

City of New Haven Homeless Advisory Commission

June 8, 2023

Attendance:

Members Present: L. Hardy, C. Mendez, S. Bass, U. Muley, T. Ficklin

Ex- Officio: V. George,

Staff: S. James- Marquis

Guest: K. Lawrence

Members Present: R Handler-YHHAP, K. Fitzgerald- CAN

Members Excused Absent: N. Spears, N. Torres

Call to Order

Chair C. Mendez called the meeting to order at 6:08pm.

Minutes: The group reviewed May's minutes. There was no quorum to approve the minutes.

NEW BUSINESS: Overview of Office of Housing & Homelessness Strategic Plan:
K. Lawrence, who was the facilitator, shared the findings from the Strategic Planning Sessions with consumers/ stakeholders.

The following questions prompted the provider/consumer discussions:

- ✚ **What creative priority steps are needed to increase the supply of emergency beds, permanent housing options, and supportive services for New Haven's homeless residents?**

- ✚ **What would an increased supply of shelter beds and permanent housing options look like?**

- ✚ **How can the city better collaborate with service providers and the Regional Alliance to End Homelessness, and promote working partnerships among service providers?**

- ✚ **How can the city better hold service providers accountable and better facilitate working partnership among service providers and consumers?**

K. Lawrence shared with the commission the feedback from discussion questions.

Expand Capacity

- Collaborate with service providers to:
 - identify suitable shelter locations,
 - determine resources needed to create and operate shelters,
 - secure additional funding to procure and operate emergency shelters.
- Partner with service providers on fundraising to support shelters, e.g., via joint grant applications, private sector solicitations, legislative lobbying.
- Procure and retrofit existing vacant buildings such as supermarkets, schools, hotels, and warehouses buildings, for use as shelters.
- Eliminate wide open congregate shelters and create apartment style units.
- Designate parking lots for people living in cars and not ready to enter shelter, where they can still receive shelter services and stay in a safe space.

Improve Accessibility

- Build/designate a new shelter to accommodate people with special needs, service and emotional support animals.
- Ensure that shelter facilities are located strategically/easily accessible.
Shelters should be close to public transportation, have services such as showers, laundry facility, medical, legal, and daycare. Also, large common areas for community meetings on site to foster client to client relationships.
- Shelters should be open 24 hours 365 days a year to accommodate work schedules.
- Provide safe, clean, and well-maintained shelter spaces with adequate amenities and security.
- When necessary, allow clients more time in shelters that are person centered and more flexible.

Upgrade Quality

- Enlist service providers to help monitor progress in shelters; identify areas for improvement.
- Create family shelter beds to accommodate children's growth needs.
- Include storage and lockers in shelters to ensure security of individuals property.
- Services should also include life skills classes such as budgeting, how to maintain a unit, landlord tenant relationship, and employment recruiting and placement services. These should be offered at the front end of shelter stays.
- To build trust; train 211 staff to not threaten families with DCF when they call to report homelessness.
- Ensure families are connected to McKinney-Vento program to continue school routine for students.
- Create programming and space for children with autism and other disabilities.
- Secret shopper: place city staff in places to observe treatment of clients from staff in warming centers, shelters, hubs.
- Facilitate City/client open forum to hear grievances about services, stolen property, prison-like shelter management, staff treatment.
- Review providers' data; follow up with agencies on tracking housing sustainability.
- Eliminate cracks that clients fall through; pay Case Managers better.
- Create more outreach staff jobs that pay well to limit staff turnover.
- Create program jobs for clients.
- Stop funding agencies that are not treating clients with dignity.
- Provide public restrooms on New Haven Green with regular cleaning.

Note:

The "accessibility" and "upgrade quality" recommendations came mostly from homeless system consumers. Service providers were invited to respond and vigorously disputed the criticisms of their staff, facilities, and programs.

T. Ficklin gave suggestions for ways to raise awareness of the work being done by the Office of Housing & Homelessness and other service providers in the city. He suggested that the mayor conduct a press conference to share feedback/ findings from the strategic sessions. He also

suggested there be regular press conferences about the work being done to address homelessness across the city. This will send a clear message about the city's stand on homelessness to its citizens and business owners.

K. Fitzgerald suggested that the Mayoral candidates participate in a round table discussion about homelessness. That suggestion was welcomed by several commissioners.

CAN Update

K. Fitzgerald shared that there is a slight decline in calls to the 211 sites while there is an increase in intakes at various Homeless Navigation Hub intake sites. K. Fitzgerald shared that with the new Sat/Sun intake hours added to the schedule, clients can receive same day appointments along with hybrid phone appointments. These additional Services times and spaces have decreased client wait times and allows for more robust conversation between navigation staff and client. K. Fitzgerald shared that there is an increase in outdoor sleeping seen across the region. K. Fitzgerald shared there were 93 individuals housed, and 100 diverted with security deposit assistance. and 200 household stable housed.

K. Fitzgerald shared some of the consistent barriers faced by families and individuals experiencing homelessness are: recent evictions, deeply affordable housing shortage, higher rents, and landlord's screening methods.

K. Fitzgerald shared that DOH hotel funding ended on May 11 due to the end of Covid funds leaving several families still in hotels awaiting an apartment or shelter bed. V. George shared that the City was able to provide funding to cover families in hotels through June 30th.

K. Fitzgerald also shared that 3 warming centers were extended through June 30th with a capacity of 30-35 spaces each. In addition, all shelters were at capacity.

YHHAP Update

N. Braimah shared that he will be transitioning from the role of representation of YHAP and this will be his last meeting. He will notify HAC when the new appointee is chosen. N. Braimah shared that YHAP raised \$10,102.00 to address food insecurity in New Haven.

Announcements

V. George encouraged members of the Commission to share creative ideas for increasing housing options/ solutions for our unhoused residents.

Adjournment – 7:21pm