

Metropolitan Homelessness Commission
Meeting of Nov. 4, 2016

Present: Liz Allen Fey, chair; Freddie O'Connell, Mina Johnson, Mary Carolyn Roberts, Tanaka Vercher, Wendell Segroves, Norman Humber, Paula Foster, Charles Strobel, Tom Turner, Ellen Zinkiewicz, Jim Harbison, Angie Thompson, Sgt. Ricky Bearden, Dayna Lovelady, Kirby Davis, Marvin Cox.

Staff: Will Connelly, Deon Trotter, Lesley Head, Jessica Ivey, Troy Jenkins, Sally Besuden, Judith Tackett, Lisa Ricketts (MSS Finance Director)

Welcome and Roll Call

Liz Allen Fey welcomed everyone. Ms. Fey took roll call. Then she asked all commissioners to quickly introduce themselves to the new commission member, Paula Foster, who replaces Phil Duke. Ms. Foster introduced herself. She is the executive director of the Tennessee Conference on Social Welfare.

Minutes

Wendell Segroves made a motion to approve the minutes from Sept. 2, 2016. Tom Turner seconded the motion. All approved.

Financials

Lisa Ricketts reported that everything was in line with the budget. She explained that the last report showed the Commission as being under budget because contractors have still time to submit their invoices and are doing so now.

Budget Discussion

Ms. Fey asked for permission to flip an agenda item and move up a discussion about the contracts provided through our budget with the updates section on the agenda to accommodate Freddie O'Connell's schedule. She said the budget discussion was really a contract discussion to understand how the contracts are aligned with the goals of the Commission.

All agreed to the following agenda order: Updates, public comment section, contract discussion, etc.

Governance Task Force

Freddie O'Connell who co-chairs the Governance Task Force with Kirby Davis, gave a history of the task force based on the Focus Strategies report, which recommended that Nashville would do well to streamline governance and with it funding and programmatic efforts. Mr. O'Connell said that the task force met and it was a good discussion about values. He said a good portion of the discussion focused on what exists right now in terms of governing and resources. Mr. O'Connell reported that the group talked about the position of the MHC as a commission under the umbrella of another commission which is Metro Social Service. In addition, the task force spoke about the impact of HUD TA coming to Nashville to do some of this work.

Mr. O'Connell stated that the governance task force came up with four belief statements to anchor its work moving forward. These statements are:

1. Everyone has an opportunity to housing.
2. Services need to be aligned and moving people toward housing.
3. Leadership should be operating out of best practices.
4. Decisions need to be data-driven.

"Basically out of the task force this comes as a recommendation to this body that these are the set of principles we work out of," Mr. O'Connell said.

Liz Allen Fey tied these beliefs to the core values of the Homelessness Commission, which are printed on the bottom of the agenda: housing focused, person centered, data driven, effective use of resources.

The next Governance Task Force meeting is on Monday, Nov. 7, 3 p.m., in the MDHA Board Room. It is a public meeting. Mr. O'Connell said the goal was to keep momentum going and create urgency to move us forward as a community. He then asked MDHA Executive Director Jim Harbison for an update on the HUD Technical Assistance process.

Mr. Harbison gave a brief history of the HUD TA request. He said HUD contracted with The Cloudburst Group to work with the Nashville-Davidson County Continuum of Care (CoC). The scope of the TA "will include developing a community-wide vision for the best possible structure for CoC management and governance. It will also involve identifying areas where services can be improved." Select stakeholders are invited to participate in meetings on November 9 and November 10. All meetings will be held at the Nashville HUD Field Office, 235 Cumberland Bend. Mr. Harbison said this would be a six-month process.

Ms. Fey asked for a quick description of what the CoC is. Angie Hubbard explained that the Continuum of Care follows a structure that makes decisions from the bottoms upwards, meaning that the general CoC membership delegates authority to a governing body through by-laws. The Continuum of Care consists of relevant organizations that are interested in homelessness within a defined geographic area (Nashville-Davidson County). She said funding was unique in that there are no contracts between the providers who receive HUD CoC funding and MDHA. All contracts are directly between the nonprofits and HUD. She explained it was intentionally created to be a loose structure. The CoC is a federally created process that has to follow HUD regulations. Mr. Hubbard said that through this TA process, MDHA encourages open and honest dialogue. Mr. Harbison added that the CoC was based on a federal statute regulated law. This is not a HUD regulated process. It's based on the HEARTH Act.

