



Health & Human Services and Public Safety Committee Minutes

Tuesday, January 11, 2022, 5:30pm, Remote Meeting

Committee Attendance:

Tae Chong, Chair (District 3), Anna Trevorow (District 1), Victoria Pelletier (District 2), & Mark Dion (District 5).

Councilors in Attendance:

City Staff:

Kristen Dow, Director of HHS; Tina Pettingill, Deputy Director of HHS; Aaron Geyer, Director of Social Services; Adam Harr, Executive Assistant for Social Services. Keith Gautreau, Fire Chief; Bridget Rauscher, Chronic Disease Prevention Program Manager; Heath Gorham, Interim Police Chief.

Meeting called to order at 5:40 PM.

AGENDA ITEM 1 – Announcements

- November, 2021 draft meeting minutes.
 - Councilor Dion moved to accept the minutes; Councilor Pelletier seconded and the minutes were accepted unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – December Updates

HHS Update

- Homelessness and Emergency Shelter December Update
 - Increase of new families arriving from one family per day in November to nearly three families per day in December.
 - 1,017 accessing emergency shelter through our shelter system as of 1/6/2022.
 - 23 families have since arrived.
 - Total family numbers: 217 families for 711 individuals.
 - Working with Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) at the border to be better notified of families coming to Portland to be able to plan instead of unexpected arrivals.
 - Letting families know what to expect; there is an average wait of nine months before finding housing.

- o Submitted proposal to FEMA for 24/7 coverage at hotels to coordinate services.
 - o Utilizing 10 different hotels in 5 different municipalities.
 - o Some hotels are only accepting families, not singles.
 - o Working with hotels and municipalities to mitigate issues.
 - Security is now provided at hotels with singles.
 - Making sure wrap around services are offered.
 - o Freeport hotel came online this year with meetings this week to plan wraparound services.
 - o City management and HHS leadership are urging State officials for assistance and a regional approach.
 - We at a point where don't have the resources for the people served to be successful.
 - o Transportation remains a top issue,
- General Assistance Program
 - Total Applications: 1,559
 - Number of denials: 65
 - Denial rate: 4%
- Oxford Street Shelter and contract hotel:
 - o OSS average nightly census: 78
 - o Contract hotel average nightly census: 130
 - o Average individuals placed in hotels through General Assistance: 206
- Overview of the Family Shelter:
 - o Number of on-site at the family shelter: 23 families/ 62 individuals
 - o Number of families at local hotels for shelter overflow: 150 families/ 498 individuals
- Update from the City's Resettlement Coordinator:
 - o Bi-weekly meetings with Old Orchard Beach around supporting the 20 families in temporary placements there.
 - Three families have found permanent housing.
- Totals for the Needle Exchange Program (NEP) are as follows:
 - o Total number of exchanges: 366 (227 onsite, 139 outreach)
 - o Total number of needles collected: 44,961
 - o Total number of needles distributed: 44,558
 - o Total Number of new enrollees: 48
 - o Total number of Narcan doses distributed: 240 kits (480 doses)
 - o Community needles collected: 938
 - Collected from community sharps containers: 784 (83.6%)
 - This is a large increase.
- Clinic Numbers:
 - o STD Clinic: Patients seen: 98, new patients: 27
 - o PCFC: Patients seen: 42, new patients: 8
 - o COVID Vaccines Given: 266

