



Health & Human Services and Public Safety Committee Minutes

Tuesday, March 26, 2019, 5:30pm, Council Chambers, City Hall

Committee Attendance:

Belinda Ray, Chair (District 1), Brian Batson (District 3), Pious Ali (At-Large)

Councilors in Attendance: Jill Duson (At-Large); Spencer Thibodeaux (District 2)

Mayor Ethan Strimling

City Staff: Kristen Dow, Interim Director of Health and Human Services; Aaron Geyer, Acting Director of Social Services; Sara Fleurant, Director of the Oxford Street Shelter; Meaghan Void Assistant Director of Operations, Oxford Street Shelter, Jeff Levine, Planning Director; Adam Harr, Executive Assistant.

AGENDA ITEM 1 – Announcements

- Chair Ray explained there is scheduling conflict on April

AGENDA ITEM 2 – Approval of Minutes

Councilor Batson made a motion to accept the minutes, Councilor Ali seconded and the minutes were approved as presented.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – Avesta Project at the Barron Center Campus

Kristen Dow

- Explained the suggested site to partner with Avesta for a housing first and/or residential care project(s) at the back end of the Barron Center Campus behind the parking lot.

Dana Totman

- Must define the type of project (housing or some other defined facility)
 - o Potential for Medicaid
 - o Zoning implications
 - Current zoning is R5
 - o MOU with the City
- Construction
 - o One or multiple buildings
 - o Not in the near future.
- Action steps
 - o Meet with the neighbors (Nason's Corner)
 - o MOU with the City.

- Explore Medicaid, possible waiver from the state (may take years)
- Zoning: currently planning a project that would best serve the needs of the population and consider zoning timelines after the project is further defined.
- The 12-15 bed assessment center
 - Per the MOU being developed, referrals will come from the City-run Homeless Services Center.

Agenda Item 4 – Homeless Services Center

Chair Ray explained the three sites still under consideration for the recommendation they will make to the full Council, they are not voting tonight and the rules for public comment; the earliest possible meeting that a vote on the HSC could be taken up is the first April meeting (date TBD).

Public Comment opened at 5:48 PM.

Jim Devine, Homeless Voices for Justice – Thanked the committee and was concerned that the list of possible sites was reduced to three so quickly. Riverside is too far out, and favors Angelo's Acre but is aware of the drowning concern. The current shelter is too crowded and he is aware of people who choose to camp instead of going into shelter. He prefers multiple smaller shelters

Tim Margnar – Current president of the Libby town neighborhood association. When Nasons corner group expressed concerns for the Barron center site and it was taken off the table. The same should happen here. The County Way site has issues that the others don't: Unknown environments waste, the land isn't city-owned, and the perception of the criminalization or imprisonment of the homeless; train tracks lead to an estuary and presents danger, it goes against the comprehensive plan as it is a priority node highlighted for development that would ameliorate it; a homeless shelter does not improve a node.

Carolyn Silvius of Pembroke Street and HVJ - Riverside is way too far away from services and its bus stop; people would have to talk in the street. County Way would reinforce negative stereotypes that people are homeless because they are criminals. Angelo's Acre would need to build close to the street but it is the best choice of three bad choices. Douglas Street is a much better option and is a similar proximity to services as Angelo's Acre. People who have never experienced homelessness are making choices without input; that is wrong.

Sarah Martin, Valley Street – Opposed County Way Site Location as it would break the neighborhood. Warehousing 150 individuals who suffer from addiction and mental health issues will create a hub of criminal behavior and destroy the progress the neighborhood has made. The neighborhood has worked hard, improving the area with community block grants. They already work closely with providers in the neighborhood; Florence house, Logan place, and shalom house. As a business owner, she hears from people interested in starting up and is aware of three people who are waiting until a location is chosen. The low-income residents of the neighborhood deserve a vibrant and safe community.

Sherryl Harkins Homeless Voices for Justice, Statewide Homeless Council – She asked the council to consider the human element. People are literally sleeping in chairs on nights when overflows have to be opened. The Councilors need to wake up to the fact that the shelter needs to have more than 150 beds. It needs to be centrally located, Metro is raising its prices; will the City be able to absorb these bus passes? Isolation is unacceptable. HVJ understands that the process needs to move forward but it went down to 3 choices too quickly. HVJ wants to be included and not to hide people in homelessness. Riverside is absolutely unacceptable. Angelo's Acre has drowning and flooding concern. Please plan humanely and respectfully; don't hide us, include us.

