell Center in Dover offering showers to the homeless population for \$1 each use without being supplied towels, soap, or toiletries. It was stated that those in the most desperate need in Rochester or Somersworth are not going to be able to go to Dover and afford the regular fee for this basic amenity; hence the importance of these mobile resource trailers which should be able to be moved within each of the communities for use by those in need.

Charlie Reynolds asked who in Rochester would have the authority to move the issue forward and take action to have these trailers installed. Chairman Hutchinson stated that the issue had been discussed briefly at the City Council level in Rochester, and then quickly dismissed upon the information that the trailers were now located in Dover. He said that the Fidelity Committee could potentially apply for a variance with the Rochester Zoning Board of Adjustments. Ms. Andrews Parker said that the reason it is so important to find a more permanent location for these resource trailers is because the asset of the warming center is not guaranteed after the current year. While Dover has the McConnell center and Somersworth has resources, Rochester needs to have resources in place. Mr. Balian stated that along with the shower and laundry trailers, there was a kitchen trailer. He said the Salvation Army had wanted to use all three trailers to enhance the programs and services they already had in place. They had wanted to use the kitchen trailer because they were no longer able to use their own kitchen due to code compliance.

There was a discussion regarding the capacity of the Committee to make recommendations to the respective City Councils and how to best go about that. Karen Weston confirmed that the Fidelity Committee is a recognized subcommittee of the Dover City Council and is thus able to make recommendations. She said that the earlier statement that Rochester had informed a social service agency that they would not receive a variance seemed like it was denied before being given the chance for the case to be presented.

Ms. Weston said that in her experience, these emergency allowances and variances are not difficult to have issued for these situations. She recommended the City of Rochester be approached about granting the variance to allow these trailers. Dina Gagnon suggested that the Rochester Fidelity members could approach the Zoning Board for the variance and the Fidelity Committee would draft a letter of support for that purpose. Ms. Weston suggested having the support of the Rochester City Council when going to the zoning board as well. She spoke about the importance of access to laundry and sanitation in order for the homeless population to gain employment and to find housing, which is a large part of the Master Plan accepted by all three councils. These resource trailers could be an important part of that process.

Vice Chair Marsh spoke about the importance of referencing the Master Plan, accepted by the City of Rochester, which does support these activities and services. There was a discussion on contacting Fosters and potentially doing a press release as well to alert the general public to this issue which they may not realize is occurring, and to garner additional support. A press release would further serve to let the public know that there *are* attempts being made to solve these problems and a great deal of work being done, but the lack of action and communication at the municipal level is what is stalling the process.

Ms. Weston asked if there were any members of the Committee who had appeared at Council meetings and spoken about this issue and shown support. She suggested the Fidelity members and contributors appear at the Rochester Council meetings to express support and to shed light on the issue. Ms. Gagnon agreed that often, organizations or even Councils are blamed for inaction, but the items in question were never brought forward by the administration for discussion to begin with. She suggested that not only the public, but the Council could stand to be better informed of the details so they can form an opinion and make a decision. Mr. Reynolds agreed that a recommendation needs to come from the Fidelity Committee, but simultaneously the media should be alerted and the information should be distributed to make it public, otherwise it will be more of the same inaction and nothing will ever move forward.

Ms. Andrews Parker said that the Committee should be approaching S.U.R. to apply for the variance along with the Salvation Army because of their offer to donate the necessary work to place these trailers, as well as their standing in the community. Ms. Andrews Parker said that she would have staff reach out to the Salvation Army contacts and S.U.R. to get the process started.

Ms. Andrews Parker said that the placement of the trailers had been kicked down the road for so long, that at this point the discussion would be for the following year because the trailers could not be used over the winter due to the pipes freezing. Ms. Weston estimated that the variance process of going through the Council and subcommittees would take a few months. She recommended including a summary of likely questions and information along with the letter of support to detail how the trailers would be cared for over the winter and additional information. Chairman Hutchinson suggested that the DPW could weigh-in on how these trailers could be winterized and maintained once they are in place. Ms. Andrews Parker shared an email from the shelter manager at CAP detailing the work which S.U.R. had offered, including winterizing the trailers for year-round use. The email also included indication that the Salvation Army was on board and ready to move ahead.

Ms. Desrocher suggested that the recommendation to Rochester's Council be that that they support the requests of the Fidelity Committee to meet the needs which fall under the Master Plan including, but not limited to, the suggested zoning variance. Dave Carpenter, Dover Planning, suggested adding language approving the Committee to approach the Salvation Army to encourage them to apply for the variance. Chairman Hutchinson said that the recommendation should reference that there is an emerging public health crisis which needs to be dealt with, regardless of whether or not the trailers are authorized on the Salvation Army property; however if the trailers are not authorized, then there needs to be other action taken per the Master Plan which the Council already accepted. Ms. Andrews Parker referenced Strategy 2, Section 1 of the Master Plan which states "Commit to review barriers and opportunities in zoning and planning" and spoke about the other actions contained within the strategy. She said that although affordable housing is the long-term goal, these resource trailers are a much smaller, more easily managed piece which could be handled in support of that goal.

