

Metropolitan Homelessness Full Commission Meeting

Friday, November 6, 2015
at the Howard Office Building

Present: Steven Samra, Kirby Davis, Renee Pratt, Wendell Seagroves, Diane Kuhn, Nick Atwood, Angie Thompson, Angie Hubbard, Marvin Cox, Sgt. Bourque, Josh Lee, Dayna Lovelady, Erik Cole, Ellen Zinkiewicz

Staff: William Connelly, Judy Tackett, Karri Simpson, Leslie Head

The meeting began at 9:30 a.m.

Minutes:

The minutes of September 11 were approved.

Financial Report and Budget:

Lisa Ricketts reported that everything is on track for the first quarter for the Metro Homelessness Commission Budget.

The *How's Nashville* budget is very tight and is being monitored.

There were no questions.

Encampment discussion

Diane Kuhn stated that a previous discussion occurred at the Executive Committee meeting and the decision to form a task force was made. Steven Samra and Wendell Segroves have agreed to chair it. Steven Samra stated they would meet briefly today at the conclusion of the meeting and should have something to report back in January.

Erik Cole reported that the Parks Department has stated they will not pursue anything until April 1, 2016, and are looking at their master plan for the area. The hope is that residents will find permanent housing opportunities prior to the April date.

Cold Weather

Judy Tackett reported that the community has met all summer and came up with a plan for this winter. The cold weather season has started, running November 1 through March 31, and the plan looks similar to last year; the biggest change is that level 2 begins at 25 degrees this year. The Commission is paying for a part-time coordinator again this year, and Sara Lynes has returned to fill this position; Quiana Jimerson is working alongside her this winter so that the two can split the responsibilities.

Focus Strategies Presentation:

Will Connelly introduced Megan Kurteff Schatz with Focus Strategies, the group hired to analyze the last couple years of data focused on homeless services to make recommendations for ways in which Nashville can improve their efforts.

Megan Kurteff Schatz stated that Focus Strategies helps communities and states to reduce homelessness by using local data, analyzing to demonstrate how communities are performing as a whole and the results

of the investments being made. The project was to assess the service provider community here in Nashville, identify what is working and areas for improvement, and recommend a new, more comprehensive set of system objectives and strategies to help end homelessness in Nashville, along with a recommendation on governance structure to help achieve these objectives.

The ideal is for communities to be operating from the principles of a Housing Crisis Response System which are a person-centric, housing focused response to homelessness utilizing local data to make informed decision and effective use of resources. A housing crisis resolution system can't be reached if you don't use your data to guide the work.

Things that Focus Strategies learned about Nashville included:

- There is engaged and committed leadership and strong involvement across many sectors.
- The high profile success of *How's Nashville* has helped the community rally around housing solutions.
- System strengths include a coordinated entry for some populations; diversion prevention for families; a small but growing inventory of rapid rehousing; an expanding supply of permanent supportive housing; and increased funding for HMIS.
- Challenges included that the service provider community is not yet a system but still a collection of programs that aren't envisioning themselves as a system; there are no overarching goals and strategies that guide where funders are putting resources, shape policies, and help each provider understand how they fit into the whole; and the community is struggling with rising housing costs.
- The current governance structure has two lead agencies, the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission and the Metropolitan Development and Housing Authority, and while these two agencies work well together it has created decentralized leadership which leads to additional challenges.

According to SWAP performance measures:

- Nashville does not have a high HMIS participation rate across all program types, which is typically seen in successful communities across the country. Currently only 1% of emergency shelters are participating in HMIS. There needs to be community-wide HMIS coverage so Nashville can nimbly operate as a system.
- Entries into available beds and programs from homelessness are very low. Rapid rehousing (RRH) has the highest rate of entry from literal homelessness and that is likely because it is funded by ESG, which has very specific requirements. It is recommended that Nashville really look at where people are entering bed and programs opportunities and evaluate if there is a cheaper and effective way to keep people out of homelessness, prioritizing program opportunities for those who have expended all other opportunities. It is important to note that there is a lot of missing data in this area and this hinders having a comprehensive community snapshot.
- The length of stay for emergency shelters is pretty short. Transitional housing for single adult households aligns with national averages; however, the stay for families in transitional housing is very long in comparison to most other communities.
- Most individuals exiting emergency shelter are not exiting to permanent housing opportunities, which is expected as most emergency shelters are not set up to address housing needs. Exits to permanent housing from a transitional housing program is far below the national goal and national average. RRH is performing very well, with 99% of families and 78% of single adults exiting to permanent housing.
- In regards to cost effectiveness, i.e. the exits to permanent housing vs. the cost per permanent housing placement, RRH is the cheapest intervention and also yields the best results; this aligns with national findings. Transitional housing for families is by far the most costly, at \$58, 253 per exit to permanent housing.

