



Metropolitan Homelessness Commission Meeting

Nov. 4, 2011

Sonny West Conference Center
Howard Office Building
700 Second Ave. South

Minutes

Commissioners present: Howard Gentry, Charlie Strobel, Ellen Zinkievicz, Diane Kuhn, Phil Duke, John Lozier, Hershell Warren, Angie Thompson, Angie Hubbard representing Phil Ryan

Staff present: Clifton Harris, Holly McIndoe, Judith Tackett

Welcome:

Howard Gentry filled in for chair Erik Cole and welcomed everyone. All commissioners introduced themselves.

Approval of minutes of Sept. 9, 2011:

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Phil Duke, seconded by Diane Kuhn, all approved.

Reports:

- Director's report (see handout):

Clifton Harris reported that under Policy & Governance issues Metro Legal is reviewing all contracts. Most of those contracts have been approved and sent to Purchasing which is collecting final signatures of the vendors.

The contract between the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission, The Key Alliance and Metro Social Services is still being reviewed by legal counsel.

Hershell Warren has received all the new appointees for the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission, which will be reviewed by the Mayor and the Vice Mayor.

Under Communications, Clifton Harris reported that the VA is having an upcoming VA Services Summit on Thursday, Nov. 17; Operation Stand Down Nashville has been underway yesterday and today; the MHC Webpage has been created and can be found on the Metro Social Services Website (www.nashville.gov/sservices/hc); and MHC participated in the 2011 Governor's Housing Summit in September.

In the area of Service Planning & Coordination, Mr. Harris reported that the MHC case management load is at full capacity with 34 clients being served. All are housed with exception of one individual who is in the application process for housing. The Return on Investment for the FY 2011-2012 reporting period is \$470,986.

Under the SOAR (SSI/SSDI) program, 25 individuals have applied for benefits since July 1. Of these individuals, nine have been approved, 16 are pending a decision, none have been denied. The average length of homelessness for these 25 individuals is 5.1 years.

Commissioner Charles Strobel asked when HMIS would be online.

Clifton Harris reported that HMIS has already gone live and that a majority of all service providers have been trained and are using the system now. "MDHA has done a good job rolling out the new system."

John Lozier asked Clifton Harris where he was with TKA fundraising for housing.

Clifton Harris responded that until the contract was back from Metro Legal, "we are kind of on hold right now."

A brief discussion followed, focusing on the need to raise funding with Clifton Harris saying that TKA has raised some resources, but nowhere near what is needed to address the housing shortage right now.

New Business:

MHC was holding a panel to talk about how different agencies reach out to Nashville's homeless population extreme cold weather situations.

Clifton Harris introduced Sabrina Edgington, policy analyst with the National Health Care for the Homeless Council. She served as the moderator of the panel.

Panelists included:

- Giovanni Achoe, Metro Social Services;
- Heidi Mariscal, Office of Emergency Management;
- Scott Wallace, Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods;
- Ingrid McIntyre, Open Table;
- David Kitchen, American Red Cross, Nashville chapter;
- Ed Grimes, Nashville Rescue Mission;
- Rachel Hester, Room In The Inn;
- Capt. Patrick Richmond; Salvation Army
- Bill Friskics-Warren, United Neighborhood Health Services.

First each panelist briefly talked about their role in extreme cold weather situations and how they assist homeless individuals and families.

Then, Sabrina Edgington observed that "a number of organizations do have their own policies, but it's not coordinated at the macro level. A few of you offer shelters, some outreach services and a couple of you provide clinical services." She then asked how these services could be improved during extreme weather situations.

Heidi Mariscal with OEM said all providers would have to make sure that they participate in conference calls. She said over the past few years, relationships have been building and the providers are definitely on the right path, but need to build up on it a little more.

A third question from Ms. Edgington focused on being more proactive rather than reactive. "How is it that we can get together to be more proactive and ensure that we're not duplicating services?"

The panel decided a next step would be to get together and draft a cold weather policy for this winter, which then could serve as a template for emergency shelter activity in extreme weather situations. Such a plan would identify what each agency can provide.

It was determined that the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission would take the lead and get with OEM to come up with an interim plan. Further conversation focused on what other agencies need to be brought to the table, for example 2-1-1, the Nashville Humane Association, Metro Police and Sheriff representatives, and the Community Resource Center. It was also determined that between the Nashville Rescue Mission and Room In The Inn, about 1,000 people could be housed in an emergency situation.

Ellen Zinkievicz requested an update on this issue at the next Commission meeting in January.

Old Business:

- Police/Homeless Issue update:

Commissioner Charles Strobel who chairs the Police/Homeless Committee said the committee held one meeting. He asked for clarification of how the addendum, which includes the MHC Action, is presented. Judith Tackett read the note, which he then corrected. It now reads (posted online at www.nashville.gov/sservices/hc):

Notes on Metropolitan Homelessness Commission Action to Final Police Report, 2010

On March 4, 2011, the Committee on Police/Homeless Issues presented a summary report (dated February 10, 2011, and signed by Charles Strobel) to the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission. The Commission took up discussion of the report and made some changes, which are noted in this addendum.

