



INTERAGENCY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS

Housing for all = A Stronger Montgomery

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/homelessness

HousingForAll@montgomerycountymd.gov

Virtual Zoom Webinar Meeting Minutes

Monday, April 27, 2020 | 2-4p

Members (Present or Represented)

Chesney, Amanda

Glass, Evan

Goldman, Jeff (Chair)

Habte, Asmara G.

Harris, Amanda

Johnson, Ebony (Vice Chair)

Kauffman, Louise

London, Sharan

Miller, Eneshal

Nigam Aseem

Rock, Shane

Roynestad, Brian

Seidel, Stan

Sinclair-Smith, Susan

Members (Absent)

Bennett, Teresa

Reuben, Ruschelle

Spann, Stacy

Talley, Angela

Zucker, Craig

104 Participants Signed on or Called into the Webinar

Welcome | Introductions – Jeff Goldman and Ebony Johnson

Jeff started the meeting with well wishes to all and their families who participated in the virtual meeting. Being confined to your home is a daunting experience but you can only imagine what it is like when you are without a home.

Jeff expressed there is a need to think about the current situation in phases. Currently, we are in the short-term phase of focusing on treatment and containment. Following this phase, we will experience economic fallout with increased numbers of people experiences homelessness and needing services. This will put added stress on our homeless system. Then there is the long-term decisions of what policies and funding should be put in place, so we learn to address future health crisis. Determining how we build a sustainable system for the long term.

Continuum of Care Response to COVID-19

Amanda Harris shared what Montgomery County has done to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness who are currently in emergency shelter and those sleeping outside (See Slides 5-6 for entire list). (PowerPoint Presentation: [IChFullMeeting PresentationApril27-2020.pdf](#))

Some of the highlights are:

Currently, there are approximately 400 single adults in shelter and about 50 families in shelter.

Helping People in Emergency Shelter:

- Winter seasonal shelters remained open and will continue open the duration of the health emergency. Two recreational centers have been repurposed as shelters to provide social distancing
- Quarantine locations for new intakes have been established
- People 62 and over with complex medical needs have been given the option to shelter in hotels
- Secured 48 hotel rooms for those who test positive for COVID-19. Hotels and motels provide the space only. The County is responsible for room cleaning, laundry, meals, and case management.
- Shelter staff are conducting regular screening for COVID-19 including daily temperature checks and monitoring symptoms at shelter and hotel.
- The State’s Task COVID Force Ready responder (EMS workers and CH Workers) are now available to do brief medical screening and provide test, as needed.

Helping People sleeping outside:

- Hotel rooms are being offered to high risk people and many have taken advantage of the opportunity.
- Shepherds Tables providing to-go brunches and dinners.
- The Interfaith Works Empowerment Center is closed but still providing shower facilities and soon laundry service in the community | Progress Place has reconfigured space to provide social distancing.
- Partnering with the City of Gaithersburg to provide and distribute daily meals.
- Exploring the option of providing shower access to people up county.
- Expanded medical services in partnership with outreach teams to screen for COVID-19. New medical provider, Dr. Kathryn Kelly, Medical Director & Physician of Kelly's Collaborative Medicine, has come on board to provide medical services in the shelters and street outreach.

Ilana Branda shared the efforts to prevent people from becoming homeless. There has been an increase in concerns from residents on how they will pay rents. (See Slides 7 and 8 for entire list). Some of the highlights:

Preventing People from becoming homeless: GOAL: Keep people housed

- Waiving requirement of court eviction notice and/or utility shut-off notices
- Waiving documentation requirements
- Germantown Emergency Services (ES) office is closed, and the parking is being used as a COVID testing center
- Rockville ES is open on Tuesday and Thursday and Silver Spring ES is open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for families seeking emergency services
- Flexible cash assistance for people in informal housing arrangements without an active lease
- Residents are being encouraged (1) to call to schedule phone interviews only, (2) use online applications and (3) to drop off documentation at office drop off boxes
- Extending eligibility for the Rental Assistance Program through July 2020
- Terminations from housing programs suspended

