



## Metropolitan Homelessness Commission Meeting

September 7, 2012

Sonny West Conference Center

Howard Office Building

700 Second Ave. South

### **Minutes**

Commissioners present: Erik Cole, chair, Renee Pratt, Diane Kuhn, Angie Thompson, Phil Duke, Marvin Cox, Angie Hubbard, Ellen Zinkiewicz, Charles Strobel, Tom Turner, Lt. Horace Temple, Hershell Warren, Jason Holleman,

Staff present: Carolyn Grossley, interim director, Tojuana Jordan, John Hite, Judith Tackett

#### **Welcome**

Erik Cole welcomed everybody and said there were a lot of updates and a lot of items that were in transition. "Transition can be hard and transitions can create questions and create concerns," he said, adding that he felt that this transition that the Commission was currently in was good for the Commission and for the community. "I believe we can turn this transition and the concerns into something positive for our community. We've got the capability to produce housing and produce results."

He also said he felt it was also a time to talk about the Commission's strengths.

#### **Minutes**

Chairman Cole asked whether there were any questions or comments on the minutes. There were none. Phil Duke made a motion to approve the minutes, Tom Turner seconded, all approved.

#### **Financial update**

Pam McEwen, the finance director for Metro Social Services, said her report was for the budget period which ended on July 31. She said unfortunately today's meeting was so early in the month that the financial report for August was not finished yet. She went over the handout and said the

overall budget for this fiscal year was \$1,465,200. She broke it down to personnel and major contracts. She also followed last meeting's request and broke out Room In The Inn's Guest House and Day Center contracts. Ms. McEwen explained that "other contractual services" referred to cell phones, mileage, and other small items like that.

She said the HMIS software support really was only \$28,000, but there was other money included in that line item for other software support. She said she would break that out for the Commission in the next financial report.

Under "contributions to others," Ms. McEwen said the Commission really didn't have a budget for that, but she put that line item in for extra money at the end of the year. She said she projected the Commission will have about \$5,000 left over at the end of the year, and this left-over money could then be moved over and be spent directly on services benefitting people.

## **Transition**

### **Director Position:**

Erik Cole reported that the position has been posted through Metro HR and MSS. The Deadline is Sept. 30. He encouraged commissioners to post the announcement. He said it was also placed on some national networks.

The selection committee will have 8-9 people on it; a formerly homeless representative who is also a commissioner and a representative from the Nashville Homeless Coalition will be on the selection committee.

### **Committee meetings:**

Erik Cole briefly described each committee and introduced the chairs:

Megan Barry chairs the Policy & Governance Committee; Diane Kuhn chairs the Communications Committee; and Renee Pratt chairs the Service Planning & Coordination Committee. He told commissioners to expect to hear from the chairs soon to schedule meetings.

### **The Key Alliance update:**

Erik Cole pointed to recent media reports. He said The Key Alliance was in the process of looking for additional board members. He said there were a lot of recommendations made based on the media stories, which he forwarded to The Key Alliance. He said The Key Alliance's financial abilities were fully in place, but TKA asked the Commission for recommendations on how to move forward. He said he believed they were interested in opinions from the community as to what The Key Alliance could do to best help the community. The Key Alliance was supposed to be a fundraising body, Mr. Cole said, adding the executive committee made some recommendations to their board as to where they could be housed.

### **Interim Director Update:**

Carolyn Grossley said she met with several commissioners and was still scheduling meetings. During those meetings, many commissioners requested a board training. She said she was working on trying to get a training facilitator. She then circulated a sheet for commissioners to place their name under Thursday evening, Oct. 11, or Saturday morning, Oct. 13, for possible board training, which would be about 2.5 hours long.

Ms. Grossley continued that she has been working through her Transition Plan. One of the things she was working on was an Improvement Plan, which also looked at programs where the

Commission is making good strides. She said she plans to use the Improvement Plan to come up with specific program proposals that examine how to create more housing opportunities and how to work together more collaboratively in the community.

