



Metropolitan Homelessness Commission Meeting

July 6, 2012

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

Minutes

Commissioners present: Erik Cole, chair, Angie Thompson, Rachel Hester (representing Charles Strobel), Renee Pratt, Council Lady Sheri Weiner, Marvin Cox (representing Cynthia Croom), Diane Kuhn, Angie Hubbard (representing Phil Ryan), Dayna Lovelady, Steven Samra, Hershell Warren, Howard Gentry, Councilman Jason Holleman, Josh Lee (Metro Legal representative)

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

Welcome & Introductions

Erik Cole welcomed everyone, and commissioners introduced themselves. Mr. Cole asked commissioners to sign a thank you card for Clifton Harris.

Introduction of Carolyn Grossley, Interim Director

Erik Cole talked about the transition phase that the Commission is in, which will also set the stage to move forward with the Ten Year Plan.

He said that Renee Pratt, the director of Metro Social Services, and he worked very closely to maintain a level of leadership within staff moving forward and found an interim solution. He introduced Carolyn Grossley as the interim director.

Carolyn Grossley said she was working through her 30, 60, 90-day transition plan. "Housing is certainly at the top of my agenda," she said. "I'm asking for your patience, your guidance and am certainly open to hear from everyone."

Erik Cole said the job description for the directorship was being reviewed and would be posted widely to get a good feel for potential candidates.

Transition Plan – revisiting the Ten Year Plan

Mr. Cole said one of the things to focus on in the interim period is re-setting MHC's committee work. He encouraged commissioners who want to serve on a committee to participate in the process.

Mr. Cole said he and Ms. Pratt got together with Carolyn Grossley and talked about the contracts. "And that is something the committees will work on – really look at these contracts and get the best performance we can," he said.

He said the Commission was three years out from the expiration date of the Ten Year Plan. "We can take this restructuring process and really jump-start and re-focus on Housing First."

He continued, "We're committed to pulling together and setting the stage for new leadership or leadership that continues moving forward."

Part of that effort will be looking at that Ten Year Plan and see what other cities have done, he said, adding that Carolyn Grossley was working on a business plan for the Commission to help push the goals and achievements that the Commission can accomplish in the next few years.

Commissioner Samra congratulated Carolyn Grossley on her appointment as interim director. "She is the perfect person to take the reins at this point," he said. Next he said the most important issue facing commissioners is very clearly laid out in the Ten Year Plan, "... and it's around housing. You cannot succeed in ending homelessness if not around housing." He said the Housing First model now has plenty of evidence around it. He encouraged all commissioners to gather around that issue.

Erik Cole pointed out that HMIS is now producing results. He talked about the Gaps Governance Commission, which is working on examining how the HEARTH ACT will affect service providers. A review committee was established to look at current grantees and renewal/new applications. He said folks involved in that process are from various backgrounds including business.

Angie Hubbard added that MDHA is going to do a new analysis of impediments to fair housing choices and a new consolidated plan.

Erik Cole said at the last meeting we recognized some of our main volunteers. One of the people who could not make it to the meeting was Lt. Swisher. She has been a long-term supporter of our work and is a very engaged servant within the Police Department.

The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission thanked Lt. Andrea Swisher for all her work and support and recognized her. Lt. Swisher said a few words recognizing the good work that has been done.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the minutes of May 4, 2012. All approved.

Financial Update:

Pam McEwen, chief financial officer of Metro Social Services gave the financial update for the period ending May 31, 2012. She said year-to-date, the Commission was \$99,429 under budget. Most of that occurred because of vacant positions (no salaries paid) during the year.

Overall, the Commission was coming in at about \$100,000 under budget. A lot of that money was used to purchase bus tickets, safety kits and other material for outreach to assist homeless individuals. Carolyn Grossley listed the items: food, toiletries, medical kits, and other essentials to help people in the interim.

Ms. McEwen said the Commission is likely still going to be about \$20,000 under budget by the end of the year.

Erik Cole said the other item within the budget that the city approved was the pay increments for staff. He said as the governing body of the Commission, there needed to be a vote on that increment.

Pam McEwen explained that when the Council approved the budget for the next year, they approved an increment for all Metro employees – for civil service employees. “Employees for the Homelessness Commission fall under the Commission, so you will have to approve the 4% increment,” she said.

Howard Gentry made a motion to approve the 4% pay increment for all staff. The motion was seconded and all approved.

Pam McEwen talked about next year’s budget. She said Metro gave an additional \$100,000 for the Guest House, which takes that contract from \$350,000 to \$450,000.

