

CITY OF LACONIA  
Mayor's Homelessness Task Force  
Tuesday, December 15, 2020 - 4:00 PM  
Remote access via Zoom

Mayor Andrew Hosmer read the e-meeting introduction.

Members in attendance: Andrew Hosmer, City Mayor; Daisy Pierce, Navigating Recovery; Carmen Lorentz, Lakes Region Community Developers; Leonard Campbell; Eric Adams, Laconia Police Dept; Skylor Berry; Cathy Raymond; Ron DeDucca, Loving Lakes Region; Jason Bean, Laconia Fire Dept; Pam Wellman, Family Promise of Southern NH; Kimbly Wade; Siobhán Balázs; Julie Hart; Scoop Welch; Celyne Godbout, Peter R. Brunette

Absent: Kelsi Lemear, Mike Davis, Colleen Garrity, Amy Hinds, Amy Jones, Peter Karagianis, David and Dawn Longval

Staff in attendance City Manager Scott Myers and Glenn Smith, Zoom Host

The Mayor thanked the members for taking their time to join the meeting.

Mayor A. Hosmer brought up the initial report and action plan from the Council on Housing Stability, which was approved unanimously by the committee on Friday December 11, and urged the Task Force members can take time to look through it.

Mayor A. Hosmer introduced Amy Beaudoin. She worked in the area for a number of years and had firsthand experience of the situation. He has been communicating with A. Beaudoin recently. It is critical to the Task Force to get the best understanding possible. She explained her situation. She is currently living in a tent in Belmont. She has been working with the homeless in the area for over five years and now that she is in that situation, her eyes have been widened to feel the judgment. This has broken her heart. There has been a need in the area for housing and other needs. She would like to see the area united. Not all homeless are addicts or using. She asked if anyone were to become homeless would they know what to do? Education needs to be more adamant. There are people that do bad things that are not homeless. Belongings need to be taken with them or get thrown out. Homelessness can happen to anyone. She became homeless at the beginning of the summer. She has two jobs with still no place to go. What is preventing that from happening is that there isn't enough housing and she does not have the money. Mayor A. Hosmer asked for a sense of what a day is like and she explained.

P. Brunette brought up a village or something that could house camps for folks to use. A. Beaudoin is in an area near Piche's that used to be a camp. She thinks the stigma of homelessness needs to change. There is nowhere safe to go and the homeless get kicked out of places.

Mayor A. Hosmer asked what the biggest obstacle would be. A. Beaudoin said it is lack of jobs and people's past is a huge issue. P. Brunette asked if there is any outreach in the community. A. Beaudoin has reached out to some people but not heard anything back yet. Mayor A. Hosmer asked what would be the one thing necessary to be able to have housing stability. A. Beaudoin said it would be an old hotel or vacant building to be fixed up and each person would need to do something for the community in order to live there. She does not go to the doctors and doesn't have healthcare currently.

Ron DeDucca addressed the Task Force. He has worked with A. Beaudoin over the years. He also talked about a gentleman and the process that person had gone through.

Leonard Campbell asked if there is one solution or one way this can be resolved and A. Beaudoin said absolutely not, but the main need is to have a safe place to live.

Mayor A. Hosmer told A. Beaudoin that it is important to the Task Force that she remain involved with the group and remain not only part of defining the challenges but finding the solutions. A. Beaudoin said the community is strong and needs to be bridged together.

Daisy Peirce gave a brief update on the gaps and barriers of the homeless population. The three biggest barriers discussed were stigma and judgment, short term goals for that would be a community wide education effort. Another barrier is the need to enhance intercommunication. Short term goals would be to have a more solid referral system. A last barrier is the lack of beds. A short term goal for that issue would be to begin to identify where a low barrier warming shelter could be located for people to go during cold weather.

Kimby Wade explained what is in the process of being done with the community wide education effort. Results of assessments should be available soon. She has given D. Pierce a draft of the resource map which will be updated periodically.