Laura Cannon of Paris Street and VP of Bayside Neighborhood Association – When the Barron Center Proposal was announced it made statements that they would not allow the situation in Bayside to be repeated. The shelter serves over 150 people a night plus an overflow at PSRC; there are many reasons for the situation and it is not just OSS. There are many providers and over 500 homeless people a day in the neighborhood. The reality is that the residents of bayside live in a community with and of the homeless people being served. The bad incidents are just what make the news; a purpose-built modern shelter will mitigate the negative. County way is the best option with a large lot to mindfully build; Angelo's Acre is too small and could not have an internal court yard and Riverside is too far away.

Zach Barowitz, Hunter Street LTNA – Memo has inaccuracies and omissions. Is the presence of service providers a good thing or a bad thing? Angelo's Acre has 4 providers listed all over a mile away. County Way lists providers as further away than they are. Proximity to water is only defined in Angelo's Acre and not at County way. County way doesn't list its closest neighbors, such as the beer garden. Examples like these tables do not inspire confidence and there should be a taskforce.

Arden McSwain – Bought a three-unit home and do not support the county way site. She provides housing to a family and two adults; the neighborhood has children playing in the streets and active outdoor activities like her running. She had a bad encounter with an inebriated homeless man and supports a scattered site model.

Maury Morris Libbytown Neighborhood Association Opposes a 150-bed mega shelter in any neighborhood. She bought a house next to a sober living facility and believes smaller facilities work. People would rather sleep outside than in a large shelter; County Way has plenty of camping space. The neighborhood is strained enough with the Maine med expansion and parking lot development. Asked Committee to please consider not building 150

Eric Mcswain on Hemlock Street – Opposes County Way site and supports scattered site models. He does not see a clear system on how the committee reduced down to 3 and wants a task force with defined selection variables. Libby town is only 1,500 and the addition of a 150 bed shelter would greatly change its makeup.

Jane Drew, Homeless Voices for Justice Advocate and Oxford Street Shelter Guest – Jane hears people saying that their voices don't matter and the council will make a decision on their own. Riverside is too far away and transportation/accessibility will be prohibited; how will people get

to appointments. County Way is not good for the negative stereotype. While being next to the jail may make it safer, some who have justice or substance use issues may choose to not go into shelter to avoid contact with law enforcement. Everyone

Channing Cafuccino [sic] owns a house near county way. Many neighbors have shared stories of regret for union station and houses being torn down, and an ugly strip mall and 295 built to replace them. The Neighborhood association has worked hard to rebalance the neighborhood. She supports shelter but the neighborhood is already too saturated with social services; development such as a rec center would be better growth. She supports scattered site models.

Michael Stuckmire of Homeless Voices for Justice – The City should be more transparent and have more suites on the table. He prefers multiple smaller shelters. Each site has positive and negative elements. The homeless community via outreach largely opposed the Riverside lot due to accessibility concerns; it would take over two hours to talk to. County Way is concerned about the criminalization of the homeless. The site highlights stigma but it is close to groceries, jobs and services. Angelo's Acre does not hide the homeless is near services but others were concerned being close to the street and Casco Bay bridge. How will the new center operate and who is eligible to stay? Are 150 beds really enough? It needs to be bigger because of the overflow used every night. There should be two shelters because no one neighborhood can absorb a mega shelter. The City needs to work with metro to work on bus fares; other communities are cheaper.

Shawn Kerwin of Paris Street – He commented on the process. He is aware of taskforces starting years ago and the current situation is a crisis. He encouraged the comity to please move forward, the issue has been worked on for years. The single or scattered sight model has been litigated twice and the single site model has been chosen twice. A large cause of the issue is a facility that cannot work for the need. A purpose built facility with a capacity for the current need would mitigate the negatives felt in bayside. It would be great to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness but a bigger shelter is needed now.

Damon Yakovleff wants a task force charged with site selection. More outreach with local communities including education on why a new facility would mitigate the issues at OSS.

Jenny McKenzie on E Street – Opposes a mega shelter on County Way or in the Libby town neighborhood. The neighborhood is losing housing due to the MMC expansion There are many homeless service providers already. The situation may get worse for being co-located with a jail and police station; choosing not to congregate at the shelter but farther out in the neighborhood

Jenny Stasio ED of Through These Doors – Thanked the City and will support any decision made. TTD is the domestic violence shelter and service provider. The work with the City shelter and asked that the City recognize TTD's services and to provide a space to offer their services at the HSC.

Patrick Russel – Parkside Resident – Moved here ten years ago from Boston for being a City that treats people with kindness and compassion. He doesn't think any of the three locations has kindness or compassion. He supports a scattered site model.