She also pointed to another small change, which is a \$100 deduction in office supplies.

“The other thing that will happen this fiscal year, there will be some adjustments,” she said. “We will have to make some changes because of benefit changes, fringes, etc. We also make those adjustments because of internal service fees.” MHC will pay for space staff utilizes for example. The only other changes that need to be made, according to Ms. McEwen, are things within the line items.

Rachel Hester, who represented Commissioner Strobel, asked whether the Guest House line item could include the Day Center because the increase in the contract was made due to the increased need at Room In The Inn’s Day Center.

Erik Cole agreed with Pam McEwen. He said the line item adjustments will be very helpful. “I think our goal is to not end up with money on the table.”

Pam McEwen told commissioners if they would like to see information presented in a different way to just let her know.

Outreach Initiative

Carolyn Grossley explained that the Outreach Initiative came about in response to the extra money that Ms. McEwen had talked about. It also was a response to the outreach needs. She pointed to a panel presentation that Commissioner Steve Samra, Corey Gephart and her did on the needs of outreach a couple of Commission meetings ago.

She said the Commission was able to get bus passes, food items, toiletries and bare essentials for people on the streets. She explained that there is an entire procurement process involved. There are already coordinated monthly outreach meetings going on where outreach workers will be informed what the process is for clients to access needed items. "It's not a free for all."

"We are trying to get outcomes," Ms. Grossley said. "We are trying to get information of needs toward housing."

Commissioner Gentry cautioned that if the Commission starts this initiative, then it was important that this becomes a sustainable program. Rachel Hester agreed. She said Room In The Inn has some purchasing power. She suggested that maybe the Commission needed to look at how other agencies can assist and explore collaborations when there is left-over money.

Erik Cole agreed that it was worth looking at the Outreach Initiative and have the Service Planning & Coordination Committee explore how it can be sustained.

Commissioner Samra said there had to be a bigger plan in place for transportation, which includes folks who may just not ever have access to an outreach worker. "If we approach MTA, we need to look at the bigger picture," he said, suggesting that maybe it was necessary to look at funding a set number of seats on a bus where people wouldn't have to engage in accessing a bus pass.

Rachel Hester asked about other cities that do it well. Commissioner Samra named Seattle, Washington, D.C., Boston, and Denver.

Erik Cole said in a past meeting there was talk about transportation coordination among congregations and agencies.

Erik Cole then talked about the Communications Committee, which has been very active and is chaired by Diane Kuhn.

Commissioner Kuhn said the way she views it, communications needs to happen around three things, which she referred to as the three pillars: communications, outreach and housing. She said if the Commission works on these three things, we can get something done. "Obviously housing is number one, but these other issues are important."

Erik Cole said that Megan Barry agreed to chair the Governance & Policy Committee. He announced that he would forward a list of all committees so commissioners can sign up for them.

Dayna Lovelady asked about the weather situation with temperatures being so high, she wondered where the Homelessness Commission stood on that front. Judith Tackett informed commissioners about OEM's and the Mayor's Office responses, the cooling centers and cool patrol of the Mission. She said we were linking to all of this from our online tools (Website, Facebook, Twitter). She also said that staff was in the process to reach out to OEM and improve on the current Homeless Emergency Shelter Plan with the goal to have a coordinated effort in place by November.

Announcements:

Staff informed Commissioners once more of the upcoming Poker Run on Aug. 11 that will benefit housing as well as Art for Change, a collaboration with Nossi College of Art around the Adopt A Meter program.

A moment of silence was held in memory of homeless neighbors who died since the last Commission meeting.

Erik Cole informed commissioners that USICH (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness) reached out to the Commission to push Nashville's alignment with Opening Doors, the federal plan to end homelessness. He said he read it, and the Commission was already in alignment with the plan, but it was an item to be discussed by the Policy & Governance Committee.

Next full Commission meeting Sept. 7, in the Sonny West Conference Center, 800 2nd Avenue South.

Next exec. committee meeting July 18, in the large conference room of Metro Social Services, 800 2nd Avenue North, Suite 100.

Other items mentioned before the public hearing:

Howard Gentry talked about people not understanding homelessness from the ground up. He gave an example of a dentist who fell on hard times and ended up homeless.

Council Lady Emily Evans circulated a New York Times article that describes a new trend of financing called social impact bonds. The article called The Promise of Social Impact Bonds by Tina Rosenberg was published on June 20, 2012, and describes how investors make money through positive outcomes.