Committee questions and discussion

- Councilor Pelletier confirmed the municipalities with GA hotels: Portland, South Portland, Westbrook, Old Orchard Beach, and Freeport.
- Councilor Pelletier asked what full capacity looks like.
 - Meeting with CBP and NGOs tomorrow to discuss what this looks like..
 - When people cross the border, they fill out paper work that indicate 54 chestnut street, the family shelter, as their destination.
 - This makes us a Tier 1 committee.
 - We are already in overflow.
 - Organizations continue to buy plane and bus tickets here..
 - This is resettlement, not simply family homelessness.
 - Is there movement on State resources?
 - We update them weekly on the numbers but having more success with federal funding.
- Councilor Dion said we used to see secondary migration in Portland which was more planned with resources.
 - Is there any talk of financial support from the State?
 - That support came in 2019 when asylum seekers became eligible for General Assistance, reimbursing 70% of that cost.
 - Tier 1 funding allows FEMA funding.
 - They are funding the 10 onsite coordinator positions at the hotels.
 - The positions are awaiting approval.
- Councilor Trevorrow asked for the tiers to be explained.
 - Tier 1 means we are an immediate final destination for people who cross the border.
 - Customs and Border Patrol toured our facilities and said we are one of the best facilities they've seen and are not surprised families are coming here.
 - Who us being spoken with at the state?
 - Deputy Commissioner Hamm and other staff from the commissioner's office.
 - Is there a role the City Council could play to help secure resources?
 - Yes, advocacy to the state, local and federal delegates as well as other municipalities and town administrators.
 - Advocate for the state to take on the role of resettlement and uniform general assistance around the state.
 - Asylum seekers must wait 6 months to work.
 - We want to be an open community and when advocating for regional solutions we are told we are too welcoming and have a reputation and should limit our resources.
 - Uniformity of GA could address this.
 - Individuals presenting for shelter in other municipalities are sent to Portland instead of screening for GA eligibility.

- Councilor Chong said that asylum seeking homelessness is the biggest equity issue before us. The immediate need of new arrivals is great that it is supplanting scarce resources, including staffing.
 - Are the other municipalities providing resources?
 - South Portland has been very active with regular meetings with their City manager, police, Fire and their GA administrator.
 - South Portland is half the size of Portland and the GA cost in Portland is 4 times that of South Portland.
 - Has there been talk at the legislative level about Portland taking up the GA funding and that GA is broken for service center like Portland.
 - Director Dow can't speak to the legislative lever but had a meeting with Deputy Commissioner Hamm one year ago about the cost and informed them about FEMA reimbursement.
 - Councilor Chong reached out to our delegation and encourages others to do the same.
 - Has there been talk with the Commissioner about a statewide resettlement program?
 - This is asked for at every meeting.
 - Would GA dollars go further in less expensive communities?
 - Yes.
 - The Portland Community Support Fund helped asylum seeker in 2019. Do families understand our climate and what can people do to support them?
 - Some families do not and arrive in flip flops.
 - We are not lacking financial resources due to federal funding; the lack is physical resources:
 - Staffing
 - Housing
 - Space to shelter
 - PCSF ended when asylum seekers became eligible for GA.
 - Councilor Dion in his advocacy at GPCOG observed their willingness to fund but understands it is just funding and that they do not have human resources to share.
- Councilor Dion said people come to Portland because family and recommend it.
 - Brunswick is a success story and could be modeled after.
- Councilor Chong said this committee can educate the community as this is our biggest equity issue. If FEMA does go away as scheduled in April, the City will be responsible for costs currently being reimbursed.
- Councilor Chong asked how morale is with staff.
 - Our staff are working tremendously hard day in and day out and appreciate advocacy on their behalf.
- Councilor Chong saw an increase in needles exchanged; what explains this?
 - The dip in November is likely due to the physical location closing for a week. We never stopped services but arranged them through outreach locations. This plus Thanksgiving account for a dip in November.

- o We are no longer the only syringe service program in Portland with Amistad coming online.
- Fire Update
 - o Adjusted PPE used.
 - o 16,000 calls for service
 - 74% ae EMS
 - o 3 active Covid cases in the department.
 - o Staffing is a challenge: 14 short term vacancies and 12 long term vacancies.
 - o 2 pumpers and 1 ladder truck arriving in June.
 - o 2 new ambulances in service this month.
 - o Just promoted 9 firefighters.

