



Health & Human Services and Public Safety Committee Minutes

Tuesday, July 13, 2021, 5:30pm, Remote Meeting

Committee Attendance:

Tae Chong, Chair (District 3), Belinda Ray (District 1), Mark Dion (District 5).

Councilors in Attendance: Pious Ali, April Fournier, Andrew Zarro

Mayor Kate Snyder

City Staff:

Tina Pettingill, Deputy Director of HHS; Anne Torregrossa, Associate Corporation Counsel;
Aaron Geyer, Director of Social Services; Adam Harr, Executive Assistant for Social Services.
Keith Gautreau, Fire Chief.

Guest Speaker:

Lauren Bustard, Director of Programs with MaineHousing

Meeting called to order at 5:31 PM.

AGENDA ITEM 1 – Announcements

- June 8, 2021 draft workshop minutes.
 - Councilor Ray moved to accept the minutes; Councilor Dion seconded and the minutes were accepted unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – Updates

- 39 Forest Avenue Update
 - Renovations are ongoing, but slightly delayed.
 - Looking to move out of 196 Lancaster St by the end of September.
 - Planning to move our India Street space at the end of October.
 - Working to solidify a date to move City Hall staff first.
- June totals for the City's General Assistance Program:
 - Total Applications: 1,275
 - Number of denials: 103
 - Denial rate: 8%
- Oxford Street Shelter:
 - OSS average nightly census: 49
 - Contract hotel average nightly census: 120
- Overview of the Family Shelter:
 - Number of on-site at the family shelter: 31 families/95 individuals
 - Number of families at local hotels for shelter overflow: 66 families/ 199 individuals
- June totals for the Needle Exchange Program (NEP) are as follows:

- o Total number of exchanges: 495
 - Number of on-site exchanges: 495
- o Total number of needles collected: 28,576
- o Total number of needles distributed: 34,173
- o Total number of Narcan doses distributed: 364
- o Community needles collected: 1,491
 - Collected from community sharps containers: 622
 - Collected elsewhere: 869
- Clinic Numbers:
 - o STD Clinic: Patients seen: 109, new patients: 33
 - o PCFC: Patients seen: 62, new patients: 11

Committee questions and discussion.

- Councilor Ray said we sheltered 363 on average in June. We sheltered an average of 169 single adults and have 75 beds at OSS. Of the 294 individuals in families, only 95 are in the shelter.
 - o We can increase our capacity at the FS by 7 families once some renovations are complete.
 - o As of Monday morning, hotels were up to over 80 families for 255 individuals with 16 new families in the past two weeks.
 - We will see an increase in July's numbers.
 - o We can never go back to 154?
 - Awaiting guidance from the CDC.
- Mayor Snyder asked if MaineHousing is funding the contracted hotel sheltering 120 people.
 - o Yes. We were a month to month contract and now it is under a 3-month contract through the end of September.
 - o Do you funding ending?
 - Yes, the funding will end at the end of September. It coincides with the end of the federal fiscal year and the end of the non-congregate funding.
 - o Does that look like a lot of people needing shelter at the end of September?
 - Yes.
 - o The 40-bed Preble Street will open before that?
 - The last update he heard was the Fall.
 - o How many people are sleeping outside?
 - It fluctuates and we are engaging with our outreach team but we do not have an estimate. If individuals from the outreach team report people sleeping out, we line up hotels for them.
- Councilor Dion asked if we are experiencing pushback from hotels to return to their previous use?
 - o Yes. We have been attempting to foster relationships but they have conveyed it is a tough balance to be partially GA and non-GA.
 - o There could be a demand on this resource for the hotel owner and viewing this as a perpetual resource is speculation.
 - o How many beds are needed to meet the demand?

