

VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES

Monday January 9, 2023, 6:00pm

Virtual meeting link:

<https://cow.webex.com/j.php?MTID=m9d233db4f78bb0528628acf433e3ce8a>

Meeting number: 2311 007 3698 Password: C6GputMFp79 Phone: 415-655-0001

This meeting was not live streamed tonight.

Attendance

Members present: Charles Hopkins, LaToya Lewis, Elizabeth O’Callahan, Jamaine Ortiz, Edward G. Robinson, Jacqueline Yang

Members absent: Guillermo Creamer Jr., Jorge Lopez-Alvarez, Ellen Shemitz

Staff: Jayna Turchek

Guests: Eniya K. Lufumpa, City of Worcester Director of Homeless Services; Evis Terpollari, City of Worcester Homeless Outreach Worker

Call to order and introductions

Vice Chairperson O’Callahan called the meeting to order at 6pm. Ms. Turchek provided the technology instructions for public access to the meeting.

Ms. O’Callahan began with an acknowledgement of the traditional, ancestral, territory of the Nipmuc, the first people of Massachusetts and those whose land we are convening on tonight. While the Nipmuc history predates written history, records from the 1600s inform us that the original inhabitants of Worcester dwelled principally in three locations: Pakachoag, Tatesset (Tatnuck), and Wigwam Hill (N. Lake Ave). It is important to make this acknowledgment and to honor the ancestors that have come before us. It is all too easy to live in a land without ever hearing the traditional names and the history of the people who first resided and prospered in these lands and continue to reside and prosper.

The Human Rights Commission was established to promote the city’s human rights policies. It is the policy of the City to assure equal access, for every individual, to and benefit from all public services, to protect every individual in the enjoyment and exercise of civil rights and to encourage and bring about mutual understanding and respect among all individuals in the city. Our work requires us to address institutional racism so that as a community we can achieve racial equity. Our work also requires us to make visible the unheard, unearned, and unquestioned privilege enjoyed by some members of our community to the detriment of others. We take time to make this acknowledgement, to educate, so a path can be cleared for healing.

Mr. Hopkins shared the terms of the Commission. The term “**institutional racism**” refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies create difference outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional polices may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to

create advantages for whites and the oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

The term “**racial equity**” is the active state in which race does not determine one’s livelihood or success. It is achieved through proactive work to address root causes of inequalities to improve outcomes for all individuals. That is, through the elimination or shifting of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

The term “**privilege**” describes the unearned social power and informal institutions of society to all members of a dominant group. For example: “white privilege” and “male privilege.” Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we are trained to not see it but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage against those who do not have it.

Approval of meeting minutes from December 5, 2022

Motion was made by Commissioner Hopkins and seconded by Commissioner Robinson to approve the December 5, 2022 minutes as written. These minutes were unanimously approved by roll call 6-0-0.

Annual Homelessness Update

Ms. O’ Callahan welcomed Eniya K. Lufumpa, City of Worcester Director of Homeless Services who introduced Evis Terpoliari, Homeless Projects Manager. This Commission provided a list of questions for response to assist the discussion. Dr. Lufumpa provided the Commission with a PowerPoint for the update.

1. Please share an update on new homelessness initiatives and staffing:

Staffing

Staffing has grown a bit this year and includes: Director of homeless Services, Homeless Projects Manager, Community Navigator/Recovery Coach, another Recovery Coach, three additional Recovery Coaches through Spectrum Health Services, Inc. who help with outreach and recovery services.

2. Initiatives include:

- a. Weekly outreach efforts with the City’s Quality of Life Team helping to locate homeless people. On Wednesdays and Thursdays SMOC, Open Sky, and Veterans, Inc. meet to determine resources available.
- b. Hub Initiative – Group of human service agency staff available to help a person who needs particular service(s), a case is presented and a point person helps identify the appropriate agency(s) that can provide service(s) to protect the person from risk. Examples: connecting the person with medical services, helping a person get back into school.
- c. Housing First Coordinating Council (creating additional Units – three projects) which comes out of the City Manager’s Office. This Council involves four different components. The Data Component keeps track of the number of homeless individuals and trends. Support Services Component looks at the services that are available and

needed. Crisis Response Component connects people to health and housing resources. Fourth is the Housing Supply Component which keeps track of the number of units in the city available to homeless people. Negotiations are in the works to have 80 to 90 permanent units available in the Quality Inn Hotel in addition to the Lewis Street and 15 to 20 Tiny Houses by SMOC and Worcester Community Housing have ideas for housing units as well.