Mayor A. Hosmer expressed concern for the immediate needs for cold weather shelters and asked for suggestions from the Task Force. D. Peirce brought up some challenges such as location, and with COVID there still needs to be social distancing so the location needs to be big enough, with an educated staff and funding for transportation for when the shelter closes or medical attention is needed.

Mayor A. Hosmer asked P. Wellman for her expertise on the situation. She noted they are going through the same thing with cold weather shelters and have collaborated with some of the churches. There is just a lack of real estate in many areas. She asked if there is an empty school of any kind that could be renovated for beds.

Kristy Shot, Bureau for Housing Support for DHHS spoke. She thanked A. Beaudoin and explained her roll with the Bureau. There is a statewide system that anyone experiencing homelessness can access. She has been working with companies in this region on housing options. There are housing grants and other options being worked on as shelters are not housing. There are some emergency solutions and grant funding available, and she suggested contacting Belknap/Merrimack CAP for more information. She explained what some of the caseworkers are currently doing for the homeless. The Carey House can be contacted for information as well. With the weather getting colder and the storm coming, she suggested people call the shelters to see if they can help.

Carmen Lorentz believes the City received money for housing in a hotel as a short term option during cold weather. There needs to be more infrastructure for permanent stable housing in the area. At the end of January, the NHHFA will put out an RFP for supportive housing projects as they do once a year. As for models as to how to approach this, it is necessary to first understand what the needs are. She feels that the CAP staff will have a big picture view on obstacles in the area.

Mayor A. Hosmer noted that there will always be part of the population that do not want this type of housing due to the stigma. He wondered how that is dealt with. C. Lorentz feels that location selection is important and the people are already here creating the demands on the community. It is more

beneficial to have this type of housing available so there isn't a burden on the community where services are available. People can move forward when there is less to worry about personally. Those options are not provided right now and that is the reason for the current problem and conversation.

Siobhan Balazs asked A. Beaudoin if there is another first step that would be immediate and was told that it depends on where you are and who is around. Each individual is different and if they were given something to do there is the harm reduction. There are many different needs in the community and the needs won't all be fixed overnight.

Daisy Pierce suggested that the next two work groups can identify the needs of those experiencing homelessness to find out what supporting housing would be and start getting something ready for the RFP, and the other work group could work on getting the cold weather shelter up and running as soon as possible. A. Beaudoin asked where she could be during the day as she works at night and most places are open for night sleeping.

Mayor A. Hosmer asked J. Bean if he had a sense of the amount of people that will need to be served for a shelter and was told dozens and dozens, not just this year. L. Campbell asked if the Partnership for Public Health would do anything for this kind of shelter and E. Adams assumes only for a mass blizzard. He suggested looking at the website to find out. The long term goal would be to have shelter set up for the cold months and not just cold spells. He would suggest no less than 50 beds for an immediate shelter. Surrounding communities will be sending people as well. He asked if it will be just Laconia or the county and it would be possible to check to find out where people are from. D. Pierce noted that Rochester's shelter is for Stafford County only. E. Adams said for the county he would have no less than 70 beds. This is something to seriously consider looking into. Over the years there has been a lot of community collaboration. Mayor A. Hosmer offered anyone that is interested in the low barrier shelter community to reach out to D. Pierce. E. Adams suggested the Fire Dept and Police Dept should each have a person on that work group. P. Wellman added that transitional programs help with working through those barriers that keep folks homeless. She encouraged the Task Force to inspire a transitional program in Laconia.

L. Campbell spoke to the low barrier concern raised. Communication was key to the success of the Belknap House. Working within the county there were agreements with the surrounding towns and he feels the towns will work together in the future.

Next steps: D. Pierce will work on the low barrier cold weather warming shelter and C. Lorentz will work on the group for housing. Mayor A. Hosmer will send out emails for those who would like to join the groups.

Mayor A. Hosmer thanked the Task Force and wished all Happy Holidays.

The meeting ended at 5:32 PM

Respectfully,  
K. Graham