- 395
 - We have 75 beds at OSS with a varying census; we reached 74 last week but it varies nightly.
 - 120 at contracted hotel (fluctuates 120-128)
 - 65 estimated at the Preble Street hotel.
 - 135 people in hotels paid for by GA (over two hotels not including families.)
 - When we say family, it is talked about as a unit but that breaks down to separate beds. When we say family, how many beds are we talking about?
 - Roughly 335.
 - For the total need of about 750 beds, how many beds do we have access to tomorrow morning?
 - 75
 - 135
 - 142 at the Family Shelter
 - Gap is made up through hotel placements which is not a fixed resource.
 - When we say families, how many of those are restricted to GA resources specifically?
 - 80% to be safe; it could be closer to 85%.
 - How many are refugees or asylees?
 - That is the 80%
 - Do new arrivals account for racial disparity?
 - Yes
- Councilor Ray asked about the number of beds the City has available is 217. There are other shelters but the total available beds fall short of the need
 - We are trying to get at that the permanent available beds cannot meet the current need.
- Councilor Chong asked how many beds are in the State of Maine for people experiencing homelessness?
 - 1,222, not including private shelters; there are about 1,300 emergency shelter beds in Maine.
- Councilor Chong said Portland needs nearly 730 beds.
 - Roughly the City has a capacity to serve 29.4% of people experiencing homelessness.
 - Nearly 70% of the people we serve are sheltered in an over flow or hotel with GA.
 - 50% of all beds in the State wouldn't meet Portland's needs.
- Councilor Chong is impressed with the numbers of needles we are collecting.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – Corporation of Supportive Housing Final Report

- Lauren Bustard, Director of Programs with MaineHousing presented.
- Maine Homeless Response System.
 - Currently group of dedicated but independent service providers, not a system.
 - HUD requires a Coordinated Entry system for prioritizing resources.
 - The pandemic demonstrated the need for coordination.

- Primary goal is to reduce homelessness to functional zero, when new individuals accessing the system equals or is less than the number of people leaving the system.
- Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) started with a system analysis and interventions:
 - Diversion
 - Emergency Shelter
 - Transitional Housing
 - Rapid Rehousing
 - Supportive Housing.
 - Affordable Housing
- Key take-aways
 - Reliance on initial front door (shelter).
 - 32% enter from rental housing, home ownership, self-paid hotel/motel or another situation someone can be diverted from entering a shelter.
 - They had been paying on their own and may just need some financial assistance to be diverted.
 - Low number of long-term stayers in the system.
 - Over reliance of shelter and transitional housing.
 - General lack of housing available on the back end.
 - Once housed, people stay housed with a 7% success rate when under 15% is good.
- Race Equity
 - Asylum seekers do not qualify for federal funding.
 - Mayor Snyder asked about the BIPOC people in shelter; most are in the Portland and Lewiston area.
- Resource Map
 - There are resource deserts in the rural areas of Maine.
- Looking to move into systems and address homelessness holistically.
- Working with the Statewide Homeless Counsel, CSH came up with the 9 hubs.
 - Shelters
 - Outreach/PATH
 - Supportive providers CAP agencies.
- Summary of the final report on Appendix A is page 23.
- Many people have focused on the shelter reduction number without the disclaimer that the analysis is dependent on a fully operational diversion program that diverts 70% of people.
- The Numbers
 - Statistics are from 2019; post Covid shelter capacity has not been established.
 - Shelter numbers didn't include clients supported by GA because there is no way to get those numbers statewide.
 - The decrease in shelter beds is contingent on an extremely high success rate. In the first 3-5 years, the percentage is around 20% successful. The timeline to get to 70% is around ten years. If these assumptions weren't met, shelter capacity would remain at current levels.
 - Increase Rapid Rehousing opportunities is difficult without available units.