Protecting People through Housing: GOAL: Clear out the shelters by placing 75 people in permanent housing with case management in the next four weeks

- Providing additional slots within housing initiative program and prioritizing housing resources for those most at risk of COVID-19 complications
- Adding staff -- Housing Locators and Rapid Rehousing case workers
- Providing first month's rent and security deposit for any household exiting homelessness

Supporting our Partners:

- Providing cleaning supplies and PPE for shelter, outreach, and housing staff
- The Health Care for the Homeless Team is providing technical assistance to identify quarantine and isolation space how to implement the CDC guidelines on shelter protocols
- Approved incentive/hazard pay for shelter staff workers
- Every other day calls with the CoC to give updates, answer questions and collaboratively problem solve.
- Sharing resources for private funding sources with the providers – i.e., Greater Washington Community Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, National Healthcare for the Homeless, Carefirst

Exploring for ways to recognize the work of Frontline Workers:

Susie Sinclair-Smith shared that she and Shane Rock have been brainstorming on how to recognize the remarkable work of frontline workers. Perhaps a video for shelter workers featuring board members recognizing the workers by name. Ebony suggested incorporating the Councilmembers and the County Executive to have a celebration to thank the workers on the frontline.

Future forecasting of housing and homeless needs

Amanda shared slides on future forecasting. (Please review slides 11-18 for details). Highlights are:

Pre COVID-Statistics:

- Half of new households in Montgomery County low-income (earning under \$50,000 a year).
- Shortage of affordable housing – Additional unit to accommodate low-cost housing (2015-2030): 23,100 units.

After COVID Statistics: (After MCPS closed)

- Increase in number of households calling MC311 for services
- Increase in number of calls to MC311 for SEPH Prevention services
- From March 7 – April 18, 45,562 unemployment claims in 5 weeks | 8.0% of the County labor force | 75% increase

Comments:

- Ebony Johnson encouraged all to help clients apply for unemployment and other benefits that they are entitled to keep people out of shelter and the homeless system.
- Amanda Harris stated that homelessness has always been a crisis because it is unhealthy and unacceptable for people to be sleeping outside. Those who work in the homeless field have been acting with a sense of urgency for a long time. It is encouraging that other people are beginning to recognize the need to help.
- Amanda Chesney expressed that it is good to see people responding to the need to remove barriers. She expressed that we all hope this momentum continues and we learn from this experience so people experiencing homeless can receive the help they need.

Exploration of available funding for both immediate and long-term needs

Amanda shared slides that shows that Funding Availability, Summary of Eligible Activities and Funding Restrictions (See slides 20-25 for details.)

Funding Source Highlights:

- Emergency Solutions Grant, Round One: \$1,438,797
- Community Development Block Grant, Round One: \$2,955,102
 - Funds provided and managed by DHCA and they would be the point of contact for these funds
 - HUD has waived the need for a public hearing because of COVID
- Coronavirus Relief Fund – Estimated Allocation to Maryland: \$2,244,000,000
- FEMA Disaster Relief – Allocation to the State is unknown
- EARP -- Provides immediate cash assistance for people in need: Total funding is \$5 million
- Supplemental Funding for Housing -- \$2 million for rental assistance

Supplemental Funding for Housing Legislation:

Councilmember Evan Glass reported that tomorrow a public hearing and a vote will be held to legislate providing \$2 million to provide emergency support for rental assistance. It has been reported that nationally, one third of renters did not pay their rents the first of April. The \$2 million will provide rental assistance for those who are currently eligible and those who are in need. Evan also drafted a letter to County Executive Elrich to ask for the expansion of the rental assistance and housing stabilization easing barriers and restrictions (i.e., the need of and eviction notice, etc.) at this time where many are experiencing financial difficulties. The MC Council supports the passing of this legislation. All were encouraged to write in and express their support for the supplemental funding for housing legislation.