Liz Allen Fey said that the Commission recognized that with the Governance Task Force and the HUD TA, we were running a parallel process. She said that may actually be a good thing. She said the community could see how the two processes inform each other.

Freddie O'Connell said the Commission's Governance Task Force was specifically addressing the first recommendation in the Focus Strategies report, which reads as follows, "The single most

important step for Nashville is for the community leadership to come together and identify or create a single structure and lead entity that will be tasked with moving forward in transforming the current collection of programs into a Housing Crisis Resolution System.”

Kirby Davis asked MDHA whether they sent the Focus Strategies Report to Cloudburst, which Angie Hubbard confirmed was done. She said they had the report and the MDHA response. She further recommended for the Commission to have their regulations and bylaws ready for Cloudburst to review. Ms. Allen Fey said due to the short notice of next week’s meetings several key stakeholders would be unable to participate. Angie Hubbard said she would ask Cloudburst to look into how these stakeholders who cannot attend the first meetings could be included. Jim Harbison acknowledged the work of Mary Wilson, the Tennessee HUD representative from Knoxville, who made this happen so quickly.

N.O.T.E.

Will Connelly asked Sally Besuden and Troy Jenkins to introduce themselves and give an update on the Nashville Outreach Team for Encampments (N.O.T.E.). Sally Besuden said the N.O.T.E.’s mission within Metro was to facilitate communication and coordination within Metro, working to develop a policies and procedures manual/protocol for a Metro response to encampments that is rooted on dignity and respect for people. “Our goal is housing,” Ms. Besuden said, adding the N.O.T.E. also coordinates with stakeholders and outreach teams outside of Metro government to get people living in encampments connected to services. The N.O.T.E. has been operating close to two months now.

Ms. Fey asked what the team has discovered so far.

Ms. Besuden said there was a need for affordable housing in Nashville, adding she didn’t think that she and Mr. Jenkins were the first ones to discover that. But what they find is a lot of people living in encampments want to be connected and want someone to help them access housing. Besides housing, people have a variety of additional needs.

Will Connelly reported that staff was meeting with Metro department heads individually to introduce Sally and Troy as the N.O.T.E. “One of the goals is to connect Metro departments to communicate with Sally and Troy, so we can collect better data and to make sure there is a social services response, not just an enforcement response.”

Mr. O’Connell said from his personal experience through the Cold Weather Community Response Plan was that there are other outreach providers. Mr. Connelly responded that both Ms. Besuden and Mr. Jenkins had previously worked on outreach teams with other organizations and part of their job was to coordinate with other outreach teams.

Council Lady Mina Johnson asked what the reaction from Metro Police and Metro Parks has been so far.

Ms. Besuden said it has been a really great reaction and that the departments seems open to learning more about people experiencing homelessness and open to communicate. Will Connelly said that especially the Parks Department had asked for the N.O.T.E. to do training with their staff. “One of the goals we had for the team was interdepartmental training.”

Furthermore, Mr. Connelly pointed out that the N.O.T.E. has connected with Sgt. Ricky Bearden who serves as the community outreach officer for the central police precinct. “Sgt. Bearden has

been really helpful with connecting the N.O.T.E. team not only to downtown but other community coordinators in other precincts.”

Liz Allen Fey asked whether the interdepartmental council was still operating?

Will Connelly said yes, explaining that the interdepartmental council was a quarterly meeting of department heads to talk about homelessness. The first issue to tackle has been about encampments, specifically about developing a Metro protocol around encampments. “This protocol should help create transparency and consistency around [a response]. We hope this Interdepartmental council will continue to meet around other issues of homelessness.” Mr. Connelly added that the Mayor attended these meetings as well.

Ms. Fey addressed commissioners pointing out that if the Commission’s goal was to create a communitywide response system, it was good to see these different pieces and pay attention to how they are coming together. “How do we work with people around the city to make sure that homelessness is a short-term experience? That’s our goal.”

