

Emergency Shelter Assessment Committee

Remote Meeting

Thursday, September 16, 2021

8:30 am – 10:00 am

Minutes

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Adam Harr	City of Portland	Norm Maze	Shalom House
Cullen Ryan	CHOM	Ben Martineau	HVJ
Jim Devine	HVJ	Ben Strick	Spurwink
Bill Higgins	Ha4aLL	Deb Ibonwa	MEJP
Jenny Stasio	Through These Doors	Aaron Geyer	City of Portland
Anna Brewer	Preble Street/HVJ	Sarah Michniewicz	
Vickey Rand	CHOM	Brian Townsend	Amistad
Sara Fleurant	City of Portland Oxford Street Shelter	Oliver Bradeen	Milestone
Terence Miller	Preble Street	Ginny Dill	DHHS
Amy Geren	Portland Downtown		

Meeting Summary

The statistics showed high first-time homeless numbers and intakes from Maine towns outside of greater Portland prompted a conversation on the need for prevention and diversion resources outside of 211 and the need for advocacy and education on General Assistance. FEMA Hotels are extended through December 31st with MaineHousing working on a solution beyond that date. A subcommittee to prepare for the cold season was made of the following volunteers: Ben Strick, Aaron Geyer/Sara Fleurant, Brian Townsend, Terence Miller, Bill Higgins, and Norm Maze. The Homeless Services Center plan to replace OSS was approved by the planning board. The ballot question language will be shared for ESAC to be able to vote and take a position on the questions at the October meeting, ahead of the November election.

- **August Meeting Minutes**

- o Brian moved to approve the minutes and Oliver seconded. The motion passed with none opposed.

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- **August Statistics.**

- Total number of people is up compared to last year.
- Shelters are staying at current capacity due to Delta.
- Housing placements are looking close to last year.
 - Housing Placements are high in Portland due to GA.
- First time homelessness continues to be high and may increase with the end of the eviction moratorium.
- CTOs are trending downward.
- GA hotels are increasing slightly and doing outreach to get folks to accept GA hotels.
- MaineHousing working with the OSS contracted hotel to extend through the end of December.
- Family numbers in hotels continue to rise: 94 families for 303 individuals.
- Florence House had an outbreak at the end of the month and worked with Fairfield to transfer there. It will be a couple more weeks to get past a 14-day period.
- First time homeless concerns; in the redesign there is an emphasis on diversion; MaineHousing will leverage HOME funds to pay for organizing the 9 hubs.
- Intakes are not from the usual places: Clinton, Gray, Warren, etc. The large number of people from municipalities that aren't from Greater Portland is new.
 - Education needed on GA; it's uneven use around the state is likely contributing.
 - Using GA outside of Portland is a struggle when trying to divert people.
 - What advocacy can this group do?
 - Maine Shelter Network has invited Sara Denson, General Assistance Program Manager, and Tony Pelotte, Director of the Office for Family Independence to advocate for GA to be administered uniformly across the state.
 - Are there are no repercussions if towns don't do GA?
 - There are statutes and mechanisms in place. GA is never really about a budget number. Every municipality does their best to project what you will spend but not having enough money budgeted is never a reason to deny a client.
 - In terms of repercussions, PTLA can help contest decisions.
 - There is a clause that municipalities that assist a client from another town can bill the municipality of responsibility.
 - Sending to Portland and billing other municipalities has had limited success.
 - Towns in York County denying because they don't have a budget.
 - Individual GA offices can be hard to access making self-advocacy hard.
 - GA Bill this legislative session was carried over; it is the time to advocate.
 - There aren't any resources going into diversion except for 211. We need more resources going to diversion and housing.

