

Encampment Visioning Meeting – 9/28/15

Minutes

People in attendance:

Sara Novicki, Rachel White, Tony Gonzalez, Steve Reiter, Kimberly Byrd, Brittney Brown, Ingrid McIntyre, Jay Voorhees, Traci Pekovitch, Nathan Scarlett, Laurie Green, Kay Haley, Howard Allen Jr., Elizabeth Langgle-Martin, Samuel Lester, Lauren Plummer, Alice Poore, Alexander Smith, David Langgle-Martin, Steve Lindstrom, Chris Scott Fieselman, Chad Hindman, Denis Huey, Amanda Haggard.

Metropolitan Homelessness Commission members present: Diane Kuhn, chair, Wendell Segroves, Erik Cole (representing Mayor's Office)

Homelessness Commission staff present: Will Connelly, Karri Simpson, Lesley Head, Judith Tackett (took minutes)

I. Welcome, framing, setting our mutual purpose, flow of the meeting:

Will Connelly welcomed everyone and said the meeting would be kept to 90 minutes or less. The goal of the meeting was to get people's thoughts on how our community addresses authorized encampments and unauthorized encampments.

Mr. Connelly said an "authorized" encampment would be what a city identified as being a city-sanctioned camp. "Unauthorized" encampments, he said, will be existing in our community regardless of whether we set up an authorized encampment.

Mr. Connelly acknowledged previous discussions on encampments, but he pointed out that with a new Council and a new Mayor in place, it was time to take a fresh look at the issue and come up with recommendations.

The goal of this meeting is to be an envisioning meeting. The Commission staff then would try to capture those recommendations and send it out to the group for additional input prior to finalizing the document and presenting it to the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission's executive committee on October 13.

Mr. Connelly then went over the agenda of today's meeting.

II. Check-in: why am I personally committed to improving our community's response to unsheltered homelessness?

All participants had a chance to introduce themselves and one-by-one say why they are participating at today's meeting.

III. Authorized (“sanctioned”) encampments: pros and cons of three models at work in other cities.

Will Connelly asked that people “zoom out” of Fort Negley and look at the overall issues regarding encampments.

Ingrid McIntyre of Open Table Nashville presented a PowerPoint slide show explaining four models of authorized encampments from other cities (see attached PowerPoint slides). Ms. McIntyre recommended that if people want to find more models, they should google “tent city studies.”

She summed up that for today’s discussion the main questions are focused around:

- Governance
- Funding
- Location
- Amenities
- Capacity
- Requirements

Participants started sharing some of their opinions.

IV. Visioning of ideal authorized encampment – identify elements from models

The following capture the input given by participants:

Governance:

- Self-governing with basic guidelines and rules laid down by authority that gives us the land.
- Some sort of governance, abidance by rules (three strikes and you’re out – depends on the offense, not permanent).
- A board of directors based on several nonprofits offering something. This board would help with camp guidelines.
- Having different models at 3 different locations.
- People should have a relationship with the self-governing board to decide who is there and who is not there (the self-governing board is not the same as the nonprofit board of directors).
- Having some sort of participation requirement, for example, help cleaning up camp.
- Camps generally run pretty well as they are. Really all we’re talking about is minimum requirements based on who owns the land. But besides that, you just basically sanction the camp and then let the camp be.
- Residents have to sign a waiver, to cover liability issues of property owner. (That input received a strong response warning that such an approach could create a situation where a person who is victimized signed their rights away.)
- Whoever is the property owner has a right to have input, too.

- If people rent and have a landlord, that landlord has input. So self-governance should not be the way to go.

Funding

- Participants agree that the funding discussion will depend on the size, location, governance, etc. and will be an item to be discussed at a later point in time.

Location

- ½ a mile near a bus line.
- More than one location. Having numerous camps with numerous models will help us try different ways.
- Neighborhood and conversation with communities and Council of the area to address NIMBY issues.
- What about a non-residential area, a warehouse area such as along Hermitage Avenue? (response: there will be issues with NIMBY regardless, there were issues at Green Street and even on the Beaman property even though no one could see those tents).
- Establishing a camp on private property will create issues with Codes – it should be on government land (Parks property)
- What about the old “Tent City” location? (response: part of reason we weren’t able to use the old Tent City location was because it is in the flood plain. Further response: If the area is zoned for camping, regulations change).
- What about the Spencer Youth Center location?
- What about the building at 1306 Katie Avenue in North Nashville, which used to be a medical center? (SunBridge Care & Rehabilitation)
- Greer stadium?

Amenities

- Emergency tent for people that are found who need a bed for the night.
- Shower facility, laundry? (response: If we want to move on this fast, it has to be something like solar showers, for now).
- Toilets? – at least port-a-potties.
- Potable water.
- Handicap accessible.
- Sanitation pick-up, trash pick-up, recycling.
- Mail services.
- Gardens for food production.

Capacity

- About 20X20 for each person.
- Not over 100 people.
- Accessible for emergency vehicles.
- Figure out how much space each person needs to be comfortable, and how much space to have access for emergency vehicle.

- Ingrid will look up past plans that were drawn for Tent City space of the bus station, above tent city

Requirements

- True housing would be long-term solution. Working with a housing navigator. Work on solutions – this is not permanent.
- Background checks (people disagreed. Some did not want any background checks. Others said some limited background checks may need to be required depending on the location of a camp (for example sex offenders could not be accepted when camp too close to facilities housing kids)).
- There should be a camp that is just for families.
- Legal substances should be approved (response: no drinking after 5 p.m. would be a preference. Other response: that's a question to be dealt with in self-governance).
- Access should be given on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- It should be said that a camp resident has to be either work with Mental Health Coop, Park Center, or OTN.
- Pets allowed.
- Couples allowed.

Another issue that people quickly said needs to be addressed is policy decisions such as rules and regulations that the city would have to change to accommodate an authorized camp. This includes potential changes in land-use.

After 90 minutes, participants were ready for the meeting to end.

Will Connelly outlines quickly the next steps, which include that the Commission staff will put together a Visioning Document that captures today's discussion. That document will then be sent out to participants who signed up with their email address to ensure they feel the document captures the input that was given in the meeting.

The final document will be presented to the Executive Committee of the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission at the October 13 meeting (Tuesday, October 13, 8:30 a.m., at MSS offices, 800 2nd Avenue North).

The executive committee will be asked to review the document and discuss further action. Diane Kuhn pointed out that this is a conversation and a process and at this point, she could not guarantee that any specific outcomes. She said she wanted to set clear expectations.

Post Script: Further items on the agenda will be picked up in further conversations.