Committee questions and discussion

- Is there a CO2 awareness campaign for the cold snap?
 - o Yes. There is information on the website and will do a press release reminding people to have operational Carbon Monoxide alarms and that there will be frozen pipes.
 - The announcements will be translated.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – Overdose and Naloxone Distribution Update

- Bridget Rauscher, Chronic Disease Prevention Program Manager presented.
 - o Covid-19 have been disruptive and dangerous for people who use drugs.
 - o Fatalities from opioids have been above 80% 2016-2020.
 - o County and state level data are published monthly.
- Fire Chief Gautreau presented overdoses between people who were responsive or not at the time of arrival: Opioid with coma, opioid w/o coma, and non-opioid.
 - o There is so much naloxone available that there may be unreported overdoses.
 - o Some people are legally dead, get revived and then refuse transport to hospital.
 - o Some people are revived and have left the scene before EMS arrives.
 - o The number of doses per patient is decreased in 2020 but increased in 2021 likely due to fentanyl.
- Interim Police Chief Gorham presented PD overdose data.
 - o PPD responded to 322 ODs in 2021, a 9.5% increase from 2020.
 - 23 were fatal.
 - These are overdoses the PD responded to.
 - o Is there geomapping on these overdoses?
 - PD uses OD Map; Fire does not in order to not duplicate entries.
 - Data is not provided between Fire and PD so it is a possibility that Fire responded without PD but it is unlikely.
 - Are the ODs happening in public or private spaces?
 - PD data on deaths will be more accurate.
- Naloxone (Narcan) distribution
 - o There was a rise in distribution in the second half of the year. This corresponds to a decrease in the administration of naloxone by PD and fire in that timeframe.

- o Nearly half a million needles were distributed in 2021.
- o From the start of the state of emergency to August 1, the 1-1 exchange rule was temporarily expanded.

Committee questions and discussion

- Councilor Dion asked about demographics and how many overdose deaths were people in recovery, post treatment.
- Councilor Chong showed that how deaths are near stable with deaths increase around the state shows our harm reduction is working. He would like to know more about our harm reduction services.
 - o How many unique individuals are enrolled in the NEP?
 - About 1,400.
 - o How many people are experiencing addiction?
 - Could not say but certainly more than 1,400 individuals.
- Councilor Chong is confused around tiers and Narcan distribution: how much Narcan does Portland get?
 - o The exchange is both a tier one and tier two.
 - Anyone in York and Cumberland County can get Narcan from us.
 - Over 10,000 are coming from Portland Public Health and are tracked separately.
 - It denotes funding, not a set number of doses.
- Chief Gautreau will note location data on overdoses and will explore demographic data and our ability to share data under HIPPA.
 - o Will increase reporting needles at scene.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – Work Plan

- Chair Chong asked the committee what topics they were interested in working on over the approximately 10 meetings/20 hours anticipated this year.
 - o Councilor Pelletier
 - Interested in a collaborative effort on outreach to the state and other municipalities.
 - Needle Exchange Program outreach.
 - o Councilor Dion
 - A day conference on what is immigration policy; we know enough to be dangerous but do we know enough to be effective? Not only for this committee but the Council as a whole.
 - ILAP, Refugee community leaders, etc.
 - Why do people come to Portland?
 - We have assumptions about policies that sound good but may be counterproductive.
 - We need a unified ask.
 - Can this start with a workshop?
 - o This format is limited and a workshop could plan it but he prefers all the councilors and key people to participate.
 - o This should be a priority at the next meeting to plan
 - o The sooner the better and be more of a working task force.

- o Councilor Trevorrow
 - Resettlement is a priority.
 - Meet jointly with the legislative committee to nail down messaging and coordinate efforts.
 - There is a lot of learning as a new councilor.
 - Updated presentation on best practices in Policing and where we are as a department.
- o Councilor Trevorrow asked if invite people from other municipalities can seek who are tackling similar issues.
 - We have not found other cities like us.
- Councilor Chong recapped:
 - o Advocacy around Resettlement
 - o Advocacy around General Assistance reform
 - o Conference or task force around resettlement.
 - o Looking at best practices around other cities that are facing similar homelessness levels.
 - o Educational review of the Police Department best practices.
 - De-escalation techniques and measuring success.
 - o Needle Exchange Program introduction and communication.
 - Explanation and expansion of harm reduction.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – Next Meeting: February 8, 2022

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:35 PM.