There was discussion on the recommendation which should come from the Fidelity Committee and referencing the Master Plan within. Ms. Desrochers stated that it seems redundant to ask Council to support and stand behind the Master Plan which they already accepted and

agreed to support years ago. The necessary actions are already included in the Master Plan. Ms. Weston suggested that the recommendation be for Council to endorse the recommendation of the Fidelity Committee to find a permanent home for the resource trailers while also assuring both the Council and the public that there is no cost to the taxpayers or the City because the work is being entirely donated. Ms. Desrocher stated it should be noted that this recommendation is leveraging cost-free available and sustainable resources which can be used both short-term and long-term.

Chairman Hutchinson emphasized the importance of recognizing that a public health crisis exists, which has been compounded by COVID and emerging evictions, and these resource trailers are a way to assist with this crisis. Chairman Hutchinson **MOVED** to recommend to the full Rochester City Council that, in accordance with the Master Plan approved by the Tri-City Councils in 2018, to endorse the recommendation of the Fidelity Committee to find a permanent home for the resource trailers and to allow the Committee to approach the Salvation Army to apply for a variance for this purpose. Dina Gagnon seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by a unanimous roll call vote with Betsey Andrews Parker, Todd Marsh, Dina

6. Report from local Welfare

Mr. Balian stated that with the moratorium on evictions coming to an end, Dover Welfare has already seen an uptick in requests for housing assistance. He said that in the current housing market, there have been some instances where landlords have evicted existing tenants for the sole purpose of renovating and renting for more money. The Dover wait list for sheltering individuals is standing around 2 weeks at this point, with the wait for families being longer. He stated that in the past they had been able to shelter in other communities such as Laconia, but that area is at capacity now and welfare is having to look even further for options.

Mr. Balian expressed concern for the upcoming winter season; with a surge in COVID expected and the option of the Garrison Hotel not available for overflow, there will likely be an even greater capacity issue with local shelters than there is currently with no place to accommodate overflow. He stated that with only an extreme cold weather center available, there will be sheltering problems.

Ms. Andrews Parker echoed the sentiment that there have been increased evictions, often without legitimate cause or proper procedure. She cautioned against needless eviction processes because once there is an eviction on a person's record, it becomes increasingly more difficult for them to secure housing regardless of the reason for said eviction.

7. Regional data/statistics

Betsey Andrews Parker reported that CAP had submitted a proposal to run the warming center from the Monday after Thanksgiving until March 31, 2022. The proposal posited that the center would be open seven nights a week; 5 AM to 8 PM Monday through Friday and open 24-hours on the weekend. It was estimated that with staffing, supplies and logistics, it would cost approximately \$300,000 to run the center for this time period. Ms. Andrews Parker stated that this proposal had been rejected by Dover, Rochester and Somersworth. The new proposal was

based on an activation of 60 extreme weather emergency days with staff to support the openings. She stated there are still details to be worked out, but that is the current proposal and she would report back to the Committee when there were further details or approval. Ms. Andrews Parker reported that there are still volunteer shortages; there will be information forthcoming on trainings for those interested in volunteering. The warming center will have three paid staff members.

Councilor Hunt-Hawkins inquired which officials at the municipal level have the authority to approve these proposals. Ms. Andrews Parker stated that it was the EMDs from each community that are the points of contact in regards to the warming centers, and the City administrations would approve or deny the financing aspect. Ms. Andrews Parker outlined the costs for running area shelters and warming centers and emphasized the importance of finding a permanent home for a regional shelter since the current warming center option will not be available after this year. She clarified that the State will not fund warming centers, only permanent shelters, which makes gathering adequate funding more difficult.

Ms. Andrews Parkers stated that there needed to be a plan formulated on what a shelter in the area would look like, the costs associated, how these costs would be covered by the municipalities, and ongoing operation costs included so there can be a plan moving forward. This should be the focus of the next meeting.

Ms. Andrews Parker detailed the problems being encountered with GOFERR funds. She said that some of the COVID funding for housing is being converted to have fewer restrictions and it is a “free for all” situation. She said that CAP wanted to utilize some funding to hire housing navigators to assist with the process of finding and sustaining housing for clients. GOFERR informed them that it would not cover such an initiative, and rather just wanted increased enrollment numbers. Ms. Andrews Parker summarized some of the issues with the great amounts of paperwork and specific criteria GOFERR requires for these enrollments, which can be prohibitive, time intensive, and adds layers of frustration and red tape to an already stressful process.

8. Other

Vice Chair Marsh reported that the City of Somersworth has initiated the Hilltop Mental Health and Wellness Commission of which he is the Chair. He said this initiative is unique in that it's coming from the mayor and the policy makers, with the majority of members being made up of Council and School Board members, reaching out to the social service agencies as opposed to the other way around. He expressed optimism with this format and cited the Master Plan as a driving factor behind the formation of the commission.

9. Closing Public Input

Ashley Desrochers addressed the Committee in regards to a summer program through the Strafford Regional Planning Commission called “Promoting Outdoor Play” (POP).

10. Adjournment

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Fidelity Committee TCMF
August 12, 2021

Chairman Hutchinson **ADJOURNED** the Fidelity Committee meeting at 8:02 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cassie Givara
Deputy City Clerk, Rochester