Recommendations:

- The most important step is that Nashville must decide if they want to transform the current program structure into a system.
- Identify or create a single entity tasked with transforming the current set of initiatives and programs into a Housing Crisis Resolution System. Centralize the resources and decisions regarding the resources, which helps the overall systems change happen faster and more effectively.
- Involvement of high level leadership from public and private sectors is needed, along with a strong alignment of local public and private funders around a common set of goals and performance measures.
- Elements of new system would include coordinated entry; removal of program barriers; shelter diversion for those who are still housed, keeping people out of the system; shift investments to high performing RRH; increase capacity for landlord recruitment and housing navigation; and engage providers not currently participating and improve the rate of data in HMIS.

Q&A:

- Charles Strobel stated that Room in the Inn has always sought to be a public-private partnership and over the years there have always been questions of terminology. There is this new word “system”, and previously coalition and partnership have been used, and now we have system. Ultimately whatever public-private system is created it comes down to authority and who is going to call the shots. When you have different agencies in the private system living out their mission and now they are coming into the system that is going to change their priority that becomes a problem. Do you have any recommendation?
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz stated that he is right, it is very complicated and requires both centralized authority and willful collaboration, which requires a willingness to give up real things including control, power, and ideas about what works, in order to achieve overall change. They have seen this process evolve in other communities over several years and it has clearly somewhat started in Nashville with the *How's Nashville* campaign. It involves everyone collectively choosing to change.
- Jim Johnston asked what Focus Strategies was hired to do in 10 words or less?
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz: Analyze your homeless system, tell you how you're performing, how you can improve.
- Dayna Lovelady said she is optimistic about having a coordinated system and is hoping everyone can rally together and make it happen.
- Diane Kuhn stated that Nashville has both the Metro Homelessness Commission and MHDA serving as leaders in the effort to end homelessness and is wondering about how other communities similar in size have structured their successful governance system.
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz said that it is important to note that many communities have this same challenge where different pieces of what make up the system live in different places. Some communities choose to continue to lead bifurcated and it has not helped reach their goals as there isn't a centralized place for policy and funding and it is so important that those are housed together. A couple communities have created a non-profit to house this function and that has some strength, but also faces the challenge that government entity still has to act as lead for several federal funds. The most successful examples have been where a lot of strength in leadership lies in local government, but that government entity is and must be nimble and flexible to run functionally. Focus Strategies is not making a specific recommendation for Nashville governance at this time, but will in the future.

- Charles Strobel asked about the terminology of “literal homelessness,” stating that the report states that “in a high function system, beds are prioritized for people who are literally homeless while those who are still housed are diverted from entering the system (and housing is preserved or new housing is secured).” Charles Strobel stated that if Nashville did this it would drastically reduce the numbers. What do you mean by literal vs. those who need to be diverted? Most everyone he considers homeless actually comes from housing. What is the definition of literal homelessness?
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz stated that she is not suggesting that 100% of program and bed entries must be from literal homelessness and that everyone must be on the streets or in the shelters to get into a program; however, when rates of entry into transitional housing programs for families includes only 30% entering from homelessness and 39% entering from non-homelessness situation you may want to evaluate that. The line between housed and homelessness is very unclear and communities are not good at predicting who will become homeless. Typically what is known from research available is that the pathway to homelessness included multiple doubled-up episodes until there is nowhere left to go and they end up literally homeless. The goal of diversion is to figure out whose situation can be resolved through mediation to keep them in housing and not enter the homeless system. The approach to entering the homeless system is that all other options to keep housing should be exhausted and only those with no other options should enter the system.
- Steven Samra stated the difficulty of change was mentioned and that he has been in Nashville for 10 years and has seen significant change happen. He’s also seen a lot of change in his current work, where he deals with systems change in the behavioral health field. What he has learned is it is a long, slow process. When Nashville embarks on systems change it takes time, and he thinks, as a person in recovery from serious addiction, we want instant gratification and change now. So as we start pouring into the report we need to take a breath and really think through what this actually means and know this won’t happen overnight.
- Alexander Smith: Where in priority do you consider encampment in regards to “Homeless”?
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz state if you are sleeping outside then you are at the top of the list. Everyone needs a safe place to sleep and that is not a tent.
- Kirby Davis wanted to know if the funding has been quantified regarding how much the public and private sector are spending on homelessness?
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz said yes but she doesn’t have those numbers with her and doesn’t want to misquote. It is very important and a very complex question which is why she can’t just give a flat number. Budget data from providers was collected and they looked at all of the investments at all of the programs in HMIS. They don’t have the budget data for privately funded organizations including many emergency shelters.
- Ingrid McIntyre wanted to know if there is a reason that privately funded places weren’t asked for their numbers. She stated Open Table Nashville will be glad to share their budget and data.
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz said the approach ask for budget data for any program in which they had outcomes data. They don’t want to ask for budget data from programs without outcomes data because that would influence the overall data on what the overall outcomes are for what is spent.
 - o Ingrid McIntyre thinks that this then isn’t an accurate reflection of what is happening in Nashville.
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz thinks that the HMIS participation rate being low is a large problem and if more organizations would utilize HMIS then overall community data could be analyzed to get a fuller picture of the current outcomes in Nashville.
- Howard Allen: What part of the system needs to be fixed for people who don’t met the standards?
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz said they recommend removing entry barriers from programs and that this is critical for people to be successful. This isn’t about getting people to behave