One of the successful programs of the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission was the SOAR program, Ms. Grossley said. She introduced Corey Gephart, the Homeless Outreach Director of Park Center, who oversees the SOAR Program.

Ms. Gephart gave a detailed presentation of the SOAR Program.

She explained that Park Center is a nonprofit mental health agency that provides recovery for individuals suffering from mental health issues. One of the programs Park Center has is a homeless outreach program. And part of that program is the SOAR program. SOAR stands for SSI/SSDI Outreach Access and Recovery.

The SOAR program is a technical assistance initiative that provides strategic planning and training to local service providers. The goal is to increase access to Social Security benefits for clients, which can increase access to housing, treatment and other supports.

The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission launched the SOAR program in 2006 and contracted with Park Center in May of that year. Currently Park Center has two full time SOAR coordinators and one SOAR liaison, who goes into jails and prisons and assists inmates to get their benefits 30 days prior to their release. This approach prevents homelessness.

Since inception Park Center has served more than 435 individuals. Conservative estimates show that the program generated \$9.2 million in benefits to the city of Nashville. Typically it takes 90-120 days to 3-4 years per individual to successfully receive benefits, but Park Center is able to get the application process done in an average of 55 days.

For FY 2011/12, Park Center served 102 individuals. "Our benchmark was 80 individuals," Gephart said. "We exceeded that." She said in addition to getting the benefits, Park Center permanently housed 43 individuals. "We assisted 72 individuals into some form of housing." Gephart said there were many success stories and she shared one example, "I can think of one client. He's been homeless since he was 13. He is now 53. So for 40 years he has been homeless. He called me on August in 2011 and said he was ready to move into housing. We worked with him and by October we got him into housing."

For the current fiscal year, Park Center continues its work and hopes to exceed its benchmark of serving 80 individuals. "My team is extremely dedicated."

After Ms. Gephart's report, commissioners joined the public in applauding her and Park Center for their work.

Q&A followed:

Commissioner Tom Turner wanted to know whether the SOAR Program was only for people with mental illness.

Ms. Gephart said that Park Center works only with individuals with mental illness because that is the population Park Center focuses on.

Mr. Turner further stated that currently Park Center has three people serving 100 people. "If you had one more employee, could you serve 150?"

Ms. Gephart said that one SOAR coordinator typically completes applications for about 30-40 people per year. "Obviously our SOAR coordinators do much more."

Commissioner Phil Duke asked whether there was overlap with Eckman/Freeman in the SOAR program.

Ms. Gephart said that Eckman/Freeman may refer people to Park Center, and Park Center refers people who have disability criteria to Eckman/Freeman.

Commissioner Diane Kuhn asked whether Park Center follows up with people to ensure that they are continuing to receive benefits, especially with people who are not in housing.

Ms. Gephart responded with yes. Park Center connects SOAR applicants with case managers and those case managers then follow up. "After they get their benefits, we definitely connect them with all their identification they need on the front end – I.D., birth certificates.." then Park Center connects them with other service providers such as the Mental Health Coop, Centerstone and helps them get Medicare/Medicaid.

Ms. Kuhn asked whether we are tracking them.

Ms. Gephart said Park Center was tracking people who get into housing, but not individuals Park Center connects with case managers.

Commissioner Angie Thompson asked who the case management organizations were that Park Center connected people with.

Ms. Gephart said they were Mental Health Cooperative and Centerstone. Ms. Gephart said Park Center also works with Urban Housing Solutions and has a special program to get people in housing. Once housed with Urban Housing Solutions, people have case management through UHS. "That's been truly successful."

Ellen Zinkiewicz asked whether the Vulnerability Index was done.

Ms. Gephart said that a lot of the people Park Center refers to the Mental Health Coop and then does a VI on them. "People we move into housing, they all have the VI done on them."

After Ms. Gephart's report, Interim Director Grossley continued her Director's Report: She talked about Housing Goals for FY2013. She said one of the things she has looked at is the housing goals for the Commission. I don't think we can get any more money in the budget. She said she has come up with a plan that would allow for the Commission to house 100 people instead of the current 34. "I hate to bring out numbers, but I think it is possible. We worked with Rusty [Lawrence] at Urban Housing Solutions." She said another opportunity is to also reach out to Woodbine.