Will Connelly further pointed out that the N.O.T.E. and the work on an encampment policy originated with the Commission’s Encampment Task Force this past spring. “A few recommendations came out of that task force,” he said. “One was to create a homeless outreach team, one to create a protocol.”

Dayna Lovelady asked what the response from other departments was toward the interdepartmental council. Will Connelly responded that there was definitely an interest in improving how Metro responds to people experiencing homelessness and getting them into housing. Mr. Connelly said he thinks that with Police and Parks it can be really a frustrating experience in terms of having to enforce the law and send people to jail, then when they come out, they are in the same situation. The overall goal was to help people get into housing.

Liz Allen Fey said she had the opportunity to facilitate the first couple of meetings. She said what stood out was the commitment of the group to work together and find solutions. “I saw an overwhelming willingness around that table to do something.”

Charles Strobel said he thought it was a great first step to broaden outreach. He said there was a need for public awareness of the existence of the N.O.T.E., especially when it comes to Metro Council. “They need to know.” Freddie O’Connell suggested approaching Councilman Bedne’s ad hoc committee on affordable housing.

Tanaka Vercher said she was holding meetings in southeast Davidson County inviting various departments. The police community coordinators use the red booklet [Where to Turn In Nashville booklet published by The Contributor] as an on-hand resource when they encounter encampments.

Wendell Segroves said if the interdepartmental council only meets quarterly then it would take a while to get anything done. Ms. Fey said that was a good point, but the meetings hopefully spark conversations that lead to actions between the meetings.

Cold Weather Community Response Plan.

Judith Tackett gave an update on the Cold Weather Community Response Plan which is posted online at www.coldweathernashville.com.

She pointed to a couple of changes this year, which include that the Metro Response was taken out of the Level-system because it was confusing. Metro's response will be based on temperatures, weather conditions, and bed availability (looking at predictions based on Room In The Inn congregation beds). Another highlight was that for the first time, youth and young adults ages 18-24 had a specific shelter to go to every night thanks to Oasis Center, LaunchPad, and Room In The Inn. Ms. Tackett further went over the plan, which includes an on-call coordinator during levels 2 and 3 paid for from the Homelessness Commission budget and housed at Room In The Inn. This coordinator (Sara Lynes) monitors the weather and announces through a texting system available to first responders and shelter providers when the levels are elevated. Street outreach and canvassing is coordinated by Open Table Nashville. MTA again provides 250 bus passes for outreach workers to hand out to people living in outlying encampments to get to places indoors. Those cards activate at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. The Humane Association will park its Rover mobile unit at the Men's Mission during levels 2 & 3. In addition to the Website, which notes which level the plan is operating under, an information line has been set up for people in encampments to call in. The level information on the Website and information phone line are updated by 9 am each morning.

Freddie O'Connell said that Metro has a regular cold response, but he believes it was necessary to look at the Metro response when it gets to the point of 32 degrees Fahrenheit. He spoke to the response he heard from people who utilized the Farmer's Market last year about the minimal intake process to enter the shelter. Mr. O'Connell asked how the temperatures for the level system were determined. Ms. Tackett said that was a community decision and explained that this plan is created based on partners coming together and saying what they can offer with the resources they have.

Ms. Tackett said that this year, the overflow shelters would be run by Metro Social Services. Mina Johnson suggested looking at the possibility of utilizing an MNPS building. Freddie O'Connell said there were definitely levels of frustration about why Metro does not open an overflow shelter at 32 degrees Fahrenheit.

Ms. Fey asked him whether he was asking the Commission to revisit the plan. Ms. O'Connell said the Commission could come back at the end of the winter and evaluate this plan. Charles Strobel asked whether Mr. O'Connell would like to see everyone who asks for shelter to have shelter. "The assumption that we're going to get everyone in is not in this plan."

Mr. O'Connell said it would be great to know whether this plan targets 100% of the need, 80% or the need, or what level of need. Norman Humber spoke from the Nashville Rescue Mission's perspective saying that they increase capacity during cold weather. Wendell Segroves said there were not a lot of places that accept couples and pets.