how you want them to, but to get everyone housed which means a lot of compromise and giving up rules that prevent people from getting housed. If there are certain rules that can't be changed, then you must look at how to set up that program to serve the right population and get the greatest impact.

- Dayna Lovelady wants to know if they have encountered many agencies being reluctant to participate because of intellectual property rights and not wanting to share their data?
 - o Megan Kurteff Schatz said she has never heard it termed as "intellectual property right" but has run into people not wanting to share certain parts of their data; however, often people can be convinced. When you make change each organization has to grapple with if they really want to be a part of this and if you don't want to be a part of it then it is important to say so and not slow down the progress of everyone else. For those who often choose not to participate though, they often see their funding erode because their mission isn't headed in the direction of the overall change.

The full report from Focus Strategies will be released in December.

Announcements

The annual Homeless Memorial will be held on Saturday, December 12th from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at Riverfront Park.

Public Hearing

- Howard Allen: He read an article in the paper thanking Charles Strobel and celebrating the 30th year of Room in the Inn. He wished Commissioners good health and happiness.
- Jim Johnston: In response to what Vice President Joe Biden said at yesterday's event in Nashville, he wants him to know the problem is waiting for federal government to do their job. How can local efforts end homelessness when the federal government isn't doing their job? If we could get people who are supposed to do their job, to do their job and have accountability, but we can't. We keep spending money, our money, just like money was spent on this report. Nothing is going to get down until there is transparency and accountability.
- Alexander Smith: He wants to work with Steve Samra and Wendell Seagroves on the encampment task force. He still hasn't heard anything about working with the youth. There is no word, no action, and they still get left out. It is awesome that there are warming shelters but the majority of those churches don't allow the LGBTQ to come in. They depend on the community to let them know how to help but when people get to the door you can't come in because of who you are. He challenges the committee to make churches accept them.
- Dwayne Bone: He lives at Madison Towers and finds it troubling that his friend, who has been living in Madison Towers for 30 years, has recently been evicted because they smell cigarette smoke in her apartment despite no evidence being found. The hearing to appeal this eviction was scheduled for 1:30 p.m., but was changed last minute to 10 a.m. so that advocates couldn't attend. Hopefully someone will intervene on her part and help her. Once someone is evicted it is almost impossible to get housing elsewhere.
- Steven Samra: It is really important that there are prevention programs for a woman being evicted for smoking, and all others being evicted, and that barriers must be reduced so someone doesn't end up homelessness. The Commission really needs to be involved in the prevention piece.
- Ingrid McIntyre: Open Table Nashville worked with someone who was almost evicted over \$80. They have been providing welcome home kits, furniture, and beds for all collaborators of How's Nashville for a long time and were compensated for this delivery. However, now that How's Nashville funding is almost gone the compensation has been cut and they can no longer provide this service. She asked that if anyone has ideas for how to fund their furniture delivery program, she would be elated. Furniture is part of the retention to help keep people in housing.

- Sean Muldoon: Operation Stand Down Tennessee is holding the Stand Down event on the 17th and 18th of this month at Greater Bethel AME Church.
- Samuel Lester: He is concerned about the cold weather plan that is in place. This year's level two plan is two degrees lower than last year; 27 degrees is already putting people at risk, so to lower temperature from last year puts them even more in danger. This year, even more than last, we are in a crisis situation because Woodbine has shut down, which previously provided over 100 beds for single men. There are no places for couples or pets and means these people can't come in. It is possible for the city to provide more resources at higher temperatures, and not extremes like last year, and to rely on the faith community for this is a terrible burden. It is awful to find a person extremely vulnerable and have no place to take them.

Next Commission is January 8th. Exec is December 8th.

The next full Commission meeting is scheduled for Friday, January 8, 2016 at 9:30 a.m. at the Sonny West Conference room, Howard Office Building.

The next Executive Committee meeting is on Tuesday, December 8, 2015 at 8:30 a.m. at a location to be determined.

With no other comments, all approved and the meeting was adjourned at 11:05 a.m.