- Transitional housing numbers include BRAP which is not an accurate portrayal; of transitional housing.
- The Funding
 - Service Hub Coordination would cost \$899,620 annually.
 - Statewide Capacity and Support?
 - Councilor Chong asked how much of this funding do asylum seekers qualify for?
 - Philanthropy; it is limited by federal eligibility.
 - The funding sources in red are colored to note they are insufficient.
 - Mayor Snyder thought 2025 looks very quick and the funding is a lot of money needed; she would like to hear more on if the timeframe is realistic with all of the contingencies in this plan?
 - We asked for recommendations from a consultant but given the need for construction, even a ten-year goal is pushing it considering the cost and construction labor shortages.
 - We are trying to get more funding but we get \$3-5 million a year for supportive housing.
- Councilor Dion said the industry diversion rate is three times the normal practice. There are people in our community that think this document represents realistic goals when the report says 5 years and the professional at this meeting says 10 years.
 - How many items require legislative approval?
 - Potentially do not require legislative approval.
 - Is this an aspirational document?
 - Very aspirational.
 - We asked for a holistic approach to functional zero and we do need the elements of the report but the timing is unrealistic.
- What is missing?
 - Building back shelter capacity.
 - Renovation needs.
 - Covid money is going away.
 - Professionalizing shelter staff with core competency trainings lack funding.
- MaineHousing has contracted with Community Solutions, a national organization that helps sub populations reach functional zero that specialize in ground up work.
- Looking to stabilize shelters with diversion programs and looking to add housing on the back end.
- Councilor Dion asked we account for the decrease in white individuals in shelter?
 - We don't know.
 - If the numbers are not reliable, why do we document them?
 - Funding. There is a Point in Time count that we know is an under count but it is a HUD requirement for funding.
 - We are compelled to come up with numbers that are not always the most accurate.
- Councilor Ray sees homelessness is on the rise for BIPOC people and a large number are people arriving to this community for the first time and once settled do not need help. That is a vastly different statistic than someone losing a job or resources causing homelessness.

- In many places around the country, asylum seekers are not counted in the homeless system.
 - These statistics are not about people in our community losing our homes, it is about people entering our community who need homes.
 - HMIS cannot collate data by immigration status. We would need to establish a way to record them separately.
- Councilor Chong said this shows the homeless services system is working well for white people experiencing homelessness, but it is not working for people resettling or asylees who do not have eligibility.
- Councilor Fournier said that the number of Native American people has doubled; this their indigenous land and is not a resettlement issue.
 - HUD is trying to improve reporting tools to get greater detail to look at racial equity.
 - Whether or not someone grew up in Maine and then lost housing, or came to Maine, they are people who need housing.
 - Seeing the number of BIPOC people experiencing homelessness increasing while the number of white people decreases is compelling in the context of the racial equity.
- Councilor Chong said that the Hispanic/LatinX population is over 30,000 and doesn't have any data
 - This research looked at race, not ethnicity.
- Councilor Dion asked to see the numbers distinguish between populations experiencing chronic homelessness and circumstantial homelessness.
 - Refugees and asylees fall under circumstantial homelessness.
- Councilor Ali asked if some of the money coming into the state is going to be used to address racial disparity?
 - There is money coming into the counties and some are looking to partner around issues of homelessness.
 - \$16 million can be used to buy things, acquisition and renovation of buildings like hotels for shelter.
- Councilor Dion asked if there is an inventory of available units in the categories of the CSH plan.
 - There are no empty units/resources that get left on the table.
 - Transitional housing and supportive housing are actual units.
- Councilor Ray explained that the citizens referendum capping bed capacity as a response to this report is frustrating when we are attempting to restore lost shelter capacity, not create new shelter beds.
- Councilor Ray said municipal zoning changes will be difficult. We allow supportive housing, apartments, etc. but we have surrounding communities that don't even allow multi-unit housing.
- The figure around 1,200 shelter bed capacity is based on 2019 and will need to be updated because beds were lost since then.
- Councilor Zarro asked how do we address racial disparities that we know exist so we don't end up on the side of a one size fits all solution that prioritizes white people over BIPOC people? How will we account for this, prioritizing diversion and housing?