- d. Recovery Coach Initiative - Working with the Division of Public Health and Spectrum Health System, Inc. to provide health and recovery care through a recovery continuum of care
- e. Working with the local shelters (SMOC) and medical facilities to improve the model of care by reviewing policies and other issues the city can help with.
There is a bi-weekly meeting with SMOC to include review of policies and informing SMOC what the city team hears from their clients. The team works with medical facilities. A more recent effort to this initiative of improve care model is for example when a homeless person who goes to the hospital often upon discharge there is no place to go. The city team is helping medical facilities to know better options than the street such as a nursing home, etc.

3. Is there a change in population from last year? (ie # of homeless persons; newly homeless; demographic trends). What accounts for that change?

The data being used here is from Central Mass. Housing Alliance (CMHA) and HUD. The most recent data (CHMA) is from November 2022. There were 586 people homeless, sheltered and unsheltered individuals. This is an increase due to lack of housing affordability and Worcester having services, people come for the services. Shelters see a doubling of individuals in the winter. During the summer they stay in encampments.

The Team works with individuals, sometimes families. City Health and Human Services (HHS) will work with families. The HUD data indicates homelessness doubled from 2021 -2022. For 2021 HUD data does include unsheltered individuals but in 2022 it does. That number is 605 homeless individuals. This number includes Worcester County. There were 600 Females, 668 Males, 9 Transgender, 6 Non-binary Total 1,277 includes families.

4. Please provide list of all the homeless shelters operating in the city (individual and family). Where can this be found on the city website? (Please share link)

Shelters in the City are:

25 Queen Street (up to 100 beds), and the MLK (237 Chandler Street) 54 beds – operated by SMOC

Harbor – operated by LIFT 15 beds for people who identify as women

Sewing Seeds at Bethlehem Hall (561 Pleasant Street) Up to 60 beds – Overflow shelter operated by Open Sky

Abby's House

Veteran's Inc. (15 beds for women) (15 beds for male)

Some addresses were not shared for safety reasons. Currently there are 227 shelter beds.

5. Data on the homeless population in the city broken down by gender

There were 600 Females, 668 Males, 9 Transgender, 6 Non-binary Total 1,277 includes families.

6. Where on the city website can the public find information about the work of the Homeless Services team and find information about resources?

There is a plan to establish a homeless division within HHS and once this is done there will be a tab on the website with all the services that are provided.

7. Article 10, Section 17 of the city of Worcester ordinances states there is a Homelessness Commission operated from the Department of Health and Human Services under the Transitional Housing Services Division. There is no reference online that the Commission has members or is currently meeting. What is the status of that

Commission? www.worcesterma.gov/uploads/7d/6b/7d6b98c1a1640e52880307f1112ef1f0/revised-ordinances-2015-2.pdf<<http://www.worcesterma.gov/uploads/7d/6b/7d6b98c1a1640e52880307f1112ef1f0/revised-ordinances-2015-2.pdf>> and www.worcesterma.gov/boards-commissions<<http://www.worcesterma.gov/boards-commissions>>

There has been conversation with Dr. Castiel and this is still a work in progress.

8. When was the last multi-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Worcester published and where is that located on the city of Worcester website?

This question was not addressed at this point in the presentation.

9. What are the current performance measurements and benchmarking criteria used to quantify the impact of homelessness programs?

One benchmark is how many people we are successfully in shelter. Other criteria include wrap around services for example getting into treatment and employment. Worcester is one of 100 COCs in the nation. A Continuum of Care is an integrated system of care that guides and tracks homeless individuals & families through a comprehensive array of housing & services designed to prevent and end homelessness. Using this system Worcester has been able to housing 400 people. The tracking system includes those who are looking for housing, one bedroom unit, and that number is high due to affordability and availability. With the city's effort to promote such housing and the projects earlier mentioned Worcester has a good chance of housing individuals who have been homeless. Worcester has gone from 25 beds on Queen Street to close to 250 to 300 beds. Even though shelters have capacity they have always made shelter available to those that need it. The increase in the Homeless population is from several factors beyond those already mentioned include Worcester has developed more capacity. We are a large city with services and attracts people from other towns and out of state. The mental health crisis in the nation has created homelessness and the elderly are being effected by high housing costs and mental health issues..

