

Health & Human Services and Public Safety Committee Minutes

Tuesday, June 25, 2019, 5:30pm, Room 209, City Hall

Committee Attendance:

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

Councilors in Attendance: Councilor Kim Cook (District 5), Spencer Thibodaux (District 2)

Mayor Ethan Strimling

City Staff: Heather Brown, Assistant City Manager; Aaron Geyer, Acting Director of Social Services; Sara Fleurant, Director of the Oxford Street Shelter; Adam Harr, Executive Assistant.

Meeting called to order at 5:35 PM.

AGENDA ITEM 1 – Announcements

- The July meetings will be cancelled and rescheduled to July 30th with no meetings in August.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – Approval of Minutes

- Councilor Batson moved to approve the minutes; Councilor Ali seconded and the minutes were approved as amended:
 - o Noted on page 3 that overview from Patient advocacy group was a public comment period.
 - o The committee decided to destroy the survey results.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – Shelter Policy

Sara Fleurant, Shelter Director

- Councilor Cook requested the background on the current policy: if it based in statute, etc.
- OSS Policy
 - o The shelter does not turn anyone away; it was the decision of the City Manager at the time the shelter was first created.
 - Bob Ganley in 1984 in response to people camping in Lincoln Park.
 - Originally a 50 bed facility.
 - Councilor Cook requested that the history be documented and made available online.
 - o Low Barrier Emergency Shelter
 - People can enter shelter without being required to be:
 - Sober
 - Working
 - A resident.
 - Intake forms can be shared

- Long due to various funding sources and to understand an individual's situation to be able best help that person.
 - Includes rules and responsibility, residency contract, housing and mainstream resources at orientation the next day.
- “No barrier” is a nomenclature that is similar to low barrier; low barrier is used to describe OSS as some people may be restricted from entry if safety is an issue. Individuals are searched at check-in:
 - No weapons
 - No drugs or alcohol
 - No families
 - No Youth
 - No pets (service animals are allowed)
 - Outlined in the Residency Contract.
- Emergency Shelter Assessment Committee (ESAC)
 - Meets monthly on the third Thursday of the month since 2006.
 - Tri-chaired by the City, Homeless Voices for Justice, and the United Way.
 - Influential in steering homeless services in Portland (but does not directly write OSS policy)
- Shelter Beds
 - 154 bed HIC count (Housing inventory chart) plus a 75-bed overflow.
- Intake
 - Individuals are given materials at intake and then sent to an orientation the next day. At orientation individuals are assigned a housing councilor and referrals are made to outside providers based on need.
 - Once assigned, housing councilors are dedicated and will be the sole person working with that guest.
 - Many people self-resolve in a matter of days and do not in practice work with a housing navigator.
 - Mayor Strimling asked for what number a typical active caseload is; staff will follow-up.
 - Are longer stays due to a lack of housing or other issues? Both.
 - How often are people restricted or not allowed in the shelter?
 - Will follow up.
 - Sex offenders are allowed as criminal history does not prevent people from entering shelter, current unsafe behavior does.
- 17 days is the median length of stay.
- What happens in other communities that do restrict access to shelter more than OSS?
 - Father bills place
 - serves certain catchment areas and if there is no connection to those areas, individuals are allowed to stay one night.
 - What is the total population in the catchment areas?
 - Rigid Check in times: if someone checks in outside of the hours they are allowed to stay in a cold night: that are allowed to stay that night but then are restricted for 24 hours.
 - If people are not able to stay at Father Bill's, they will be referred to a nearby shelter.

- This is not an option at OSS.
 - What informs the catchment areas? Is there a financial agreement with those towns?
- Hope House and Preble Street sent documents today and will be uploaded later.
 - o OSS does not send to Hope House; Hope House does not send to OSS.
- How does Father Bills and other shelters deal with overflow?
 - o Similar shelters?
 - o Father Bills: transports people from the Quincy location to the Brockton location as it has a lower utilization rate. (Utilization rate is important for shelter funding.)
- What brings people who are not Portland locals to the shelter?
 - o Where in the process is that determined?
 - Found out during intake, in the General Assistance portion.
 - How is residency verified; Required documentation?
 - ID; copied on file if available.
 - o %of individuals who present with identification?
 - Bills
 - School district
 - A point of contact that can attest to a person's situation.
 - Lease or social services.
- Shelter List
 - o All but three shelters are not low barrier.
 - What do these shelters do when they hit their capacity?
 - What does Hope House do when it hits its bed capacity?
 - o Is OSS the default overflow shelter?
 - o How many people are turned away at other Maine shelters for substance use/intoxication?
 - o How would the shelter be affected if sobriety was a requirement?
 - Drastically as over 85% self-report substance use issues.
 - o If a person is a risk to themselves OSS would call the police department for a wellness check.
 - o When are people referred to Milestone via the HOME Teams?
 - When people cannot ambulate and could hurt themselves or others.
 - Milestone usually operates at capacity or over capacity due to turn around and bed management.
 - What is the exchange and referral rate to Milestone?
- What is the percentage of people from Portland, other Maine towns, out of state and out of country (average going back two years)
 - o Based on self-reporting.
 - People are asked about their connections to Portland. (Reason why a person from out of state come to Maine?)
 - o Is this informed by a HUD form asking where an individual slept the night before?
 - Asked what an individual's last residence was.
 - GA questions dive deeper than the self-reporting.