Liz Allen Fey restated to evaluate in March how this worked.

Public Comment Period

Samuel Lester with Open Table Nashville said it was about this time of the year when the Mayor was preparing the Mayor's report on homelessness and poverty. He said every year the numbers were based on the Point In Time Count, which in 2016 were 2,356 people, which was a 10% increase from the year before. "But that number does not reflect the real number." He said if that number were true and How's Nashville housed more than 1,000 this past year, then

that would mean that Nashville had seen a 100% increase in homelessness. He asked the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission to come up with numbers that actually reflect the number of people experiencing homelessness in Nashville. Further, Mr. Lester cited Catherine Knowles from the Nashville Public School System as stating publicly that the 3,000+ homeless children in the public school system was not accurate. He said Ms. Knowles said the number was closer to 8,000 families. Mr. Lester further said that if the assumption is that there is at least one parent per child, now we were talking about a minimum of 15,000. He added that the real number was probably closer to 25,000.

Mr. Lester also briefly addressed the issue of winter sheltering, saying that the response was not meeting the need. Open Table Nashville has regularly shelters and a lot of people cannot get indoors even when they want to.

Mandy Wood, who is the community HMIS lead working for MDHA corrected Mr. Lester's number of the last Point In Time count, which she said was 2,163. "In order to know what our actual number is, we have to have coverage in HMIS," Ms. Wood said. Ms. Wood said that currently the community had about 50% of coverage, meaning provider participation in regard to different types of beds (emergency, transitional, permanent supportive housing, etc.) offered in our community.

Will Connelly asked her whether it would be helpful to have outreach providers participate in HMIS to determine the need. Ms. Wood said yes.

Mr. Connelly said that the Homelessness Commission would love to be able to answer the question on how many people experience homelessness. He pointed out that there was always an issue around the homelessness definition with programs and organizations defining homelessness differently (including government programs). He said a common database could help determine how many people experience literal homelessness, how many live in motels, how many are doubled up, etc.

Charles Strobel asked, "What keeps us from doing that?"

Will Connelly said there needed to be buy in from providers to use the common data system we have (HMIS). "That's something that especially Mandy at MHDA has been trying to get for a while." He said if the coverage increased, the community would be able to analyze data more effectively. "Once we have that, data should fuel how we respond." Mr. Connelly then pointed to the Coordinated Entry process, which the Commission is trying to streamline and which can help provide data entry.

Angie Hubbard pointed out that when programs receive federal funds, they are required to participate in the common database (HMIS, which stand for Homeless Management Information System). Therefore, she said, it was about getting those providers that do not receive federal funds to participate in HMIS.

Liz Allen Fey proposed to look at this issue more as a Commission and put it on a future agenda. Will Connelly said that as Commission staff we have not embraced HMIS historically. "We built solutions that are outside of HMIS, and now we realize that probably didn't help long-term. We're coming full circle." He said the Commission staff was trying to buy into the system as well and hoped to spend more money on HMIS and help lead those buy-in efforts in the community.

Charles Squire with NOAH talked about government interference with people experiencing homelessness. He said government does not want feedings at the Memorial Plaza. He also described a typical scenario at the grocery store and other places where when he goes in he sees a police officer talking to a homeless person and when he returns the homeless person is gone. He said all these empty locations in Metro could be used for housing, and he stated that county jail should not be the long-term provider of mental health. Constitution grants us a right to a speedy trial. Instead, he pointed out the extra charges in fees that accumulate with every arrest for a person who is homeless and cannot afford these expenses. He ended by making a suggestion to pump more money into housing.

Moment of Silence

A moment of silence was held in memory of all the people who had experienced homelessness. The following names were read: Yolanda Collins, Nick, Toy Man (at Trinity), David McKenzie, Stanley Cordwell, Starleen Woods, Michael Bond, Thomas Turner, Kenny Biggs (formerly homeless who passed away on Wednesday and had been living in the apartments at Room In The Inn), James Estes (who had been in housing for about 1.5 years).

Announcements

Next Commission meeting will be held on Jan. 13.

The December executive committee meeting will be at East Park Community Center.