Erik Cole said "that is part of what the Governance Committee is going to support you on and also be able to work through the budget next year."

Nashville's Road Home:

Carolyn Grossley reported that staff suggests to brand MHC's Housing First program by creating a brand under "Nashville's Road Home." She said that MHC used to start out with Nashville's Road Home branding, but got away from that. Now it would make sense to move back to it since Housing First is a best-practice model rather than a brand.

Ms. Grossley announced that Project Homeless Connect is scheduled for February 13, 2013. She also said that staff was working on another initiative, which is at the beginning stages for a work development program.

A moment of silence was held to remember the homeless individuals who died in our city since July.

**Announcements:**

- Erik Cole gave an update on the Gaps Governance process, which is the group that submits grant requests on behalf of the city for the Continuum of Care. He said the Gaps Governance process set up an Evaluation Committee. That committee is using the new HUD guidelines that focus on moving individuals into housing and maintaining that housing in the future. He said that process is going well with good community and organization involvement. Right now, applications have been submitted to Suzie Tolmie and an independent Review Committee is looking at those using criteria and HMIS data to make some recommendation around that CoC funding.
- Erik Cole announced that this was his last meeting as chair. He said he had some other opportunities coming his way. “I thoroughly have been honored to be working with this Commission. As I said before, change and transition can be positive. I think new leadership on the Commission after my three years is very positive as well, and I’ll enjoy and treasure the time I’ve been able to work with each one of you.” He is not leaving the Commission just stepping down as the chair. The Mayor’s Office is making an announcement to appoint a new chair pretty soon.
- Mr. Cole informed the Commission that one of the things he is starting to work on is the Housing Trust Fund concept.

Commissioner Strobel expressed his appreciation for Mr. Cole’s leadership and asked whether it was too early to have questions in regard to the Housing Trust Fund.

Mr. Cole said there was a core group right now, which will eventually reach out for partners to support the Housing Trust Fund. It will be a campaign for the community to support. He said he also hoped for the homeless community to get involved. “One of the features of these trusts is that you have the possibility to focus on lower income populations.”

Carolyn Grossley reported on the upcoming Art for Change event, which is scheduled for Oct. 6 in Downtown Nashville. The goal is to draw attention to our blue meters and help people understand what these blue meters are for, and why people are getting assistance to get off the street.

Erik Cole said Ingrid McIntyre slipped him an announcement for the Open Table anniversary. Ingrid McIntyre said it was Open Table’s first fundraiser. She invited commissioners to attend the event. She said Councilman Jason Holleman was the board chair of Open Table. Jason Holleman said the event was on Saturday, Sept. 15 at the Farmer’s Market.

Dennis Huey announced that the 20<sup>th</sup> Operation Stand Down event for homeless veterans would be held on Oct. 12 and 13.

Erik Cole told commissioners to look for notices for committee meetings and the Commission orientation.

The next full Commission meeting is scheduled for Nov. 2, at 9.30 a.m. at the Sonny West Conference Center.

The next executive committee meeting is on Sept. 19 at the offices of Metro Social Services.

### **Public Comments:**

**Howard Allen** said that he and sometimes Mr. Steve Reiter get a little emotional. “What we’ve been saying for the longest is Housing First. We know a lot homeless people who have died that might not have died if they had housing by 2015.” He said that this Commission was established to get housing. He himself has been in contact with the homeless community, “and they asked us to tell MHC that we’re sorry that this system has failed to meet the goals that were set for 2015. This season is over.” He said, “...so we want to let this Commission know, that we have your pink slip – you’re fired.”

**Jim Johnston** said he had seen a lot of press lately about The Key Alliance and the Homelessness Commission. “The Key Alliance, they got the money and then they run. They don’t do anything with it. They take care of themselves.” He said he’d like to ask whether he was forbidden to serve on the Homelessness Commission. He had been asking for a number of years to serve. He then asked again what The Key Alliance was doing and said they were taking care of themselves. Mr. Johnston called for an honest, open debate. He said nobody cared. Then he added, “President Clinton said we’re all in this together. That’s a joke.”