Excerpt: "Social impact bonds are the latest illustration of two new and welcome trends in social services. One is measuring outcomes, not outputs. The number of people counseled is an example of an output. That may or may not be a marker of success, but it usually becomes the benchmark because it's easy to count. Measuring outcomes, such as less recidivism, is, of course, the test of whether a program is working, but it is often very hard to do. Sometimes outcomes aren't visible for many years. And it can be hard to know what made the difference without a randomized controlled trial – far too expensive to be realistic. The other trend is paying only for success: if the program doesn't work, the taxpayers can tear up the bill."

The last time addressed the attendance policy of commissioners. In the past few months there was a lot of effort made for increased attendance. Erik Cole said he will look at the current attendance policy and get with people who have not met it.

Public Comments

Stever Reiter made a comment agreeing that when a commissioner signed up they should be present. He then said it was no secret that he had asked for Clifton Harris' resignation for a long time. He stressed that he had no personal issues with Mr. Harris, but he had performance issues. "You are the governing body for staffing. And Clifton is your staff. You need to evaluate him. That's never been done."

Commissioners corrected Mr. Reiter on that point.

Mr. Reiter continued saying that he talked to Mr. Harris twice and was told that the resources just were not there. "We need competent and capable staff. And we are so far off plan, it's not even funny. It's a shame."

He then talked about the Police/Homeless Committee, which he said has not had a scheduled meeting since January. He said since the committee was not meeting, he was moving in another direction. He said he needed some issues addressed.

He said he's been addressing the Commission for seven years. "And it's like beating a dead horse." He then said he was glad to see Josh Lee representing Metro Legal.

Mr. Reiter continued to say that "when we first started Clifton was the homeless coordinator. Then he became the director of the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission, then he became the executive director. It gets very frustrating to come here time and time again."

Commissioner Gentry went on record to say that it was not the first time that Metro Legal has been present at a Commission meeting.

Barry Hobbs said he was at the meeting to call for the rebirth and renewal of the Nashville Homeless Power Project. He recounted six reasons for bringing the Homeless Power Project back: Housing, employment, education, health, transportation, and ... he could not recall the sixth reason.

He said Clifton Harris did his best under the circumstances. "I was told he worked without a net, that net was money. You have a budget. If you do or not that is a matter of opinion."

He said the six reasons he mentioned earlier needed to be addressed because the Commission listed six people who lost their lives since the last meeting.

Mr. Hobbs finished his address saying, "We just celebrated the 236th birthday of this nation, the greatest nation of the face of this earth. It's enough."

Howard Allen said he was one of the first homeless commissioners on this commission. "There is no excuse not to be here." He said today was a new beginning. He also said the hope and faith in this commission was dead for the homeless. "I've been in housing for three months, but I still feel homeless," he said.

He said when people like Kenneth Carpenter who was 63 chooses to stay in a storage rather than going to the Mission, "you've got a problem." [Note: Mr. Carpenter was found dead in a storage shed where he stayed during excessive heat.]

He said he applied for housing. He had blood in his lung, but he was turned down for housing for things he had done in the past. When he appealed it, they got into housing. He said he had a good wife, but a month ago, they had a fire, so they were about to be homeless again. He said it was about educating the homeless.

He and his wife were filming at the Commission. He asked if the Council were to come here today and ask the Commission where the 200 houses were, what would the Commission say? "Accountability means everything," Mr. Allen said.

He finished his three-minute address by saying that "we would like to see Steve Samra as permanent executive director of the Homelessness Commission."

Dennis Huey said there were a lot of folks here that he sometimes sees and there were a lot of folks that he doesn't see. "I think it's a good idea to start looking at changing the board here, so we get people who really know about homelessness."

He said concerning about Mr. Harris, "He's gone for whatever reason. We had our feuds, but I respect him, but he's gone, and I wish him well."

Nashville, he said, had a unique opportunity now with seven years into the Ten Year Plan. "We have three years left." He said the opportunity was to turn "this thing around a little bit and head into the right direction." Mr. Huey said that the choice was now.

"We need somebody who has a vision for this new job. We need somebody who has been around, who knows about the trials and tribulations of this thing. He's worked in Nashville, lived in Nashville, he has a vision." [note: Mr. Huey clearly talked about Steve Samra]. "He is well connected at the national and local level. My greatest fear is that we get a good ole boy again. "We need someone who is able to look at what's going on."

He appealed to the Commission that when it put its search committee together to consider this a very serious time in Nashville in regard to homeless issues. He said their decision would make the difference of whether "we're going to move or whether we're going to stay at the same spot right now."

Erik Cole reminded commissioners to sign a card that was prepared for Clifton Harris.

Meeting was adjourned.