

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes - 1/7/20

In attendance: Senator Adam Hinds, Rep. Natalie Blais, Rep. Pat Duffy, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Lisa Fletcher-Udel and Morinsola Tinubu, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Jared Freedman, Office of Senator Jo Comerford, Caitlyn Letourneau, Office of Senator John Velis, Katie O'Leary, Office of Rep. Mindy Domb, North Adams Mayor Tom Bernard, Northampton Mayor David Narkewicz, Wayne Feiden, Merridith O'Leary, Alan Wolf, all City of Northampton, MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Mary Beth Ogulewicz, Town of Amherst, Allison Dane, ServiceNet, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Gina Govoni, Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Rick Hart, Friends of Hampshire County Homeless, John Hornik Amherst Affordable Housing Trust, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Bill Miller, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Theresa Nicholson, CHD, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Keleigh Pereira, Three County CoC, Phil Ringwood, DIAL/SELF, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for All MA, Liz Whynott, Tapestry

Community Reports:

North Adams: Shelter capacity ok, still space at the contracted hotel rooms; providing emergency housing for youth and young adults at Louison House, working with DIAL/SELF and Berkshire Regional Housing on youth initiative

Pittsfield: Emergency shelter continues at St. Joe's High School. Still with significant capacity. Working on opening a warming center at a portable classroom at the Christian Center - hopefully 2-3 weeks away from opening. ServiceNet will staff it, will be open Mon-Fri.

Greenfield: Warming center now open (co-located with The Living Room) - open 5 hours/day with, staffed by CSO - thanks to organizations working together to make this happen. Wells St Shelter: almost done construction for expansion. 15-17 people currently at shelter (almost at capacity) - will have 10 more beds once construction is complete. In the meanwhile, ServiceNet received approval to contract hotel rooms if needed.

Northampton: First Churches emergency site is almost at capacity. Had one COVID positive case but based on subsequent testing is contained. Now possible for guests to stay in a quarantine spot within the shelter prior to getting negative test, allowing for more immediate access. Mayor thanked Health Dept for their support; and Coca-Cola Co. for contributing water.

Amherst: 25 people in hotel; 14 people at UU - at capacity. Will reach out to Northampton and Holyoke hotel to determine if shelter is available for those seeking.

Holyoke: No update available on congregate shelter site (City of Holyoke was not in attendance). Theresa Nicholson of CHD reported that the Holyoke hotel has 38 shelter guests (with capacity for 45). Everything going very smoothly, working closely in partnership with Holyoke Police to obtain support for people on street; working in collaboration with recovery workers. Please contact Theresa (text or call) if you are seeking to refer to the hotel (413-313-2237).

Springfield: Friends of the Homeless is working on getting vaccines for both guests and staff. That is their focus right now. On Springfield area hotels: Catholic Charities reported that the hotels are at capacity with 135 guests. Continuing the re-housing efforts.

Eviction Update

Rose Webster-Smith of Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for All MA Coalition offered these latest numbers re:eviction filings (only those with a non-payment component) post the lifting of the moratorium:

Hampden County - 675, 432 in Springfield

Berkshire County - 115

Hampshire County - 66

Franklin County - 47

The Governor signed into law new tenant eviction protections -please [click here](#) for the summary from Homes for All MA Coalition.

Rose noted that there are no protections included for homeowners against foreclosure as the national protections expire. This will be addressed in soon to be proposed legislation.

Other announcements:

- Stay tuned for significant policy changes to the RAFT program that will be announced on Monday 1/11. They will address the documentation requirements (make them easier) and the sustainability requirement (lifting it), among other things.
- Bill filing for the new legislative session has been extended to Feb. 19 (from Jan. 15) - please communicate with our legislators re: housing priorities (note: Homes for All MA is meeting on this right now).
- Noted youth housing openings in Franklin County - contact DIAL/SELF Youth and Community Services at 413-774-7054 x 4 or in Berkshire County: contact Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority at 413-443-7138 x229. For Hampden County, contact 1-413-316-4979.

Next meeting date: Tues., Jan. 26, 9 am (note: at our meeting we initially declared 1/19 but the date has been changed!).