



**Fidelity Committee
of the
Tri-City Joint Mayors' Task Force on Homelessness
Remote Meeting Via Zoom
May 14, 2020
6:00 PM**

MAYORS

Mayor Caroline McCarley
Mayor Karen Weston
Mayor Dana Hilliard

Rochester Members

Jeremy Hutchinson
(chairman)

Barbara Holstein

Dover Members

Charles Reynolds

Betsey Andrews Parker

Somersworth Members

Todd Marsh

Dina Gagnon

Others Present: Ashley Desrochers, Public Health Network. Julian Long, Rochester Economic Development. Dave Carpenter, Dover Planning. Tory Jennison, Integrated Delivery Network. John Burns, SOS. Lindsey Williams, Dover City Council.

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chairman Hutchinson called the Zoom meeting of the Fidelity Committee to order at 6:02 PM. Rochester Deputy City Clerk Cassie Givara took a visual roll call of meeting participants. Mayor McCarley of Rochester and Mayor Hilliard of Somersworth were excused. All other Committee members as listed above were present.

2. Public Input (3-minute maximum and/or submit a statement)

Tammy Whalen, Connections for Health, spoke about the importance of having a clear, consistent message and publicizing information regarding the positive things the Committee and other organizations have accomplished in order to combat the large amount of misinformation circulating.

Mayor Carrier reported that he'd had a remote meeting with the Governor as well as multiple other City Mayors and State leaders. He spoke about the ongoing opioid crisis in the state, especially effecting the larger cities. Mayor Carrier spoke of the fact that although the opioid epidemic is currently taking a backseat to coverage of COVID-19, the problem is still prevalent.

3. Communications from the Mayors

Mayor Carrier said that he has been attending weekly meetings with the State and regular emergency operations meetings within the City of Dover. He stated that COVID-19 recommendations and statistics are changing day to day and the situation is constantly evolving. He reiterated that although COVID-19 is on the forefront and overshadowing most other issues, the problem of homelessness and opioid dependency are still significant and need to be prioritized as well.

4. Communications from the Chair

Chairman Hutchinson referenced a discussion from the last Fidelity meeting in which the long-term effects of COVID-19 were discussed, such as unemployment and housing insecurity. He stated that this is going to likely increase as the current situation progresses; with people out of work and unable to meet financial obligations. Chairman Hutchinson reported that several councilors in Rochester had attempted to bring a housing relief proposal to Rochester, and although it had not been successful it would still be a priority for him to work towards assisting those affected when the need inevitably arises.

The Chairman asked Todd Marsh, Rochester Welfare director and Somersworth Committee member, to report back to the Committee with any noticeable trends or changes which he sees coming into the welfare department; the Fidelity Committee will be able to take these statistics and make stronger recommendations and be proactive with suggestions to the Councils and City administration.

Betsey Andrews Parker introduced Tory Jennison, who was recently reassigned to the State EOC (Emergency Operations Center) and could likely give updates.

Tory Jennison reported that for 6 weeks, the EOC has been working on shelter and support for isolation quarantine within vulnerable populations. The State has set up two isolation quarantine sites for vulnerable populations, one in Dover and one in Laconia. There has also been some investment in emergency and transitional shelters to assist with sanitizing, hand washing stations, as well as technical assistance with infection control due to the fact that it has not been an issue they have needed to focus on in the past.

Ms. Jennison said that the shelters, like all other populations, are currently practicing social distancing and limiting interactions and taking in fewer residents. This causes a backlog in other areas of assistance when there is not the same access to shelter and regular service. She spoke of the outreach the State is coordinating to provide food for various homeless encampments.

Ms. Jennison addresses the Committee in regards to the State's efforts to develop a transition plan for people to get out of these encampments and into shelters. They are exploring what can be done to make more housing available and more mental health options available. It was acknowledged that this is a complex population and it will require more access and integration to care coordination.

Mayor Carrier asked if there was any way to use the available COVID-19 relief money to supplement or enhance programs which have already been started prior to the pandemic. Ms. Jennison said there are, in fact, multiple funding streams coming in and the EOC is trying to determine how the funds can best be used. She said that the need is increasing and will continue to increase as COVID progresses, but those working in these services and organizations are so entrenched in the day-to-day that they don't necessarily have time to deal with the behind the scenes and funding aspects while COVID is ongoing. She suggested that the Fidelity Committee use this time to show leadership in identifying the funding and recommending how the money should be used and distributed.

Ms. Andrews Parker said that the housing money from the CARES act has not been released yet, although the CARES act passed in March. She also emphasized the fact that cold weather will come sooner rather than later. The Committee should not lose sight of the fact that there is still no solution for a regional shelter. There is \$500,000 available, and no community has stepped forward with property or a plan to utilize these funds, which may very well require zoning changes or loosening of variances in order to come up with a solution.

Charlie Reynolds referenced the encampments which Ms. Parker had reported had been disbanded recently and inquired where this had taken place. Ms. Andrews Parker said that there were several areas in Dover, but would not state for the record where this had occurred. Mr. Reynolds indicated if encampments had indeed been broken up, there needs to be an understanding of why it happened and to develop another approach. Ms. Andrews Parker said the issue had been initiated by property owners calling to complain about encampments. The problem that arises during COVID-19 is where to move these people once the encampment has been broken up.

Chairman Hutchinson asked Ms. Andrews Parker about the types of requests for assistance which had been coming into CAP. Ms. Andrews Parker spoke about the requests for rent assistance and assistance with utilities. She also said there is an issue with the temporary increase in unemployment benefits and whether or not the additional funding is being counted as income. This is making some people ineligible for assistance despite the fact that they are now paying out of pocket for insurance and benefits.