Commissioner John Lozier made a motion to adopt the recommendations, which was seconded by Commissioner Phil Duke and approved by all. The motion that was adopted to amend the report submitted and presented by Commissioner Charles Strobel by replacing points 1. and 2. Under "Final Considerations" on page 6 of the document. The newly adopted Final Considerations read as follows:

1. That the Homelessness Commission endorse the spirit of the American Bar Association's Commission on Homelessness and Poverty Recommendation (contained in Appendix B), which proposes the repeal of laws and policies that "punish persons experiencing homelessness for carrying out otherwise non-criminal life sustaining practices or acts in public spaces, such as eating, sitting, sleeping, or camping, when no alternative spaces [reasonable for the persons' circumstances] are available." This also includes laws and policies that are enforced against homeless persons to a greater extent than non-homeless persons, and laws and policies which punish persons who provide food, shelter, and other necessary assistance to homeless persons. In Nashville these laws include, but are not necessarily limited to: Obstructing a passageway; Public indecency and/or Indecent exposure (while urinating or defecating when no public bathrooms are readily available); and Criminal trespass (on public property for the purpose of sleeping and/or resting). The Chair of the Metro Homelessness Commission will charge an appropriate committee with reviewing the current laws and policies of Metro government related to the ABA recommendations and propose specific recommendations for Commission action, as the committee deems appropriate.

2. That the Homelessness Commission officially endorse and advocate the practice by police officers who encounter homeless individuals subject to arrest for public intoxication to take such individuals to Room In The Inn's Guest House, rather than jail, as long as the Guest House has space available and Guest House staff feels capable of caring for the individual.

Clifton Harris announced that Project Homeless Connect is scheduled for March 28, 2012, at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds. In addition, Project Coat Connect – which collects warm winter coats and is a partnership with local congregations and service providers – will take place in December. Coats are collected with the last drop off at McKendree UMC on Dec. 4. They will be distributed on Dec. 6.

Next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2011 at 1 p.m. at the Metro Social Services offices, 800 Second Ave. North.

The next full Commission meeting is scheduled for Friday, Jan. 6, 9:30 a.m., location TBA.

Ellen Zinkiewicz asked about the newly appointed commissioners. Clifton Harris said they will be invited to the January meeting. He introduced Dayna Lovelady, who sat in the audience, as one of the new commissioners.

Public Comments:

Jim Johnston said, “We need to quit blaming the police for our folks’ problem. Quit pushing the blame to police.” He said that talking about sheltering people was not new (referring to the emergency shelter plan). It was the same issue every year. Mr. Johnston said that according to reports, “this meeting cost us \$220,000.”

Mr. Johnston continued, saying that “Erik Cole needs to get here or the police needs to go get him.” He asked who was in charge of doing anything. He said the homeless were banned from being on the Commission – at least he was and he didn’t know why. “I have some ideas. I feel like we’re milking it. \$1.3 million for the Commission is a little obscene. We are just going around and around chasing our tail.” He stated that it gets cold every November. “People start acting like they care about the homeless. They don’t.”

Howard Allen said “being a former commissioner, it saddens me to see that there are no homeless or former homeless individuals sitting here. We’ve been here before. We’ve experienced this; this is a great injustice. As I look around today, I see some homeless and formerly homeless individuals here, they could make this commission complete. “

He continued, “We would like to submit names. I would like to nominate someone who is here. I would like to know someone who represents me. “

Mr. Allen also said he would like to see a finalized written statement on how money was spent and where it was spent. He asked for bylaws and other documents. He said he talked to many homeless individuals since he’s been back from New York and they told him they are afraid to speak. He said the Commission needed to meet every month and the public comment period needed to be longer than three minutes. He closed by saying, “I have some solutions; we have some solutions. Thank you.”

Howard Gentry responded briefly saying that there was one homeless person currently on the Commission and two have been appointed.

Steve Reiter said the issue really was that homeless individuals were to be seated. “With all due respect to the person who is here, I don’t know her. I’d like to have a working relationship here with the [homeless representative].”

Mr. Reiter said today’s panel discussion really troubled him. The issue was not what the service providers were doing, but what the Commission was doing. He said he didn’t hear anything about that. He continued that he would like to hear an articulated policy from the Commission that addressed extreme weather events.

Mr. Reiter also pointed out that one Commissioner just left when it was time for the public comment period. He also said that Erik Cole should be present since there were only six meetings a year.

Mr. Reiter said that if the Commission didn’t have any resources, then there was also nothing to be coordinated. “We can just abolish this group tomorrow, and I don’t think it would make any difference.” He said saying that there was no political will to raise resources was just window dressing. “It frustrates me that in six years nothing is really being done.”

Walter Kelly said he agreed with the gentleman who preceded him. He said with exception of Rachel Hester and Charlie Strobel, the powers-to-be who were present here had not accomplished much. “You seem to say that you care, but I don’t believe it. I challenge you Mr. Harris to come to the street for 30 days.”

A gentleman who identified himself as **Danny** said he had been homeless for almost four years. He said that if the Commission was going to tell the homeless what to do, then they should be for the homeless. “Find out what their hurts are, what their needs are.” He also called for commissioners to get out on the streets and experience homelessness. “It’s easy to talk the talk. You’ve got to go out there and walk the walk.”

Howard Gentry said thanked everybody for their comments.
The Commission adjourned at 10:55 a.m.