Questions and Comments:

Susie Sinclair asked whether some of these funds will be available to provide behavioral health. There have recently been six deaths through overdose which it is believed due to isolation and stress.

Amanda answered that Psychiatrist Tracee Burroughs-Gardner, MD, DFAPA (who is already seeing people at Progress Place) and LaSonya Kelly of Healthcare for the Homeless are exploring ways to increase services to

people in shelter and hotels. It makes sense to use the Coronavirus relief fund once we understand how to access those funds.

Amanda Chesney asked for assistance with filling employment vacancies. Is it possible to have vacancies posted on the County DHHS website to collectively host or highlight open positions for essential workers? In addition, collaborating to hold a virtual job fair to find and mobilize people to come on board to do the important work and use the funding. Ebony shared that she is experienced (logistics and technology) with hosting virtual job fairs. She is currently working on Veterans Virtual Hiring Job Fair. Stan shared to reach out to Serving Together.

Amanda Harris answered that the Department will help wherever we can, and this should be an effort of the entire Continuum.

Review of advocacy efforts on using hotels to address the public health emergency (VOTE)

Evan Glass reported that an advocacy group has suggested increasing the number of people experiencing homelessness in hotel and motel settings to increase social isolation and distancing. The advocates are not satisfied with the addition of recreation centers to increase shelter services.

Comments and viewpoint of ICH members:

- It is good people are paying attention to the issue of homelessness
- Housing is the solution for homelessness
- Hotels placement delays people getting permanent housing—Just a Band-Aid
- Not a good use of resources. We should invest in permanent solutions
- Advocates connected with members of the Peoples' Committee
- Members of People's Committee not in favor of hotel and motel placement, because
 - Who will do the cleaning?
 - How will people get their medication?
 - Who will provide needed services?
 - Concerns about safety
 - Women concerned about isolation (depression, loneliness). Shelters provided sense of community
- "People outside looking in don't know what they don't know." Shelters are providing social isolation and distancing:
 - Beds that are 6 feet or more apart
 - Increase cleaning (round the clock and at times every hour)
 - Personal Protective Equipment provided
 - When a client tests positive, has been in contact with someone who tests positive or is recovering that persons is sent to a hotel/motel to be quarantined and monitored for symptoms
- Challenges for clients who move to hotel/motel:
 - Unfamiliar with transportation options around new location
 - Cut off from donations of supplies and food
 - No shelter staff at hotel/motel to provide needed case management and services

- Interfaith Works (IW) have these comments and concerns:
 - IW has implemented all the CDC guidance with respect congregated living areas:
 - IW have lowered density and provided space between beds, etc.
 - In addition to following guidance, IW has created an environment where people have socialization, can be entertained, and not be bored.
 - Compliance is a big issue (wearing masks, staying apart, etc.). Social Workers on sight at shelters help with compliance issues. There is a loss of the expectation of compliance when a person moves to a motel setting.
 - Many women who are homeless are victims of trafficking and they do not want to go to motels because that is where they were trafficked. They do not feel safe in a hotel and it would endanger them to put them back in that setting.
 - Addiction is another concern. At a hotel/motel there will be no oversight and support (staff and Narcan) to handle overdoses quickly.
- Hotels are a good idea when dealing with those who have been infected, exposed or who are recovering from the virus.
- Hotels are not a good option for housing people experiencing homelessness.
- Hotel/Motel placement addresses some concerns but there are many complexities of homelessness that go unaddressed in a hotel/hotel setting

Conclusion: The ICH will draft a letter that describes all that the County has done. is doing and explain the many concerns that would go unaddressed in a hotel/motel setting. Also, explain that the hotel/motel option is needed at times and ask the advocates help and support in securing rooms, when needed.

Motion: Sharan London moved that we draft a letter outlining the work that has been done in community and giving ICH support for maintaining the current program and responding in kind. Amanda Harris seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Next meeting: Wednesday, May 20, 2020 – Zoom Platform