Dee Clark, ED of Survivors USA – Serves exploited and sex-trafficked women. She is concerned with the decision to move the shelter: A shelter in riverside is not safe; walking to or from is dangerous and predators would have an easy time preying upon people walking along riverside streets. How would people access the services at the shelter; will there be outreach to campsites? What are the eligibility qualifications to sleep at the shelter, Address, citizenship, substance use? What is disqualifying people to get down to 150 beds? What is the overflow plan? These questions need to be answered ASAP.

Brett Gabor of Frederick Street to speak against the County Way site. Staff said they did not know of the environmental concerns. He researched and obtained a 1,200-page environmental survey. He also obtained a report from Maine DoT that 10,000 cubic yards of coal ash was buried there 10 years ago. There has been no discussion of light industrial zones for the shelters. The conditional use cannot have substantial or significant impact on the surrounding areas; the committee has not discussed this. The City needs to take the time to do this properly. OSS needs to be replaced but a taskforce that can do a deep dive should make these decisions.

Kelly Walsh Through These Doors – She oversees the emergency shelter. Receives 400 requests annually but cannot meet that demand so they regularly make referrals to OSS. Victims need to choose to stay in abusive relationships or stay to Oxford Street. She asked the committee to consider the DV perspective; would it feel safe to walk a mile and a half, past bars at night.

Norman Maze of Shalom House – Speaking for Shalom House. They are not in for of Riverside as it is not walkable and too long a ride. County Way hides guests from public view and stigmatizes so it is not a preferred location despite being centrally located near services. The preferred location is Angelo's Acre as transportation is not an issue and is the closest to most services. It is not hidden from the public, while understanding the concern for its proximity to the Back Bay Bridge. Shalom House will support any decision made and will continue to meet with guests in need of services and the rental subsidies SH administers.

Anne Pringle from Western Prom – Before the decision to move the shelter be made, the city should make policy decisions. Should Portland still be the provider for the rest of the state and for people coming from out of state? What are the costs? What are the impacts of neighborhoods with emergency shelters; should guests with short stints at emergency shelters really be considered neighbors, or as much a short term renters? It would be much smaller and less costly to only serve people from Portland. Reminded the council it is an emergency shelter with self-contained services so location doesn't matter.

David Packard PK realty in Libby town – Thanked the Committee and staff. He opposes the County Way site. There were development plans that are now on hold because it is unknown if the shelter will land there. He wanted more county development

Heather Zimmerman, or Preble Street – Preble Street Strongly Opposes Riverside Street for hiding the homeless and it being so out of the way it has safety concerns along the path and proximity to the highway. Both County Way and Angelo's Acre would work. She heard the term Mega shelter and wanted to dispel what she views as a scare tactic; 150 beds are much smaller than the current shelter. Last night 260 people stayed with the shelter using Preble Street's

overflow to meet the demand. A new shelter needs to be big enough to meet the current need. There are a number of mischaracterizations of the community and there were stereotypes expressed tonight criminalizing the community.

Peggy Moran of Riverton – Riverside already has six mega apartment complexes and the PHA housing project. There are already large amounts of transient population in the neighborhood. She is afraid of the potential for loitering with a shelter of people who do not have transportation, moving there. Who will pay the expense of bus passes needed to get to riverside? She supports a scattered site model

Linda Knight Shelter Guest at OSS – Reading for community members: One woman left her housing voluntarily because it was unsafe and was threatened. She has several debilitating conditions; just because a person is disabled does not mean they do not have suggestions. Please renovate the empty houses on Oxford Street for shelters, housing, or group homes. Her second suggestion was to have housing councilors receive more training to provide more individual care. What effect would a shelter have on businesses, for better or for worse?

Maddie Lynch of Parkside – Doesn't think homelessness should be criminalized or be hidden. The proposed shelter. 150 bed shelters cannot support real relationships. Smaller shelters could build community and support systems. She asked what happened to the scattered site model.

Meredith Roy, Owner of Union Station Plaza – Reinvestment will be difficult if the shelter is moved to County Way. The comprehensive plan highlights the area as a node in need of improvement with responsible growth and development; a large shelter is not zoned and is the opposite of the complaint, for that and environmental concerned asked that it be removed

Michael Connelly owns a business on Saint John's Street. He was surprised that he saw little research supporting large shelters versus multiple smaller shelters. It does not support a large shelter in any neighborhood.

Brant Sharrock of Charter House Developments – He asked the committee to remove County Way from consideration. The site should be ruled out for environmental reasons. A site this size usually has a 200 page report not a 1,200 page report; this would take time to build on, too much time for the current crisis.