Kirby Davis suggested that there was a need to use a different term than affordable housing. He said most people that the community was trying to help do not even have the money to pay for operating expenses such as utilities. He said there was a need to be more precise about what the Commission and others were trying to accomplish and thus, there was a need for a better term.

Ms. Fey asked for suggestions. Paula Foster said in the social work arena people usually speak about low-income housing. Jim Harbison said there were federal definitions describing extremely low, very low, low, etc. housing.

Public Input Session Two

Ingrid McIntyre invited commissioners interested in cold weather outreach to join the Open Table Nashville team this winter to see some of the struggles and see “how we can and cannot get people into shelters when it’s cold.” People interested to go out with OTN can email her at ingrid@opentablenashville.org.

Shaun Muldoon of Operation Stand Down Tennessee said on Nov. 16, at 9 am, the Homeless Coalition will hold its annual thanksgiving meal and recognize the hard work of the provider community.

Elizabeth Langgle-Martin with Open Table Nashville said that one of the disappointing things that the public was hearing was that the Commission already decided that the winter response was not good enough, but pushed any further measures to next year when it was too late for the people who had to survive this coming winter. She said there was still time to do something

now and save lives. People were dying every winter and it was disheartening to go to a Memorial in December and read all the names. She encouraged the Commission to make adjustments to the plan now. “There is time to refuse to believe we have to have folks dying on the streets.”

Liz Allen Fey said she appreciated those statements and said she was passing this message on to people who are organizing the winter response in Metro.

Ms. Fey then asked commissioners what they had heard at this meeting and what items would need to be placed on the next agenda.

Mina Johnson said there was a need to move with urgency. She said the goal was clear. “We know what we need to do. It’s just taking too long to reach it.”

Mary Carolyn Roberts said she had a lot of empty buildings in her district. She said she was new to all of this, but if the cold weather response was treated as any other crisis, it was a matter of moving from point A to point B.

Ms. Fey asked Ms. Roberts what the process was to have a conversation about those empty buildings. Ms. Roberts responded that she believes one of them belongs to TDEC. She said the beds were there. She said she didn’t know how that conversation needed to start, but she would assume it started with a conversation between the city and TDEC.

Kirby Davis reported that he spoke with K-Mart this year and there were a lot of issues when looking at empty buildings for cold weather sheltering. One was plumbing. Another was turning on the electricity, etc.

Mary Carolyn Roberts asked why the city did not have a Metro-funded shelter that was open all the time. “Why does the city have to have a cold weather response and not a year-round response?”

Adam Ries with the Downtown Partnership asked whether the community was utilizing the emergency shelter beds that were there. He said he understood that people do not want to go to the Rescue Mission. He asked whether anyone had reached out to the Mission to have the conversation about lowering barriers to access the shelter beds.

Ingrid McIntyre pointed out that the Mission does not meet all the gaps. She used the example of a woman in a wheelchair. She said it did not matter whether there was 50% occupancy at the Mission when they were unable to accommodate that woman and other people who experience gaps that cannot be met by the Mission at this point.

Norman Humber pointed out that during cold weather, the Mission relaxes some of the rules, for example, most of the people who had been barred will be allowed to come in. But he said there were a lot of people who for whatever reasons do not choose to come in. He also said that when the temperatures drop a lot of people actually do come to the Mission. In addition, the Humane Association has the Rover vehicle for pets at the Mission, which was hardly used last year. “If the need is out there, we do try and work with those individuals. But we don’t have the facility for couples. At the women’s campus. We are accommodating as many women and children as we can.” Mr. Humber said the Mission was continuously trying to look at how they can accommodate more people even above their regular capacity. He pointed out that the Mission was not full every single night.

Liz Allen Fey said, “We have got to build a system. The system is not operating.” She stressed that the Commission needed to keep figuring out how to build a systems approach, which would help identify need and gaps in services.

Samuel Lester asked whether there was a representative from the Metro Nashville Public School system on the Commission, especially with so many school children affected by homelessness. Liz Allen Fey said that was a great point and it would make sense to look who else needed to be involved in the Commission as well.

Ms. Fey asked whether there was more input. No one responded.

The meeting was adjourned.