

CITY OF LACONIA  
Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness  
Tuesday, November 3, 2020 - 4:30 PM  
Remote access via Zoom

Mayor Andrew Hosmer read the e-meeting introduction.

Members in attendance: Andrew Hosmer, City Mayor; Peter R. Brunette; Mike Davis, Commander Salvation Army; Daisy Pierce, Navigating Recovery; Carmen Lorentz, Lakes Region Community Developers; Leonard Campbell; David and Dawn Longval, Isaiah 61 Café; Eric Adams, Laconia Police Dept; Skylor Beery, ; Cathy Raymond; Ron DeDucca, Loving Lakes Region; Amy Hinds, Laconia School District; Colleen Garrity; Jason Bean, Laconia Fire Dept; Pam Wellman, Family Promise of Southern NH; Kimbly Wade; Amy Jones; Peter Karagianis

Absent: Julie Hart, Scoop Welch, Celyne Godbout, Kelsi Lemear, Siobhán Balázs

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

Mayor A. Hosmer explained that the issue of homelessness is very complex with a wide array of opinion and suggestion. The meeting is scheduled for 90 minutes and he would like everyone to keep that in mind when speaking so everyone can have a chance to speak.

In January 2019 there were over 500,000 people homeless in the US. In Laconia homelessness continues to be a primary concern. He visited some of the homeless camps around the city this past summer and it was very eye opening with who was there. An issue brought up was if there are more services available does that draw homeless to the area. There is natural tension with this subject as well. The Mayor's goal is to get a better understanding of the data around the issue of homelessness and what impact does it have on individuals, local economy, local healthcare delivery system, schools, first responders, non profit community, city government and overall quality of life. He would like to begin with short-term, midrange and long-term goals.

### **Data & Potential Misconceptions**

Daisy Pierce gave a short video presentation. The video highlighted a few misconceptions on how homelessness starts. Only 3% of homelessness is a result of substances, 43% have substance use disorder and 66% develop substance use disorder after becoming homeless. In a national sample, 75% of homeless in the past year who had a substance use disorder also had a comorbid or cooccurring mental health disorder.

### **Belknap County Statistics**

Overall changes in homelessness in NH decreased by five percent from 2017-2019 and in Belknap County the number was 60 people in 2017, 85 in 2018 and 50 in 2019. There might be some missing data but overall those are the numbers. There is a difference in chronic homelessness vs temporary. She went over the numbers for the last few years. Greater support for permanent housing initiatives have reduced chronic homelessness by 26% since 2007 and completely ended it in some of the communities across the country.

### **Root Causes of Homelessness**

Carmen Lorentz introduced herself. She went over the slide on root causes and solutions. There are four areas: extremely tight housing market, insufficient rental assistance, widespread evictions and

inadequate infrastructure. The waitlist is usually a year for a housing voucher in Belknap County. The eviction level is higher and she feels it will be rising. She gave a background on Lakes Region Community Developers (which used to be Laconia Area Community Land Trust) and who they serve. NH needs 20,000 more units to level out the demand. Now with Covid, people are moving here to get out of the large areas they are in.

Mayor A. Hosmer asked the average cost of apartments and estimated wages needed. C. Lorentz said the NH Housing Finance Authority is a great resource, and according to them the median range is \$1,145 a month for a two bedroom, and a person would need an income of \$42,000 to afford that.

P. Brunette was a DCYF attorney and would like to make sure someone is advocating for the children as well. Mayor A. Hosmer asked A. Hinds about the students in the school system. There has been a 70% increase since 2012 of McKinney-Vento eligible over the years. The start of this school year this has decreased to 80 and ended 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years with 118.

Rebecca Bryant, CEO of Lakes Region Community Services, spoke. They deal with some of the children in the Lakes Region. They have been working with the Belknap House as well. There are classes for budgeting and tenancy for the families in need.

### **LRCD: Affordable Housing**

#### **Isaiah 61 Café**

Dawn and Dave Longval started the café a few years ago. He spoke about what they see at the café and what they do. They provide breakfast, lunch and dinner, showers and washers from 9-2 pm. Mostly they see Laconia residents. There are now some children that do their schooling at the café for the Wi-Fi. They feed them physically and try to feed them spiritually. There are about 50 people served for lunch daily. They have seen many move on and come back to volunteer. Families with children are the easiest to help and young adults with substance issues are the hardest.

Peter Karagianis has been seeing a lot of transient people vs local and that concerns him. Many conversations with them have been that people wanted to leave but are stuck here, they want to go home. He hopes to get to the root problems of the issue.

### **Survey Results**

Mayor A. Hosmer went over the results of the survey of the taskforce members.

### **Strategic Planning Framework**

Kelly Caravona is a certified prevention specialist for the State of NH with a background in public and mental health, but presents as a concerned citizen. She went over the slides. There are five steps: assessment, capacity, planning, implementation and evaluation.

A. Jones asked what Laconia numbers were compared to surrounding towns and what services do they provide compared to Laconia. Mayor A. Hosmer was not sure. He noted that one thing to think about as a group is why Laconia is carrying the bulk or burden and shouldn't we be engaging with other towns and communities where some of the folks are originating from and help with the lift. Some reasons for the transient population could be the emergency department at LRGH or the fact that some were released from the county complex with no place to go, or from Lakes Region Mental Health where they received critical service. He sees those as a draw to this area for some but that doesn't explain it all. C. Lorentz noted that it is logical to go a city where you can acquire what you need without transportation.

Leonard Campbell with Catholic Charities agreed with Lorentz that it is access.

## Next Steps

Daisy Pierce would like feedback on ideas or break into groups to identify the resources we already have and any gaps there might be, and look at models that have worked for other communities and bring that all back to task force.

Colleen Garrity from the Belknap House spoke. The house is currently full with six families, two from Belmont and the rest from Laconia. The barrier is trying to find affordable housing.

P. Brunette asked about barriers with evictions. Colleen noted that they look at what bridges are broken and work on fixing that. P. Brunette noted that other towns should be part of this task force.

Tom Cochran of Laconia Housing echoed C. Lorentz' comment. They use every voucher that the government allows and there is a long waitlist. He suggested finding out the homeless populations and the barriers faced and possibly build support services through Laconia's agencies. He gave an example on how to do that. He noted that the facilities should be working together to get the homeless on the list for the Housing Choice Voucher Management Program to see if they are eligible because it takes a long time. He also likes the idea of a task force.

Mike Davis of the Salvation Army introduced himself. He noted that the public needs to know that not all homeless are lazy and that there is a story behind each person that needs to be heard.

Pam Wellman of Family Promise introduced herself. Homelessness is so different in each community and each family and individual, and that is important to know.

Lea Brittan brought up what P. Brunette had mentioned with the eviction history. She said there is a program call Tenant 101 program which is for those with issues with past rental history and how to move forward.

In wrapping up the meeting the plan to identify the next steps that makes the most sense for the task force at this time. Education on what homelessness actually looks like and becoming familiar with services and support is the first thing to work on, then look at long term goals. Step one: Identify the assets and gaps. There was a suggestion to those interested in being part of the work group to let the Mayor know via email. Mayor A. Hosmer's goal is to have tangible benefits to the population and the city as a whole and like action items, no matter how small, to build momentum. He would also like to welcome the friends of the homeless community to participate for a real learning opportunity.

Mayor A. Hosmer values all the input and looks forward to the next meeting.

Adjourned at 6:10 PM

Respectfully,

Kalena Graham