Back to Initiatives, Worcester works with the 14 largest cities in Massachusetts. To see if they can ramp up services so people are staying in their own communities.

10. What are the most significant challenges faced by the quality of life team?

We are the Homeless Outreach Team and we are separate from the city managers' Quality of Life Team which we work closely with. The Quality of Life Team deals with a number of things beyond the homeless. They deal with overgrown grass, trash in inappropriate places including furniture, mattresses. They often know the homeless encampment locations. The challenge here is finding immediate solutions. This is when the Homeless Outreach Team comes in and does their best to connect those living in the encampment to appropriate service. Keeping the city clean can be an issue. At the same time civil liberties has to be respected as well when cleaning. Staff can get in the cross-fire.

11. What education resources do we have in place to prevent homelessness?

12. What types of wrap-around services are offered to the unhoused population?

Questions 11 & 12 were not specially addressed, but touched on in other responses.

13. How do calls to 911 and 311 regarding homeless encampments handled?

Mr. Terpoliari gets these calls and will review on the Tuesday and Thursday meetings with the Quality of Life Team.

14. Although we want people off the streets, are there any church groups that hand out blankets and sleeping bags?

There are many faith-based groups that support the Teams efforts. Nonprofits also contribute to supporting the effort. Meals are provided every day of the week. Hunger is one of the data points collected. There has been good ability to connect people with food stamps and other food related services.

15. What is the timeline for the tiny houses for the homeless?

They are finalizing funding Construction is expected to begin in late Fall.

The foundation on Lewis Street has been laid. Occupancy permit is expected in August and hopefully people can begin to move in by the end of the year. (24 beds and one unit for staff.)

16. Is there a need for the City of Worcester to adopt a Homeless Persons Bill of Rights? Is there any support locally or at the state level for its adoption? For more information: <https://nationalhomeless.org/campaigns/bill-of-right/>

There is support for a Homeless Persons Bill of Rights. Worcester already does what the Bill of Rights calls for, Worcester should definitely adopt.

This ended the formal presentation.

Commissioner Lewis thanked the presenters and said that he wished the Team could help the way he would like, but knew services like detox were thin and wait lists exist. Some of her clients find the way to get into a program is unfortunately only by relapsing. She shared that she

does not recommend her clients go to the SMOC shelter because of the atmosphere of fighting and the lack of ability for staff to do what is needed. She says as a provider she cannot reach SMOC by phone as no one answers. There are so many barriers and challenges. The price of the housing voucher does not coincide with today's market. She expressed concerned that as we wait for these new beds the homeless population is increasing.

Mr. Terpollari responded. The Team is facing these challenges as well. The Team works on a four-pronged approach:

1. Recovery coach comes in the morning knowing where the treatment beds are. In the past a morning call for a bed would reveal that Boston got a bed in Worcester. He thinks more should be done to use measured outcomes of treatment facilities.
2. Advocate for non-congregate types of shelters which gives privacy.
3. People that are doubling up in apartments are not homeless long enough. Once the team finds one, the Team has to document the homeless situation in order to be eligible for services. As far as the housing voucher situation, these new vouchers are for recently homeless people. They don't need to have the status of being homeless for 12 consecutive months.
4. People get vouchers and are not able to use them. The only thing he sees that will get us out of this homeless cycle is to build extremely low cost housing. There is a scoring list for housing vouchers. Hopefully, by the ending of the year we will see people that have been homeless for a limited time be eligible for a voucher.

How many people in the city of Worcester are chronically homeless?

In 2022 there were 151 chronically adult homeless persons out of 586 homeless individuals. 69% White, 25%, Black or African American. Dr. Lufumpa will send the statistics. Massachusetts is the only state where there is a Right to Shelter Law.

Does the Housing Voucher meet the person's ability to pay the rent?

