

Homelessness Task Force Meeting Minutes March 31, 2022

Chief Spalding called meeting to order at 9:03 am.

Members Present- Terri Steenburgen, Monica Steele, Jerome Steegmans, Mike Davis, Leslie Ford, Arline LaMear, Teresa Barnes, Kate Allen, Sean Fitzpatrick, Eva Hague, Kenny Hansen, Viviana Matthews, Osarch Orak, Susan Prettyman

Guests Present -

Staff Present- Mayor Jones, City Manager Estes, and Police Chief Spalding.

Approval of Minutes

- A. The minutes of the January 20, 2022, meeting were unanimously approved as submitted.

Mayor's Welcome

- A. Mayor Jones welcomed members and attendees and thanked everyone for accommodating this meeting's schedule changes. He provided a brief overview of the purpose of the Homelessness Task Force (HOST) and noted that this would be Chief Spalding's last meeting before retiring, thanking Chief Spalding for his service.

Community Forum Recap

- A. Mayor Jones reported that over 400 people attended the community forum to discuss livability, which was held at the Liberty Theatre. The forum was facilitated by an impartial third party. All questions and comments were submitted in writing and were categorized by Kevin Leahy from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Teresa Barnes from the Astoria Warming Center, Janet Hutchins who owns a small business on 10th Street and a board member of the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA). The panel responding to questions and comments included Clatsop County Sheriff Matt Philips, Chief Spalding, Mayor Jones, David Reid from the Chamber of Commerce, Viviana Matthews from Clatsop Community Action (CCA), Amy Baker from Clatsop Behavioral Health (CBH), and Erin Carlsen from LifeBoat Services. Presentations were given by law enforcement and social service agencies. A similar forum specifically for businesses would be held on April 5th at the Fort George Lovell Showroom from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

Harbor Shelter Program

- A. Terri Steenburgen gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Harbor's mission, current programs and services, 2021 statistics, and facts about domestic abuse.

She answered questions from members about the Harbor's need for emergency shelter options, safety and security, their annual budget, and serving people with pets. She confirmed for Mayor Jones that most of the people they serve would qualify for low-income housing.

ARPA Funds Update & County Properties

- A. Monica Steele provided an update on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds received by Clatsop County and explained how the funds had been allocated for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. Her update focused on funding for non-profit agencies, childcare, and Clatsop Behavioral Health.

She also reported on County-owned properties. A space feasibility study was being conducted for all of the County's services, which would include recommendations for the use of the existing jail facility. Inmates would be relocated to the remodeled facility in Warrenton in October. The County would also be working with non-profits and developers to provide a variety of housing types on their foreclosed properties located within city limits. This would require the County to work with the cities as well since the cities had their own zoning requirements. She also noted that Staff would recommend to the Budget Committee that the homeless liaison position and non-profit support be re-funded for the next fiscal year.

Countywide Liaison Workgroup Update

- A. Jerome Steegmans gave a slideshow presentation that included a brief overview of emergency warming shelter operations over the last winter season and a story about a homeless person who took advantage of several resources available in the area. He also reported on the homeless liaison team's outreach program and their collaboration with CBH.

Clatsop Behavioral Health Updates

- A. No update was provided.

Helping Hands Update

- A. Mike Davis updated members on Helping Hands' partnership with the warming center, their shelters, programs and services.

Opportunity Village Update – Non-Agenda Item

- A. Ron Maxted gave an overview of Opportunity Village, which was following the model used by Square One Village in Eugene to provide transitional housing. Clatsop Community Action is being considered as their fiscal sponsor.

LifeBoat Services Update

- A. Oz reported on LifeBoat's partnership with Camp Rilea, their programs and services, community outreach, and upcoming projects. He also noted that LifeBoat was able to facilitate a camp site and locker spaces if a location was made available.

Chairperson Transition

- A. Mayor Jones announced that City Manager Estes would lead the meetings until a new Police Chief is hired.

Member Roundtable

- A. Chief Spalding said the City Council had approved an additional police officer position, subject to budget approval. When the new position is filled, an experienced officer would be dedicated to a community resource officer position and would work with a CBH crisis response worker.
- B. Arline LaMear said HOST had grown and evolved since it began and it had been great to see all of the changes that had been made. She thanked Chief Spalding for doing such a great job.
- C. Teresa Barnes said it was good to hear all of the updates. It was important for HOST members to know what resources were available in the community. However, the meetings always end before any action items are identified and assigned. She believed it was problematic to leave the meetings without addressing any issues. She shared a story about a woman who had been referred to the warming center by a HOST member after the warming center had closed. The HOST member had suggested that the warming center buy the woman a bus ticket out of town.