- She thinks the hub approach will help as people will be more aware of needs at all levels and where discrimination is happening. At the local level, there is more knowledge of this.
- Mayor Snyder asked for guidance on where 730 beds needed for Portland are coming from. She is trying to understand how to use this report right now, going into the referendum question. Diversion is baked into the proposed Homeless Services Center.
 - Looking statewide, we are looking broadly over time versus the crisis situation Portland is experiencing.
 - Portland has 730 people in crisis that a long-term aspirational report isn't as useful for.
 - We are looking at other funding streams in case we need to continue in hotels.
 - What can be done with unprecedented monies coming to the state from the American Rescue Plan and Emergency Rental Assistance.
 - We need to look at the resources that are out there. There are resources at the County that could help creating more new units such as purchasing hotels turning them into SRO units.
- Councilor Fournier asked about the most marginalized people in the hubs and how there needs to be the right tools in place at the hub and state level to make sure there are accountability measures that can measure and course correct for disparities. For example, Wabanaki studies have been prescribed by law for years but no mechanism is in place to make sure it is implemented.
 - When talking about who needs to be part of the HUB teams, the cultural broker agencies will be included. HUD has recommendations and is focused on equity.
 - We are looking to make sure there is accountability.
- Councilor Ray asked about \$8.1 million for supportive housing. Was that an annual allocation?
 - No; those are project-based vouchers. When MaineHousing provides funding for SROs, they tend to be projects with a smaller number of units.
 - The \$8 million was an estimate over five years.
- Councilor Ray asked about the capital costs and annual operational expenses for supportive housing. It was \$750,000 a year needed for a facility like Huston commons for their operations. Are the annual operational costs factored in?
 - Yes, they sorted between capital costs, operational (mostly paid by vouchers), and services; staff salaries usually paid through the services bucket. The services piece has been an obstacle. Most of Maine Housing's funding is tied to housing and cannot be used for services. There is a new Maine Care Health Home section that is going through the approval process in January that would provide Maine Care reimbursement for specific populations with health conditions experiencing chronic homelessness.
- Councilor Ray talked about the racial equity work and the asylum seeker influx of 400 to 450 people where the community came together to rapidly rehouse 200 of them in one

month during the time period looked at in this report. The families were assisted quickly who may be easier to rehouse than single adults.

- o There was discontentment among the chronically homeless who saw the community come together to house recent arrivals but no them.
- Councilor Chong said it seems like there should be two reports: one for the state and one for Portland. This report doesn't take into account the large number of asylees that largely don't qualify for the interventions outlined in the report.
 - o Our solutions are leading in the state and other communities aren't even close to what we are doing.
 - o We would like other communities to listen to Portland and help take pressure off of Portland.
 - o Local municipalities close their GA offices and have limited hours.
 - o The 2-1-1 GA program should be 24/7.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – Shelter Licensing

- Associate Corporation Counsel Anne Torregrossa made requested changes.
 - o Language changed homeless shelter to emergency shelter.
 - o People first language and changed homeless individuals to individuals experiencing homelessness.
 - o Substantively we talked about how to measure distance; a memo is attached with examples.
 - o Buffer went from 250 to 300 People.
 - o Comment on the requirement for centralized operations and sightlines to sleeping areas; clarified how this would be treated for a preexisting shelter; they must specify how they will ensure client safety.
 - o Changed 250 to 300 beds within a one-mile radius.
 - o Added a section on
 - Several concerns surrounded enforcement and what enforcement would look like and if a shelter would lose their license if they were out of compliance.
 - Attorney Torregrossa explained how the city does enforcement in the memo.
 - City official will give a notice of violation and give an opportunity to fix them. It is not one violation and the license get yanked immediately unless there is an imminent threat to health and safety or if it is a significantly repeated violation.
 - There are procedures in Chapter 15 for suspension and revocation of a license.
 - Added language for the Preble Street Teen Shelter conciliation to not be subject to some of the ordinance.
 - Added fair housing language that reasonable modifications would be considered if necessary, under the Fair Housing Act.

Committee questions and discussion.

- Councilor Ray:
 - Thinks measuring property line to property line makes sense.
 - Likes the Teen Center language.
 - Could someone get a license as a domestic license shelter and convert to a general use shelter; do we need to make it clear that if a shelter was established as a DV shelter with the buffer waived that they would not be able to convert unless the new use would be in compliance with the ordinance?
 - Right now, it says it has to be a shelter serving surviving of domestic violence. We may want to say “solely” serving survivors of domestic violence.
 - What mechanism would make a shelter come back and get a license?
 - DV shelters still have to reapply for a license annually but have a waiver for certain information required in the application.
 - There could be checkbox on the renewal application to certify that they are a DV shelter.
 - Will add “solely.”
- Councilor Chong asked if the committee would like to open back up for discussion or vote to move it to the full Council?
 - Councilor Dion would like another opportunity for public comment before forwarding to the full Council. The committee members all agree.
 - Councilor Fournier asked at which point can the council request a workshop?
 - A workshop will be recommended to the Mayor in September, after voting out of committee. It can be scheduled now and postponed if needed.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – Next Meeting, September 14, 2021

- Shelter Licensing with public comment.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:46 PM