HUD has made an effort to increase the voucher adjusted to market rent by about \$100. Using the federal continuum of Care (CoC) entrance process helps. There are landlords in the city that have worked with this process for years and are happy to do this because they receive a check directly from the government for the person's rent.

The City has formed the Landlord Guarantee Fund. This is a way the City wants to support landlords. This Fund is about \$10,000 and can be used to pay for damage, unpaid rent, eviction process, etc. Less than 1% of the former homeless people housed have lost housing.

Is there a policy for evicting people in an encampment?

This was worked on last year and guidelines were drawn up which are being followed. It went to City Council It stalled related to how long it takes to get people housed. It can be complicated depending on whose property the encampment is on. This will be revisited once a timeline for housing people is determined. Hopefully the draft policy will go back

to City Council in the next couple of months. The policy development is with HHS, Quality of life Team and DPW & Parks. The city has no jurisdiction over state owned property. This city first effort is to buy time so homeless can be accessed and shelter provided. The Team has been quite successful in creating a smooth transition for everyone.

Is there a relationship with the Police Department?

Yes, there are two police officers on the Quality of Life Team. They do not have enforcement power in this role. The focus is providing services.

Are there any great business partners you would like to give a shout out to?

We consider ourselves as the only boots on the ground. There are others; however we work with every situation. The Team partners with SMOC outreach, Open Sky, Spectrum Health Systems, Inc. Everyday Miracles helps with support services. Man of Compassion provides furniture and beds. Green Corps removes trash out of public spaces – organizing homeless to help creating the communities trust. Catholic Charities, Inc. houses families until documentation can be verified. Other partners too many to name that have been helpful.

Can you give an update on cooling and warning centers?

The Senior Center and Public Library/ Guidelines should be ready in a month. The City is on board, we need other partners. The City Manager is looking for other places in the City to provide this service closer to peoples' homes. A note on shelters; Shelters let their clients stay inside in inclement weather.

Is the statistic of homeless clients having mental health collected?

Yes, Central Mass. Housing Alliance does collect this information. The Team has this information. 95 of the homeless clients indicated mental health issues.

Are you getting referrals from the hospitals and which hospitals?

Mass Health and Mass Department of Public health have this data. The Team's data working Group may have this data as well. One of the questions on the Homeless Intake Form is where are you coming from> a response could be an institution.

Are homeless asked if they are working with other case managers?

Yes. They are asked if they are working with other resources so there is no duplication of services. In some cases they may be working with a mental health worker but the person has no way to access the worker and therefor discharged.

Last year the city was losing psychiatric professionals. Has this changed?

There is now the "Road to Care" van. The Team keeps in touch with the two doctors on that van. They are responsive and there when assistance is needed. Provide medicine when it runs out or stolen. Get people into treatment. Provided care when insurance runs out. They were able to help purchase shoes of a large size. The Team works with the Crisis Intervention Team. This team will come to the person and treat him/her. The Worcester Police Department is working on a grant to hire a physician to work with the

Crisis Intervention Team. Each situation is different. The team tries to be creative in meeting the needs.

Commissioner Lewis informed the Commission about a new insurance out of Mass Health called Mass Program designed specifically for homeless individuals. They have to meet three criteria one of which is a housing lease. She is working with a MassHealth worker to change this because people in Worcester are in shelters and other housing that do not have leases or money for first last month rent. She received an email stating her comments were being considered and a revision to the criteria is forthcoming. The Team has not been able to use this resource to date. She will connect with Mr. Terpoliari.

Is there a update report from the Housing First Coordinating Council?

The 2021 report is not out yet. The Council is working on the recommendations. It was noted the work shifted a bit last year. Some of the progress was noted -Examples - From hiring particular staff to understanding the job description and actually working with /recovery coaches.

Notice: Human Rights Campaign, 2022 Municipal Equality Index

https://reports.hrc.org/municipal-equality-index-2022?_ga=2.50915817.1983743996.1670528591-406269306.1669737227

Adjournment

Commissioner Robinson moved to adjourn at 8:06pm Commission Yang seconded. Approve by roll call 6-0-0.

Next meeting: Monday February 6, 2023, 6pm, (In person at City Hall and over WebEx)