



Fidelity Committee
of the
Tri-City Joint Mayors' Task Force on Homelessness
Somersworth Middle School, Media Room
Somersworth, NH 03878
October 10, 2019
6:00 PM

MAYORS

Mayor Caroline McCarley
 Mayor Karen Weston
 Mayor Dana Hilliard

Rochester Members

Jeremy Hutchinson
(chairman)

Barbara Holstein

Dover Members

Charles Reynolds

Betsey Andrews Parker

Somersworth Members

Todd Marsh

Dina Gagnon

Others Present: Kathy Crompton (CAPS), Allan Krans (Dover Housing Authority), Chief Paul Toussaint (Rochester Police Department), Paige Farmer (Greater Seacoast Coalition to End Homelessness), Julian Long (Rochester Economic Development)

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chairman Hutchinson called the meeting of the Fidelity Committee to order at 6:14 PM. All three mayors were excused along with Betsey Andrews Parker and Charles Reynolds of Dover.

Chairman Hutchinson stated there would be no action taken at the meeting, and any voting would be tabled until the next meeting due to lack of quorum.

There was a discussion on the first of seven strategies from the Master Plan on which the Committee had chosen to focus at the prior meeting: Engaging the Community. It was stated that this particular strategy can be integrated in some

way into each of the remaining strategies and there can be a good deal of cross-over.

Chairman Hutchinson suggested that one potential option could be to host an event to engage the community or to consider a partnership with another organization to get involved in an existing event. Dina Gagnon suggested that there be some sort of initial outreach to the community to “introduce” the work the Task Force has already accomplished. It was discussed that there is a perception that the Task Force worked for over year but did not accomplish anything. The Committee felt that there needed to be an effort to inform the public and get the word out regarding the work which had been accomplished and the ongoing work going forward.

Chief Toussaint stated that the Rochester Police officers have frequent contact with the homeless community and, if needed, could help disseminate information.

2. Public Input

Paige Farmer, Greater Seacoast Coalition to End Homelessness, expressed the need for the Committee to determine what their message will be as well as the desired outcome of any outreach in which the members participate. Ms. Farmer emphasized the need for cohesive messaging so the public, as well as organizations with which the Committee may partner, will know what is involved and what is expected of them. It would also serve to convey what the effects will be and what the Committee is trying to accomplish. She suggested reaching out to organizations such as the Rotary Club, PTAs, and schools.

Kathy Crompton, Community Action Partnership, reiterated the need for the Task Force members to be seen as ambassadors and to become a public face of the Committee. She stated that establishing a message and repeating that message to organizations and the public was integral to community involvement.

Allan Krans, Dover Housing Authority, praised the Task Force for taking on a community (the homeless) with which the general public doesn’t necessarily want to be involved. He suggested that their messaging be brief and simple to be effective. Mr. Krans stated that he was most interested in the affordable housing strategy of the Master Plan. He spoke regarding “cost avoidance” and ways to make the efforts to help the homeless community more enticing to City Councils and to experience less push back.

Chief Toussaint spoke about how the police departments are often the authority contacted to deal with the homeless population; but homelessness is not simply a police issue. He stated that this problem is a public health crisis. There are mental health issues, substance abuse issues, joblessness and more which contribute to the homeless issue in the region and these are issues which are not best solved by law enforcement.

Chief Toussaint addressed the Committee regarding a suggested action in the Master Plan which advocated for law enforcement assisted diversion. The Chief emphasized the need for accountability when the law is broken in instances with the homeless. While the police department supports assisting the homeless and transient population in entering recovery programs, the assistance cannot be placed solely on the perpetrator of crimes while forgetting that there are innocent victims. The Chief also indicated the police departments are already spread thin and cannot monitor and enforce pre-court diversion programs.

Lena Nichols, Dover Welfare, spoke about the dire need for not only more beds and shelter space, but also the need for training in basic life skills such as budgeting. Offering structure and skills can help reduce recidivism. Ms. Nichols also expressed the desire for a year-round shelter.

Chairman Hutchinson reported that there had been no recent update on the Cold Weather Shelter from the Mayors and the County Commissioners, but there are active discussions and work being done. The Master Plan of the Task Force had been accepted by all 3 councils as written, so if there were to be any additions or changes they would need to go back to the individual councils for acceptance.

Chairman Hutchinson indicated that there would be a co-chair elected for the Fidelity Committee, but the decision would need to wait until the following meeting when there is a quorum.

3. Communications from the Mayors

No Discussion.

4. Communications from the Chair

5. Discussion: "Engaging the Community" – Ideas on how to execute strategy

Chairman Hutchinson stated that "Engaging the Community" could be added to each of the remaining strategies, engaging the community on each item and working that aspect into the other strategies.

Todd Marsh spoke about the need not only for shelters, but for supportive housing and rapid rehousing in the area. Mr. Marsh recognized that there are funding challenges, but the mayors are looking for something to propose to Council, and this could be an item which could be proposed. Mr. Marsh suggested that the municipalities could put out a request for proposal (RFP) for supportive housing and the funding could come from the Cities.