Chief Spalding agreed that actions items were the next step. He noted that when a new person takes over, HOST would have a fresh opportunity to take the group's efforts to the next level. Attendance at the meetings had grown and he was confident that HOST would make a difference despite the challenges.

Mayor Jones asked what the warming center needed to be in compliance with building codes to operate year-round and how much would those building improvements cost. Teresa responded that a sprinkler system would need to be installed and that would cost \$10,000 to \$15,000. She never received the complete list of repairs necessary because a City Staff person had said they did not want to overwhelm her. However, she believed the total cost of repairs would be about \$100,000 and the warming center did not have the church's permission

to install sprinklers because the building is historic. Mayor Jones said he believed the City should work with the County to decide on the best location for a year-round shelter.

City Manager Estes said he would have Staff contact Teresa, but the warming center or the church would have to get their own cost estimates. The City could provide information about what is required to obtain an occupancy permit.

- D. Bruce Williams asked what the obstacles were to allowing controlled and supervised camping. Mayor Jones responded that the City was in the process of drafting a list of potential locations, but no program or organization had been able to run such an encampment. Additionally, the City needed to ascertain whether the community preferred dispersed camping throughout the community or concentrated camping on one or more sites. Any site would be opposed by nearby residents, so the City would focus on finding the least objectionable site. Mr. Maxted noted that Opportunity Village's first obstacle was finding a fiscal partner. The next steps would be to get community support, find a site, and hire staff. Each step takes time. Oz added that LifeBoat would facilitate an encampment if a site was available. He wanted to find a location that would be safe from the lynch mob.
- E. Nate Pinkstaff asked for clarification about what Teresa wanted from the City. Teresa responded that she met with Staff last fall just before the Warming Center opened and did not understand why the Warming Center could only operate for 90 days. She was under the impression that House Bill 2006 eased the restrictions for emergency shelters. She also did not understand why there was a fire code. However, she believed a number of repairs would be necessary, but they would be cost prohibitive and the Warming Center did not have the church's permission to use their existing space indefinitely. She supported a permanent shelter, but the church was not an ideal location for that.

City Manager Estes explained that the State Fire Marshal allows temporary shelters to have exemptions from the fire code for 90 days. He further explained that City Zoning Ordinances used to require temporary shelters to get a temporary conditional use permit, which could be renewed annually. House Bill 2006 prohibited jurisdictions from addressing zoning issues for emergency shelters. Therefore, the City could no longer require a temporary conditional use permit, but the bill did not address building code requirements. Health, quality of life, and safety requirements are still in place, including the fire marshal's limit of

90 days. In order to operate year-round, the warming center would need to obtain an occupancy permit. He gave a brief summary of the City's permitting process.

Nate Pinkstaff stated he wanted the City and County to help people instead of just reviewing permit applications. City Manager Estes clarified that the City could not design projects but was mandated by the State to ensure that health, life, and safety requirements were met.

Nate said he was offended by Oz's use of the word lynch mob and explained he wanted to find a camping location that worked for everybody. Oz stated that many of the people who oppose his facility had never been in the facility or spoken to him.

- F. Gretchen Allen understood that Teresa did not get the feedback she wanted from Staff. She believed it was the City's job to provide feedback when trying to build something. The City is driving up the costs of building a home and is a roadblock in the housing crisis. Architects and builders are expensive, and they have to work around the City's lack of communication. City Manager Estes agreed that it was the City's job to answer questions.

Gretchen stated that a lot of meetings were occurring without City participation, and she had spoken with businesses who believed this was inappropriate and disrespectful. She said Oz had not asked any of the businesses what problems they were having and there was no mutual respect. She believed that locating a facility downtown was not kind because homeless people did not want to have their situations displayed for everyone in downtown. Mayor Jones reminded that the forum on Tuesday was specifically for businesses and the forums being held were just the first step in a continuing conversation. Additionally, LifeBoat looked for a facility for years because landlords did not want to rent to homeless services. It was not the City's choice to locate their facility at 12th and Commercial.

Gretchen said she believed low barrier shelters did not point people towards solutions and people were not using the services being provided, so living on the streets was being normalized. Additionally, a lot of money was being thrown at one service option that counteracted another.

Guest Comments

A. There were no comments from guests.

Chief Spalding said the meeting recordings and transcripts would be published on the City's website. He also encouraged everyone to look at the livability page of the City's website, which is updated as new information becomes available.

Next Meeting

- May 19, 2022 from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:46 am.