



Health & Human Services and Public Safety Committee Minutes

Tuesday, May 10, 5:30pm, Remote Meeting

Committee Attendance: Anna Trevorrow (District 1), Victoria Pelletier (District 2), & Mark Dion (District 5).

Councilors in Attendance: April Fournier (At-Large), & Pious Ali (At-Large)

Mayor Kate Snyder

City Staff:

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

Invited Guest:

Mufalo Chitam, Executive Director of the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition

Meeting called to order at 5:33 PM.

Councilor Chong is unable to attend the meeting due to a family emergency.

Trevorrow moved to accept the minutes, Pelletier seconded and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Agenda: HHS Updates

- Emergency Shelter Update
 - o Numbers from today:
 - 350 families for 1,208 individuals
 - 553 single adults
 - Total: 1,761 individual City provided emergency shelter, a record high.
 - o May 5th change to how provide assistance to families.
 - In April had to shift to providing just shelter and food, curtailing other services due to capacity.
 - In the first 4 days of May, we received 30 families.

- A busload came at 8:30 at night when we were out of hotel space and out of shelter and overflow space.
- As families arrive, we now send them to General Assistance.
- This applies to all families seeking emergency shelter; any family presenting at the family shelter will be treated the same regardless of citizenship or immigration status.
- Oxford Street Shelter Still has capacity at the shelter which is why this change is for families.
- October 4, 2021 memo shared to the full council: were at 150 families for 478 individuals.
 - We never increased staffing in this time and have reached our limit.
 - Received 200 families for 730 individuals in 7 months.
- Greatest concern is that we will not be able to provide services to the people in our care.
- o Mufalo Chitam, Executive Director of the Maine Immigration Rights Coalition, which provides direct services to immigrants in the state: advocacy, collaboration among organizations that provide transportation, food, and other services.
 - Advocating for federal assistance for year.
 - Basic services are no longer guaranteed shelter or food.
 - Systems put in place to support asylum seekers need to ensure they have capacity to support asylum seekers.
 - Seeking systematic changes to allow us to embrace asylum seekers again.
 - We will do our best to welcome people who come to Maine.
 - Under the rule change, when the families are processed, they are dismissed.
 - Families don't know where to go.
 - Need to figure out a new process to assist people sleeping outside.
 - Support needed finding hotel rooms and making phone calls.
 - It is the State's job to find shelter.
 - Families have agency and make their own choices.
 - Some are refusing as they think there are options that were available before
 - How can people help?
- o Councilor Fournier asked if opening the expo is being looked at and what the conversations are at with mayors of other towns.
 - HHS staff do not have the capacity to open another shelter as we are responding to the two hotels closing that will displace single adults.
 - We created a resource list for families.
 - It is difficult because we do not know when families will arrive.
 - When families arrive, they are in our overflow space that first night until they go to GA.

- o Councilor Fournier asked if we have had a conversation about mobilizing the National Guard to respond to the humanitarian crisis.
 - We requested an emergency meeting and emergency assistance with the state, specifically the National Guard, and were told no.
- o Councilor Trevorrow asked Director Dow if they have other thoughts on the arrival process.
 - We are working out the process as we go.
 - We have provider meeting to talk through this Thursday morning to set up a system in place for these families.
 - Director Dow will continue to communicate with federal partners and organizations at the border.
- o Councilor Dion asked how successful the notice process was with nonprofits at the border.
 - She had a conversation with a partner at the border; it was received and they understand but families have choices and want to come to Maine.
 - The people who came this weekend were likely en-route when the process change was announced.
- o Mayor Snyder is communicating with other mayors and town managers.
 - LD910 did not happen at the state level.
 - Temporary fixes in FY23.
 - We need to create a task force to address the larger structural issues at the municipal level to bring partners at the state, federal and regional level together.
 - Capacity comes up; not just if there are hotel rooms but what can staff manage.
 - We don't have the funding for hotels or the staffing to manage hotels.
 - Updated GPCOG and asked for help.
 - What happens when the City finds the shelter for someone who is accessing through General Assistance: 6 month period they are under the Portland umbrella versus people who find their own shelter in which Portland would be responsible for 30 days of GA costs.
- o Councilor Pelletier commented that the people coming to Maine are our new neighbors.
 - Leading a community effort to clean up parks so they are safe.
 - Please donate your time to organizations welcoming asylum seekers.
 - It is up to Councilors to organize and advocate to continue to welcome people coming to Portland as best as we can.
- o Director Chitam said that the families in the Expo were coming in without GA eligibility. There was large community support then but this time there is silence.
- o Councilor Dion said that the day would come that we would have a tent city 5 months ago.
 - For many people outside of Portland, this issue is abstract.