Ms. Farmer said that the NH Housing Financing Authority offers funds to bring supportive housing to communities, but these funds often remain unused on the table. These funds are not for the operation of the facilities which is a factor, but potentially the municipalities could contribute to implement these programs.

There was discussion of a charrette being held in Concord on October 29th and 30th hosted by New Hampshire Housing to discuss supportive housing.

Ms. Crompton spoke about the restrictions on available federal funding. While there may be money available for a variety of circumstances and allocations, the amounts may not be enough on their own, yet cannot be combined with other funding making it difficult to come up with adequate money to implement programs. Currently the funding offered is very specific and broken down for sole uses. Ms. Crompton suggested the Commission work on petitioning the State legislature to change this so available funding can be combined or used for related purposes besides the specific uses for which they are earmarked.

Chairman Hutchinson asked Ms. Crompton to draft a proposal to the State legislature for this purpose.

Ms. Farmer stated that there can be billing to Medicaid for supportive housing, but it is buried in the budget and this is another item which can be explored.

Julian Long, Rochester Economic Development, said that both Rochester and Dover offer Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds which can potentially be used towards supportive housing; they may not be large amounts but there is funding available.

There was a discussion in Committee regarding CDBG funding and whether or not a Mayoral Ad Hoc or Municipal Board/Committee could apply for CDBG funding. Mr. Long said he would look into this, although City departments have submitted applications in the past. It was determined that the RFP process may need to be utilized through municipalities so the CDBG funding would go to an organization as opposed to a City Board or Committee. Mr. Long said the deadline for CDBG applications is December, so he said he would research and look into options. Mr. Marsh spoke about the RFP process and suggested determining specifically what the funding would be used for as well as if CDBG funds can be used.

Barbara Holstein stated that the Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) is looking to have the issue of homelessness on its agenda as well, and they have received grants which could be utilized.

Ms. Crompton spoke about the barriers to establishing housing and staying in housing once it is found. The Committee discussed landlord/tenant issues and the goal of heading off problems before they progress to the level of eviction. Chief Toussaint clarified that rent is only one reason for evictions. There are multiple other reasons a landlord may need to evict a tenant.

The Committee discussed the "ban the box" initiative to remove criminal background checks from job applications and housing applications and the struggles faced by those with marks on their records. Chief Toussaint stated the option to clear criminal background (for certain non-violent offenses) has been around for quite a while, but it is not without cost. There may be public defenders and lawyers willing to do pro bono work to assist with this type of action. Typically the party

petitioning to have offenses removed will need to prove to the court that a significant life change has been made. Mr. Long indicated that NH Legal Assistance is a resource which can be utilized.

6. Discussion: Strategy on which to focus at November 7, 2019 meeting

The Committee determined that Strategy 3: Rapid Rehousing would be the focus of the November meeting. There are ten recommendations contained within the strategy and there was an intent expressed to start with the recommendations which do not involve funding.

Mr. Marsh stated he would supply a list of programs in the area offering supportive housing.

Mr. Krans spoke about the "Family Self Sufficiency" program offered through HUD. This is a 5-year improvement plan offering financial incentives for becoming self-sufficient. Mr. Krans stated he would work on a simple presentation for the Committee on this program.

7. Other

Mr. Krans spoke regarding the potential of municipalities instating impact fees which could fund affordable housing or low income housing. It was discussed that this type of impact fee is not currently being used in the area, but it's something that can be investigated further. Chairman Hutchinson stated he would confer with the Rochester City Attorney for his perspective on this idea.

Mr. Long referred to other actions municipalities can take to spur affordable housing such as the 79-E tax relief program and density bonuses for developers. Mr. Krans stated that there had been pushback recently in surrounding communities on overdevelopment and premium-income housing.

Ms. Holstein addressed the committee regarding a new approach being taken in Concord where housing is being incentivized for developers as opposed to retail.

Chairman Hutchinson stated that he hoped to have a clearer picture on the status of the cold weather shelter in anticipation of the next meeting. The Mayors and County Commissioners have taken on this strategy of the Master Plan and will update as progress is made. They will be discussing the temperature and weather triggers for opening this shelter, and Chairman Hutchinson suggested once more information is known he would like the Committee to issue a press release alerting the public that this shelter will be in operation.

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday November 14, 2019 at 6:00 PM, Somerworth Middle School Media Room.

8. Closing Public Input

Chief Toussaint discussed the Police Department's role in dealing with the homeless population as it relates to evictions. Chief Toussaint reported that the police officers are simply there to keep the peace and facilitate the moving of the party from one place to another, but they do not provide ongoing services or post-eviction assistance. He stated that there is a disconnect between the police department and social services which could be addressed. There was a discussion regarding the different categories of homelessness and the varying communities effected and circumstances involved.

Ms. Nichols reported that Dover is doing a 5-year plan and the issue of homelessness is top priority. She inquired if the Fidelity Committee would be allowed to accept funding from either programs or municipalities. Mr. Long stated that recipients of CDBG funding should either be Cities or non-profits.

9. Adjournment

Chairman Hutchinson **ADJOURNED** the meeting of the Fidelity Committee at 8:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cassie Givara
Deputy City Clerk, Rochester