

Metropolitan Homelessness Encampment Task Force Meeting

Tuesday, March 2, 2016

at Metro Social Services

800 2nd Avenue North

The meeting began at 9:00 a.m.

Present: Will Connelly, Wendell Segroves, Phil Duke, Traci Pekovitch, Lindsey Krinks, Sgt. John Bourqou, Renee Pratt, Charlie Strobel, Erik Cole, Alex Smith, Tommy Lynch, Jennifer Williams (sitting in for Marvin Cox)

Public: Denis Huey, Cayla Wilson, Harry, Elizabeth Langgle-Martin, Chris Wage, Tracy Harris, Haley Swagner, Chris Scott, Kate Wade, Diane McNamara, Samuel Lester

Staff: Judy Tackett, Karri Simpson, Josh Lee (Metro Legal)

Approval of minutes:

The minutes from the February 24, 2016 meeting were approved.

Review and Approval of recommendation document:

Option A: finish current draft, endorse it, and decide on the presentation.

Option B: write an alternative statement, no longer than a few paragraphs, endorse it, and decide on the presentation

Option C: summarize current recommendations, 3-5 sentences, and ask for more time to finish their work.

Option D: finalize first part of the recommendation regarding unauthorized encampments and ask for more time for sanctioned encampment recommendations.

The task force members voted unanimously for option D.

Last week Charlie Strobel, Traci Pekovitch, and Lindsey Krinks all worked to draft an introductory statement for the recommendations. This statement was read.

Task force members discussed the statement within the introduction regarding non-criminal arrests. The majority vote decided to change this wording to "...where they are less likely to be cited or arrested for non-violent acts of daily living."

In addition the task force members agreed to change the reference to establishing an encampment to "continued and expedited exploration of sanctioned encampments" within the last paragraph of the introduction statement.

Lindsey Krinks suggested adding a statement about the need for a continuation of this task force so that there is time to thoroughly discuss sanctioned encampments. Discussion around this ensued including thoughts about adding more field expert task force members (within finance, legal, a council member, etc.). There was some concern around meeting if the Commissioners within the Metro Homelessness Commission don't follow through on doing something with the first set of recommendations.

Will Connelly stated concern about all the time/resources/people that are dedicated to the continuation of this task force and think that encampments on religious property is the easiest way to go. He worries about all the time and focus being spent, when that could be on permanent housing and does not agree with building spaces within the current system where people would still be experiencing homelessness.

He proposes that a focus should be on building indoor interim housing that is safe and low barrier. He defined interim housing as a low-barrier, indoor place where a person can stay usually between 90-120 days, and a housing exit plan is developed and worked through with the person. Within interim housing, ideally it doesn't require sobriety and can accommodate pets and couples- making it a respectful place so that people who only currently find that [respect] in encampment now find it in another setting.

Alex Smith shared part of his homelessness experience and stated he would choose an indoor option, if it valued and respected people, the way an encampment community does. Staff within an interim housing program would also have to build trust and prove that they were there to help with housing and other needs.

With the approaching deadline to vacate Ft. Negley by April 15th, the task force agreed to add “ or an alternative safe place” to the statement about exploring and expediting a sanctioned encampment option., so that both options could later be looked at.

The need to explore the report regarding creating a housing crisis resolution system, created by Focus Strategies, was again brought up as a big part of developing the overall homeless services system within Nashville.

Task force members decided to completely remove the undeveloped recommendations regarding a sanctioned encampment, but to include the current introductory statement regarding the amount of time that has spent in discussion and the need for more time to fully develop this conversation into recommendations.

The idea to add a statement regarding a continuation of the task force was then decided to be added to the end of the entire recommendations document. Discussion regarding summarizing the introduction, including the focus on permanent housing occurred. Task force members agreed to conclude the document with the statement, “a majority of the current task force members would be willing to serve on this task force until the next Commission meeting, May 6th, meeting to provide recommendations on guidelines and protocols for the establishment of sanctioned encampments, alternative safe places, or interim housing until enough permanent housing is available.”

Members also agreed to:

- Unify the wording by using “unauthorized” vs. “unsanctioned” when talking about encampments;
- Add “members of the homeless community and current encampments” to the potential partners section of the recommendations;
- Change the order of specifics within the recommendations, by switching numbers 1 and 2 under the recommendation or unauthorized encampments;
- Add the reference to the creation of a “timeline” in regarding to working with property owners;
- Reformat the property owners section by removing the “...”.

All task force member gave a big thank you to Judy Tackett for organizing, moderating, and all her work for the task force meetings the last six weeks.

Preparation for the presentation to the Commission on March 4:

For the presentation at Friday full Commission meeting, the updated recommendations document will be sent to Commissioners tomorrow so that they have a chance to read prior. At the meeting, Wendell and Phil will lead the discussion by first reading the introductory statement from the recommendation document.

Public Input:

- Chris Wage: While not sure if it is currently still present within the recommendation document, a previous version included the term “affordable housing,” which has many different meanings for many people. He recommended this term be specified/changed.
- Samuel Lester: He is still concerned that the introductory statement doesn’t include justification for why encampment is reasonable and just. He thinks it would be useful to include something about how the US Justice Department has ruled it unconstitutional to force people to move from encampments when they have nowhere to go and not enough beds are available, as well as that HUD is penalizing CoCs that criminalize homelessness. He is worried that the recommendations have no justifications and doesn’t think the Commission will add this in.
- Chris Scott: He recommends that Samuel Lester be on the task force next time. He also thinks the task force did an outstanding job and he is in tears. He is so impressed and didn’t think it could happen. He gave a big round of applause to the task force.
- Steve Lindstrom: He is also very impressed with what the task force has accomplished but he feels that prioritization is missing. What are they going to do with Ft. Negley? If they are systematically moving people from Ft. Negley to another place, unless they just tell them to leave, you have a de facto sanctioned encampments. What are the steps that can be done right now for trust building? Providing sanitation options would be one good first step. This is a longer term situation but there are short term and immediate problems that haven’t been addressed by the current set of recommendations.
- Denis Huey: He wants to know where the closing date, of April 15th, for Ft. Negley came from? Eric Cole said that date was set last fall when Metro departments met and gave extensions for the closing of the encampment. Tommy Lynch said that the original closing date was put on hold last fall so that a larger discussion could take place, but the deadline, of April 15th, was stated then. The rules and regulations of parks and the Park Board has been clear that the direction they are headed is that the Ft. Negley area will be reclaimed for parks purposes beginning on April 15th.
- Diane McNamara: She agrees with Samuel Lester that there are potential constitutional issues for arresting people from unauthorized encampments when there are no beds to send people. If people are arrested, keep in mind that litigation could happen.
- Chris Scott: In response to possible litigation he proposes liability waivers be signed by current residents of Ft. Negley, to avoid a lawsuit when they begin the moving process.
- Josh Lee- Metro Legal has reviewed the Department of Justice brief. There are a lot of issues that have to be impact and a huge part is the availability of alternatives; discussion on this is currently going on among Metro and other agencies in the area. They are working to do everything they can to comply with those restrictions.
- Eric Cole: He added the Metro is discussing and trying to work s many angles as they can.

The meeting adjourned at 10:31 a.m.