- What does the proportion of intake residency look like based on corroborated information when a connection to Portland and connection to Maine are made?
 - How confident are staff that the intakes are about 30% from Portland, 30% from out of State, and 40% from other Maine towns?
- Can staff project an intake and walk through the process at the next meeting?
 - Going through an intake form could take over 20 minutes.
 - May be held to save time.
- When people are denied access: Restriction Until Further Notice or Criminal Trespass Order (1 Year Ban)
 - Number of people restricted/
 - What happens to people who are restricted? (referred to somewhere else?)
 - People and be swapped at shelters where they are no restricted from.
- Portsmouth Crossroads: intakes are done by municipalities in the shelter's catchment area. It is referral only.
- Senator Chipman's Bill was enacted
 - Presumptive eligibility is restored.
 - What are the impacts?
 - Will answer via memo.
 - What are the impacts on surrounding communities?
 - City Manager or MMA?
 - How will this impact people coming from other communities.
- Are there different parameters at the Expo?
 - They are similar, the biggest difference is that there are multiple intakes happening concurrently at the Expo.
 - Operationally:
 - One floor, large room.
 - Inward facing
 - Services delivered on site
 - Meals on site.
 - CDC providing medical screenings
 - Population: intakes for families versus individual at OSS.
 - OSS Intake: people come into the day room (day room is open 3:30 pm to 7:30 pm)
 - Intakes are not started until the overnight team comes in at 7:00 PM
 - Wait for overnight staff due to people finding places to stay when starting too early in the day.
 - Check in is 6:00 pm to 2:00 AM
 - Families at the Expo don't travel around the neighborhood as much as other populations may to keep track of children and generally being unfamiliar with the city.
- What are the updated numbers at the Expo?
 - 250 people in overflow from the full Family Shelter.
 - Count in the morning and a physical bed count at 11:00 PM
 - There is no established discharge or exit process.

- What are the steps moving forward; at what point does an open access policy diminish the ability to provide shelter?
- Immigrant communities have volunteered to start a volunteer homestay program for locals to take people in their homes.
 - An organization will do vetting of host families to insure the safety of families in shelter.
 - Yarmouth Compassionate coalition, faith group that organizes homestays for families staying family shelter warming center.
 - GPCOG: email hosthomes@gpcog.org
- EXPO: acknowledging the level of resources being offered up and volunteered at the expo; seeing what services offered there that should be a part of the new homeless services center and remain cognizant that the level of interest has not existed with the existing shelters before.
 - What should be part of a program's budget vs. only when donations of time and services wanes.
 - There are many service providers and volunteers but OSS does not have space for the capacity offered.
 - City had not asked for help in this way before; could momentum be sustained if the ask is extended to the new Homeless Services Center?

Committee Questions from the Background Documents

For the OSS and FS:

- How far back is there shelter information?
 - 20 years?
- When did the shelter expand to 154 beds and add the 75 bed overflow?
- How much is the housing market influencing placements?
 - Number of placements weighted by bed nights?
- How much as the City invested in Operating costs?
 - There was a jump in cost when LePage Administration made changes.
 - Not a big change in budget but the funding sources,
- What is a per client cost and how has that changed over time?
- Average length of stay for families.
- OSS has a less than 5% return rate for guests housed.
- The committee requested a memo explaining if there is a state or federal residency requirement.
- Other considerations:
 - Site controls
 - Loitering
 - Physical layout
 - Rules for who is allowed on site (must be a guest?)
 - Community policing standards. (uniform enforcement throughout the city)
 - Explanation of space and services on site and conversation on if those services are limited to shelter stayers: not a drop-in or soup kitchen/community center.
 - Be cognizant of what is a policy discussion version site plan review.
 - Publish the budget in an accessible format and include projections for building the center and its operating budget
 - How will it be paid for?

AGENDA ITEM 4 – Next Meeting

- Staff to return with answers to committee questions July 30th.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:35 PM.