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- o 27 OSS intakes were out of state. Is this normal and trending up or down?
- **MaineHousing Funding**
 - o FEMA hotel funding is extended through the end of December.
 - This includes PUI and respite.
 - o Is there will to extend hotel placements beyond the end of December?
 - They have made a huge difference for unsheltered people and the population served by PATH.
 - MaineHousing is in talks with TOA to use ERA funds and one specific hotel owner to try and extend beyond December 31st.
 - A bill was approved in the house to extend ERA from 18 to 24 months and allows for prepayment.
 - It appears to be extended on a quarterly basis but this is speculation.
- **Discussion on Community Preparedness for the Oncoming Cold Season**
 - o City Winter plan focusing on hypothermia. Courtney from GPH to share resources. She has a model from other cities.
 - Subcommittee or invite her to next month's ESAC?
 - Subcommittee as we are getting into hypothermia season.
 - Ben moved to create an ESAC sub-group to draft a comprehensive winter plan. Jim seconded. Motion Passes with none opposed.
 - Volunteers: Ben Strick. Aaron Geyer/Sarah Fleurant, Brian Townsend., Terence Miller, Bill Higgins, and Norm Maze.
 - Will there be a PIT this year?
 - Yes; in the preparation stage.
 - Looking for leads in communities around Maine. MaineHousing and Catholic Charities meeting with Shalom to find the organizations they can reach out to in rural areas.
 - PIT crew leads will be relied on to put the word out to volunteers.
 - Veterans groups have good participation.
 - o Winter supplies are desperately needed. The city will start a social media campaign seeking warm winter clothes.
- **Homeless Services Center**
 - o Planning board approved the HSC application.
 - o Will the HSC be a place where people can use the bathroom during the day; yes.
 - o The letter from the representatives from the greater Portland Area that were opposed to the plan; will have conversations with them as there appears to be conversations round the CSH report.
 - The delegation letter seems to be misinformed around the CSH report.
 - The statewide homeless council is writing an op ed to explain the report is to advocate for resources to divert, not for a reduction in shelter beds; we need to house people first. The redesign is about getting resources needed.

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- The delegation letter seemed uncurious given that nearly all of the agencies working on homeless support the HSC and that did not give them pause. There was no outreach from the delegation to discuss the plan.
- The testimony was against the shelter, not the merits of the plan.
- o With the HSC not coming online for some time, will the City issue another day space RFP for this Winter?
 - City is working to try and find a solution to day space.
 - The extension of hotels beyond December 31st will help, especially if extended to 24 months.
- o The design evolved and really respects clients.
 - There are offices for multiple organizations to wrap around assistance to clients.
- **Federal, State and Local**
 - o **Federal**
 - Eviction moratorium lifted.
 - \$1 trillion package
 - \$3.5 trillion package includes homelessness.
 - Spread over ten years.
 - HUD budget restored
 - Funding the government; hopefully by the end of the month.
 - Increase in S+C.
 - Increase in HCV.
 - DASH Act
 - Housing and homelessness.
 - Moving through Congress.
 - Everyone who needs an HCV will get an HCV.
 - Improves affordable housing development.
 - Housing Trust fund for permanent supportive housing.
 - Regional and Statewide Homeless Councils are sending thank you letters to our delegation.
 - o Norm moved ESAC send a thank you letter to Senator King and Collins in support. Bill Seconded. The motion passed with none opposed.
 - Expediting Assistance Act.
 - Maxine Waters: solves slowness of ERA and provides tenant protections and extends the length of assistance from 15 to 24 months.
 - o **State**
 - LD1733 is a catch all for using state recovery funds.
 - \$6 million to increase pay for health workers.
 - \$50 million for labor agreements.

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- \$10 million one-time funds for shelters: operations and capital improvements.
 - \$1.5 million for housing navigators.
 - Carry over bills include GA bill.
 - 18-24-month ERA extension: is this the Maxine waters bill?
 - ERA as written is 15 plus 3 to get 18 and the Maxine waters bill is 24 plus.
- **City Ordinance and Referendum Discussion**
 - It is a good idea for ESAC to take a position. It would sound good to the general population to promote smaller shelters but that doesn't mean it will occur.
 - The City sent out an RFP for day shelter with no takers.
 - It was hard for Preble Street to create a shelter with their own space.
 - Capping beds at 50 and deciding the size of shelter doesn't help create shelter.
 - Shelters larger than 50 may be needed.
 - Shelters would be sited with the path of least resistance.
 - There is an alternate proposal as well as none of the above on the ballot.
 - We voted and sent a letter in support of alternate language as a de facto position.
 - We voted for alternate language before the Councilor Ray's amendment was released.
 - We did not have the draft language but the stakes were so high with the potential damage of the referendum that we voted to support an alternative.
 - The motion was more for multiple questions, not supporting the content of the questions.
 - We have the actual language now.
 - Referendums are terrible ways to decide public policy on complex issues.
 - We don't think matters pertaining to homelessness should be decided through referendum and we should take the position "none of the above."
 - Do we have enough information and discussion to make a decision?
 - How do we get the information we need to take a position?
 - At this point United Way would abstain and the City would abstain.
 - Community input: the advantage of the City's amendment is that it creates a mechanism for increases in capacity to happen.
 - Concern that were this to pass, it would be extraordinarily detrimental to multiple providers, limiting the ability to provide service.
 - We should vote next month with the needed background info.
 - The referendum may still impact the HSC as there is debate on retro activeness.
 - What materials are needed in advance for a vote next month?