**Steve Reiter** said, “We have been at this for 7 years now. Let’s be honest, the Commission is a Chamber initiative. Then the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission created The Key Alliance. Then this Trust Fund is another Chamber initiative.” He said we raised probably \$50,000.

Mr. Reiter also addressed the blue parking meters, saying that every city was setting up these silly parking meters. “They don’t work. They are a joke. They’re an insult to the homeless community.”

He also said that everything could be done within Metro Social Services. “They do assessment. They can let you know what you’re qualified for, and then we can move on. We don’t need to outsource. Homeless people are smart. They can find Metro Social Services.

He said what needed to happen with The Key Alliance is to liquidate it.

Mr. Reiter said he was insulted every time he passes a parking meter. “I’ve never seen a person put a nickel in there. It is a joke. We don’t need an awareness campaign for homeless people. They’re trying to get rid of homeless people Downtown.”

He said people could just go Downtown to the library and see homeless people. He further stated that the Mayor has never come forward and committed to supporting the Ten Year Plan. “I’m tired to come to these meetings because we’re not doing anything.

He also said that Megan Barry was smart and “gets it. She is the only person who puts forward legislation to help homeless people. This body has done nothing. So start doing your job or let’s just be done with it.”

**Cowboy – David Luttrell** said he saw and know the need on the nonprofit side. However, he said that he had problems with The Key Alliance. “They used it as a marketing tool and marketing is deceit.”

He said the Campus [Room In The Inn] has done good work, “but other than that, we are still spinning our wheels out there. We need to get back on track and let’s go out and do the right thing for the right reason.” He said he did not have all the answers, he never would, but where we’re going has got to change.”

**Barry Hobbs:** “I wasn’t going to say anything here today because I’m sick and tired. It’s been 7 years.” Mr. Hobbs said Jesus was homeless. He said it took “giving these folks housing, jobs, education, transportation, meds, ... so just do that. But it’s not that simple. It takes money. Take the politics and personalities out of this.”

He referenced a City Paper article a while back about The Key Alliance and said that there were contributions and grants. “Who made out with the money? Was there a three-way split? Did people make off with the money or can you just not fundraise worth a damn?”

He also said that at the last meeting six names of people who had died were read. The same happened at today’s meeting. He asked how many people have to die. Mr. Hobbs then said that Will Connelly helped him.

“It’s not too late. Not when you live in the United States of America. Put Democrats back in power.” He also asked whether we were all created equal or not.

**Dennis Huey** said he was not going to speak for Operation Stand Down. He said “Nashville has come to a point right now with the Homelessness Commission, where it’s either do or die in my opinion. We’ve got folks sit up here, which in my opinion probably don’t need to be on the Commission because they have nothing to do with homelessness. We need to look at the whole thing, we need to sit down and see who really gives a flip about homelessness. Some people I don’t even know why they’re on the Commission.” He said it was probably politics. “This thing reeks of politics.” He said decisions were going to be made based on what’s going to happen politically. However, he pointed out that these were human lives we were dealing with. “If you want to be on the Commission because it looks good on your resume, we don’t really need you on here. Somebody has to take a stance on the politics on this Commission.” He said the Commission was at the point right now where it either was going to fail or change. He also asked whether people who applied for the director’s position will be out of a job in 2.5 years. If so, then people who may be really qualified may not want to give up their current jobs to be unemployed in 2 years. “This board needs to make a statement whether we are going to continue this thing after the plan is up. Does anybody know? I mean that’s affecting folks that are thinking about applying for this job.”

**Erik Cole** addressed Dennis Huey’s point. He said the question about the future of the commission was open. The Commission, he said, did not have an indication what will happen in three years, but results will matter. “I don’t think we will lose funding over the next three years, but again, I do not know.”

Public comments came to an end and the meeting was adjourned.