- We may need to set up a tent reception area.
- Could FEMA deploy emergency trailers?

Syringe Waste

- Bridget Rauscher prepared recommendations in the attached memo and shared CDC best practices.
- 218,207 needles distributed.
- Councilor Fournier asked about the trends of properly or improperly disposed of syringes.
 - 2021 saw an increase in improperly disposed of syringes after the governor lifted the 1 for 1 restriction.
- Councilor Dion asked what the volume of needles tell us on the rate of substance use in the community?
 - We are seeing people return to use in some fashion and are less well, physically.
 - We have seen many overdoses in the past 10 days.
 - The drugs have changed.
 - It is difficult to make comparisons to 6 and 12 months ago due to policy changes.
 - We don't have data from other syringe services providers.
 - Are there steps to share data among providers?
 - That would be great but and we get aggregate data form the state but there isn't another stable official exchange and the unsanctioned exchanges are not forthcoming with their data; we have not asked unsanctioned exchanges.

Good Samaritan Law

- Chief Gorham title 17 a 1011/b exemption of criminal liability from reporting drug overdose and administering naloxone.
 - This only protected the person who called 911 and the person who administered Narcan.
 - New law expands exemptions to anyone providing care, broadly defined.
 - Expanded beyond the drug offenses to anything not a sex crime, violent crime, or a crime against children.
 - Exemption lasts for the duration first responders are there to respond to emergency.
- Councilor Dion asked if the police respond to an overdose, what would happen to the people on scene.
 - Nothing, the safety and wellbeing of the person experiencing an overdose is the top priority.
 - Officers have administered Narcan 70 times.
 - Of the 70 times, have officers made arrests.
 - No.

Shelter Licensing

- Councilor Chong was going to present to the committee.
- Councilor Dion said Councilor Chong provided some text but suggests pushing this item to the next meeting for him to present this issue fully.
- Councilor Trevorrow understands that this is on the committee agenda as an opportunity to edit one last time before it goes to the full council.
 - It was postponed from the full meeting to the first meeting in June; if we postpone this, it would be after that meeting.
 - She has a proposal to present.
- Councilor Fournier asked about procedure: was it was kicked back from the committee and would require a vote from this committee to transmit back to the committee?
 - Director Dow did not recall it being referred back to committee and that this was a requested conversation by Councilor Chong but is not sure procedurally if it must be voted on before it returns to the full council.
 - Councilor Trevorrow said it was postponed by the Council, not kicked back to the committee.
 - Mayor Snyder believes it was postponed.
 - Councilor Pelletier wants to hear Councilor Trevorrows amendment and thinks we should honor the public comment period as people are attending to give public comment.
- Councilor Dion is confused by the “reconsideration” language that’s posted and would take comment and hear the amendment.
- Councilor Pelletier asked if we are able to take public comment now and at the June 6th meeting.
 - It is likely allowed since this is a committee meeting versus a council meeting.
 - Mayor Snyder said that if we have already taken public comment we don’t have to take it, but we could waive the rules and take public comment again.
 - Councilor Fournier said if we don’t take public comment tonight, there would be opportunity at the council meeting on the amendment.
 - Councilor Dion would like to take comment tonight.
- Councilor Trevorrow’s suggestion may take the form of an accompanying resolution. Public comment on the issue is fine tonight and can be taken at the Council meeting.

Public Hearing opened at approximately 6:45

- Joe McNally, director of homeless services of milestone recovery and resident of Vesper Street speaking in strong opposition to shelter licensing. Milestone serves the most vulnerable population with many barriers. Shelter licensing would create more barriers and create distrust. Former director Oliver Bradeen asked what issue is shelter licensing trying to solve and that was never answered. A lot of the info asked for in shelter licensing is already reported elsewhere like the Emergency Shelter Assessment Committee. He thanked Kristen Down and Aaron Geyer around their work on asylum seekers single adults. Providers were not engaged in this process. A lot of what this is asking goes against federal laws that protect our clients; we would be in violation following the licensing scheme. We would be happy to sit down with the city council and

staff to work on a collaborative solution. It would make more sense for oversight from a body of peer organizations. He strongly encourages the council to start from scratch.