Mr. Marsh indicated that Rochester welfare has not been seeing the volume of requests for rent assistance which he would have expected due to COVID-19, which is concerning. He surmised that these requests were expected in May, but will likely be coming in more heavily in June and July. Mr. Marsh also reported that Rochester City Manager Blaine Cox had organized a meeting on May 26, 2020 to discuss

extreme cold weather centers in an effort to get ahead of it and be prepared. Mr. Marsh acknowledged it wasn't a solution to the \$500,000 referenced by Ms. Andrews Parker, but is a step in the right direction and a way to keep the issue on everyone's radar.

Ashley Desrochers, Public Health Network, said that she could assist with getting statistics and data to the Committee, although currently there are still many unknowns and the situation is constantly evolving.

John Burns, SOS, spoke about the medically assisted treatment and recovery program which SOS is currently helping support. This is a low-barrier mobile unit available in Dover each Wednesday from 12:30pm – 2:30 pm staffed by an SOS recovery support worker as well as a registered nurse and telehealth connection to a doctor. There are two tents, one for recovery intake and the other for the medical aspect such as suboxone or buprenorphine treatment, as well as medical consultation. Behavioral Health services are also available. Mr. Burns stated that he had initially reached out to Rochester's City administration about locating this mobile unit within the City, but had received pushback on the logistics and operations. Dover's administration agreed readily and the setup has been a success, treating approximately 4-5 people each Wednesdays.

There was a brief discussion regarding the potential future expansion of this service into Rochester. Mr. Burns stated that if they could source another medical provider to offer services, he would like to revisit the discussion with Rochester (where there is a greater need) about potentially locating a mobile health unit in the City.

5. Discussion: Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative

It was the consensus of the Committee to put the agenda item for Recovery Friendly Workplace on the back burner for the time being and revisit it in the future.

6. Review: Current state of resources/operations for homeless community during COVID-19

No discussion.

7. Proposal of Master Plan strategies for draft policy initiatives

No discussion.

8. Other

Mr. Marsh asked Ms. Andrews Parker for her perspective on what will be needed moving forward in the regards to cold weather shelters and warming centers. Ms. Andrews Parker praised the volunteer driven operations of the prior winter's warming centers, but asserted that this format would not continue to work. There is the same core group of volunteers and there is such a high prevalence of burn out

for those continually helping. There are also issues with consistency; not knowing when the centers would open and in which town, how to publicize the centers opening, and the limitations of how long the facilities could be used due to other scheduled events taking place at these properties. Ms. Andrews Parker said that if it needed for be done this upcoming winter in a similar way with all 3 communities sharing the workload, there would need to be a regular schedule and a paid staff to support the operations. She spoke about fundraising and sustaining funding for centers and the time and effort it takes to source and train volunteers.

Mr. Marsh spoke about the potential of each of the 3 cities contributing from their budget in order to fund a staff position for warming centers. There was a discussion regarding the reasonable cost of such a position with benefits and the possibility of amending the welfare budgets to increase the emergency homeless services line items to allow for a greater contributions. Ms. Andrews Parker committed to providing data and numbers on the cost of a staff position for further workup.

There was a discussion regarding the ideal circumstance of finding a property for a long-term shelter. Ms. Andrews Parke stated that the main criteria would be that it must be located close to transportation; on a bus route. She said that any other shortcomings could be built upon and worked with if there was a location to start. Mayor Carrier acknowledged that it appears as though none of the 3 cities wants to have the shelter within their borders; but perhaps there is a possibility of a shelter on "neutral" ground such as county-owned land. Each City could provide budgeting for such a facility, regardless of the location. The County's land on County Farm Road in Dover was discussed. Ms. Jennison stated that there is an issue with that location having no direct access to a bus route. The county may be open to having a conversation about use of the land, but there may be increased cost and potentially effected services caused by having the shelter in a more remote, less accessible location.

Chairman Hutchinson asked Julian Long, Rochester Economic Development specialist, if there would be anything available in CDBG for staffing. Mr. Long stated that staff can be paid through CDBG, but it is considered a public service and there is a 15% cap for the grant. This ends up being approximately \$30,000 - \$40,000 which is normally split between multiple organizations. It is not feasible to use the entire grant for one staff member, but a portion could be used along with other funding sources to equal a full salary.

Dave Carpenter, Dover, spoke about the possibility of reconfiguring the way certain agencies are funded through CDBG and potentially using public service funds in a different way in order to fund a staff member. There was a discussion in Committee regarding how different organizations are funded.

There was a discussion regarding existing locations, such as 38 Hanson Street in Rochester, which may not be ideal for a shelter location as it stands currently, but which could be further developed for that cause. Lindsey Williams, Dover Council, speculated that infrastructure investment could be an item which to potentially be

put in the Cities' respective budgets in order to work on renovations and development of such existing structures with the goal of a permanent shelter.

The Committee decided to focus the next meeting on developing a plan for a permanent shelter, including potential locations and staff as well as budgeting. Chairman Hutchinson stated that he would explore the potential of the use of 38 Hanson Street in Rochester. Mr. Marsh said there are pros and cons to linking the homeless services line item to specific properties, but as far as the budget process is concerned, now is the time to make adjustments so the money is in place when it is needed.

9. Closing Public Input

Ms. Andrews Parker reported that CAP is starting up their summer meals program on Monday May 18th starting in Rochester. There will be a schedule posted on social media of the other locations and times; they do travel to the schools and several other locations in many local communities.

The next meeting will be Thursday June 11th via Zoom, 6:00 PM.

10. Adjournment

Chairman Hutchinson **ADJOURNED** the remote meeting of the Fidelity Committee at 7:32 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cassie Givara

Deputy City Clerk, Rochester