Bob Forchess of Pearl Street – Many have said they think smaller sites would be better. One piece of data that speaks to a larger shelter being better is money. Would people really support the cost of running three or four shelters? He thinks the committee has done a great job planning what people would really support.

Quincy Perlman of Hemlock Street – She is concerned by a lack of transparency of analysis and cost analysis: how much will environmental mitigation costs? On her way to donate to the shelter, people who are unaware of her car walk out in front of her; she is concerned about the railroad. She asked how they are going to handle the immediate overflow need built into a shelter with only 150 beds.

Patty Theriault of Sagamore Village – A 150 bed shelter should not be built in a residential area. She is concerned with crime and feels neighborhoods are being pitted against each other; she suggested a taskforce with members from all neighborhoods

John Fitzgerald of Westfield Street. His family owns a warehouse. He is concerned and the implications for future development if the shelter is built at County Way.

Kathy Buxton of Riverton Neighborhood Association. She opposes having a shelter in Riverton and thinks it's a disservice to the homeless community for a shelter to be moved off peninsula.

Sarah Michniewicz of Bayside – All sites have strengths and weaknesses and believes County Way is the best choice. There is no perfect site and no matter where it moves, people are going to come forward and say the wrong decisions was made. She attributes the problems in Bayside to deferred maintained. This much involvement says it is the right time to make a decision, while people are engaged. If not now, a new neighborhood from 6 months from now will be repeating the same concerns. The worst decision to make would be building a shelter of the size they want to have, not the need to have; it needs to have more than 150 beds.

Margeret Garritner of Stevens Ave. She expressed dismay at the \$5 million price of moving a shelter to a possibly toxic dump next to a jail. Saint John Valley and Libby Town has been torn apart and is pulling it together. A state of the art facility would not mitigate this. As Florence house and Logan place had state of the art facilities.

George Rhault of Bayside – He dismayed that there are only three sites left and others were hastily removed. He is skeptical that the three sites have large issues to overcome including working around wetlands, environmental waste etc. Riverside is exile, County Way would take years to mitigate, and Angelo's Acre will be communicated. There are many other locations such as the end of Washington Ave, School property. He

Frank Sanfelipo of Libby town – He has worked in the mental health field for over 25 years working with people who live outdoors. He supports a taskforce and scattered shelter. He thinks the State, and other towns and cities should get involved and share the cost burden. Scattered sites could include shelters outside of Portland. All the neighborhoods need to be involved. We're known as creative Portland so we can come up with creative solutions. A big Shelter can be traumatizing

Patty Nelan of Forest Have in Riverton – She grew up in Portland and has owned her house for 20 years. She sympathizes with people with disabilities and victims of domestic violence but does not want a shelter that serves people with substance use disorders in the neighborhood.

Chresten Sorenson, Owner of bunker brewery – He doesn't think a large shelter will solve the problem. He supports a scattered site model. He moved business into areas that would bring people in and build up the community. A shelter would do the opposite.

John Seaman of St. John Valley Neighborhood Association. He doesn't think a large site and one size fits all shelter will work and multiple is better. 150 beds is not enough based on current need. There is too much need and too much political blow back to have just one site.

Maurice Lewis works at Union Station Plaza _ He supports a scattered site model and doesn't support a large shelter; he does not think a large shelter at County Way will help the homeless population.

Public comment closed at 7:42 PM

Chair Ray reviewed notes for the meetings to answer questions.

- Cost of bus passes with Metro increase
 - o A shuttle is built into the budget
 - o Fare capping
 - o Organizations that help with passes.
- HHS Memo and its tables were updated and VRAP documents were added to the packet.
- Conditional Uses
 - o Shelter conditional uses are reviewed by the planning board for any zone for its many conditions: proximity to transportation among many others
 - o Also subject to site plan review with an additional list of conditions.
- Remaining questions are broader and including policy
 - o Policy
 - Eligibility: OSS is low barrier and there are no requirements to come into shelter. People are asked to work on housing.
 - Why is there no residency requirement: it was a former City manager's policy decision and a residency requirement is not required for emergency shelter.
 - There may not be anything barring instituting a residency requirement but that is not in the scope of this recommendation.
 - o Staff to further research some of the broader questions.
- Was there a cost analysis for every site?
 - o Cost of land.
 - o Previous single facility versus running two or three facilities is available.

If there were any questions not answered, please contact the committee who will answer questions via email.

- Councilor Ali is interested in the Cumberland Ave School site info.
- Economic Development Committee has looked at both County Way and Angelo's Acre.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:00 PM.