- Terrence Miller, director of advocacy for Preble Street. Some of the concerns shared have been addressed but Preble Street remains opposed. It is ironic after hearing about the shelter needs for asylees while we are discussing a process that makes it harder for nonprofits to provide shelter. It is critical that the city council does not pass and rules that make it harder provide shelter. We should change zoning laws, maximum density of beds, etc. We are opposed because shelters are already monitored by MaineHousing. Now when emergency shelters are needed more than ever, we must encourage new shelter development. We welcome any working group on shelter best practices and zoning regulations. Cheryl Harkin is online and cannot give public comment but wanted to voice Homeless Voices for Justice's opposition.
- Sarah Michenwicz of Cedar Street. She sees people get hurt outside of her window every day. Shelters may be regulated but in ways the neighborhood safe. The committee has worked on this for 8 months. Councilor Trevorrow was concerned for buffers. What is the right number? If ever there was a city policy to enact that would stabilize shelter this is it. The city inspector already has the ability to inspect shelters; why do we need another staff for this? There are very small fees and a broken window will not shut down a violation. If a shelter provider did not fix problems, the council should have a mechanism to address it. Portland will continue to assist those in need and it is the City's responsibility to make sure future providers are safe. She urges the un-amended passage.
- Jim Hall of Cedar Street would like to talk about the amendment. The city's budget has a \$15 million shortfall. Other communities are avoiding building shelter as a direct result seeing how emergency services unfold in Portland. The problem got so bad until staff had to make decisions absent of governance. He asks the council pass shelter licensing.
- Scott Morrison of 9 Parish Street in Portland supports shelter licensing as approved last year by the committee and city council. The impact of shelter density on unhoused people and the need for buffer zones. The concentration has proven detrimental as proven by the negative reaction from every neighborhood when the homeless service center was proposed. Understandable or not, the message to the unhoused was that we don't want you. The negative impact on the unhoused are visible on any given night in west Bayside why risk violence and harm daily, predatory illegal drug dealers, and human traffickers. It is an environment of homelessness. If shelter licensing was enacted 20 years ago, the negative effects of concentrating services would be largely mitigated.
- Jenny Stasio, Director of Through These Doors, a domestic violence organization for Cumberland County. TTD opposed the shelter licensing. They appreciate changes but think the regulatory burden would divert from services.
- George Rhault of Hanover Street is surprised to see it back on the committee without more community engagement and discussion. The political circus this went through last year was everything the city could do to make the Homeless Services Center appealing. We have a case study in front of us with the 40 bed shelter by Preble Street. If they could have opened it like the wellness shelter at USM, we would already have it but now it will be open by June at the earliest. This licensing is bogus. If we wanted to help, we would

get convenience store that profits over this population to give back to the community. Instead we are putting the onus on providers. Stop privileging private groups like the bayside neighborhood association and create a real, honest process.

Public comment closed at approximately 7:08 PM

- Councilor Trevorrow recognizes there are a lot of people who have worked on this issue for many months and does not mean to disrespect that work. Her understanding that the goals behind the policy are to codify best practices in shelters and equitably distribute services in the city. To meet those goals, there is a zoning piece that is missing.
 - The restriction on beds leaves very little area to open new shelters which makes it challenging to redistribute services.
 - Looking at land use, there are other areas that could be examined.
 - The conditions may merit review, some are zoning related and some are best practice related.
 - Should the best practice aspect live within the purview of the planning board?
 - The definition of emergency shelter is broad in terms of size and demographics.
 - Could these be further defined and inform a discussion of where shelters could go in the city
 - Proposes a resolution on a best minds working group:
 - Best practices
 - Zoning.
 - When this comes back to the council in June. Zoning would still be on the agenda and she would purpose postponing that aspect with a defined timeline while the working group address this.
 - Recommend establishing the working group and postpone licensing while the working group meets.
 - Councilor Pelletier asked about the composition of the working group: unhouse and service providers?
 - Best minds: expertise in the area in best practices in services and zoning.
 - Representation from the city in both of those aspects
 - From shelters
 - Not fully worked out and welcomes feedback.
 - Councilor Dion said best practices are a floor of safety and services for guests.
 - Not looking for an accreditation effort with a high standard.
 - We have a responsibility to ensure safety and wellbeing vs best practice performance.
 - It is important that a value we have to answer to is the needs of the guests and the interests of the neighborhood where the facility is located. The best interest of the neighbors is equally important.
 - The interest of the neighbors should be satisfied so they know their needs are also being addressed.

- Councilor Trevorrow will draft the resolution with the goal of presenting when Shelter Licensing is before the Council.
- o There is no vote to be taken tonight.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:20 PM.