



INTERAGENCY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS

Housing for all = A Stronger Montgomery

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/homelessness

HousingForAll@montgomerycountymd.gov

Virtual Zoom Webinar Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 20, 2020 | 3-5p

Members (Present or Represented)

Chesney, Amanda

Goldman, Jeff (Chair)

Habte, Asmara G.

Harris, Amanda

Hong, Christine

Johnson, Ebony (Vice Chair)

Kauffman, Louise

London, Sharan

Miller, Eneshal

Nigam, Aseem

Roynestad, Brian

Schiller, Jen

Seidel, Stan

Members (Absent)

Bennett, Teresa

Glass, Evan

Reuben, Ruschelle

Spann, Stacy

Talley, Angela

Zucker, Craig

There were 85 guests who attended this meeting.

Welcome | Remarks – Jeff Goldman

Jeff Goldman shared the projection of a study out of Columbia University. The study projected that there will be a 40-45% increase (an additional 250,000 people) in individuals who will experience economic impact of COVID-19. This is something that the ICH needs to monitor closely. In addition, we need to support legislation that advances funding to address the suspected increases in homelessness and to identify housing resources.

Approval of Meeting minutes – Jeff Goldman and Ebony Johnson

The minutes for the March 4 and April 27 meeting were approved as written.

Update regarding the advocacy efforts on using hotels to address the public health emergency

Draft letters to the County Executive and the County Council were distributed for review and comment. The letters detail the Commission's and the CoC providers' concerns regarding exclusively using hotel/motel settings for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. ICH members were asked to share their input before the holiday weekend. Several Commissioners emphasized the need to ensure the advocates that hotels/motels are important for quarantining people who have been exposed and people testing positive for the virus. Sharing the numbers of people quarantined would help the advocates to see that we do use hotels/motels as a tool to help those experiencing homelessness, when appropriate.

Committee Updates

Communication Committee – Ilana Branda

Ilana reported that the Communication Committee:

- Meets weekly to address issues around the pandemic
- The Committee is looking for a Commission member to join the group
- The Committee has updated the Homelessness website's homepage with a list of FAQs so residents can get quick information. Also, there are many COVID-19 related resources available on the website
- The Committee has worked to get the word out about the campaign to house 75 households during the month of May through tweets, hashtags and getting the information in the County Executives' Newsletter
 - SEPH has received over 40 responses from landlords expressing a desire to partner with us
 - Over 40 people have moved into housing so far this month.

- The Committee is embarking on a “Stories of Success Initiatives” to share success stories from residents as to what it means to get that key. Homeless providers will be contacted to gather stories.
- Planning the annual Homeless Memorial has begun. The Committee is exploring what the Memorial will look like this year. The Committee wants to ensure that we continue to recognize the lives of those experiencing homelessness that were lost this past year

Peoples’ Committee – Eneshal Miller

Eneshal reported that the Committee currently has 8 members and will be meeting tomorrow (4/21) to adopt a mission statement. Eneshal expressed interest in joining the Communication Committee.

The Committee is also:

- Engaging the public for membership and exploring partnerships.
- Taking on the task of reviewing homeless provider’s contracts and has chosen the Interfaith Works Women’s shelter (IWWS) as the first contract for review
- Placing selection/navigation boxes in the IWWS to gather information from shelter residents regarding the resources and services they need. The suggestion box will also serve as a navigation tool. It will include strip card allowing people to add their name and identify what resource or provider they need.

Edwin Archer a person who is first-time homeless, currently being sheltered at Taft Court, a member of the People’s Committee and a member of Coalition180 reported that through a friend he has purchased a domain PeoplesCommittee.org. Peoples’ Committee will be discussing potential utilization of this option.

Christine Hong of Interfaith Works (IW) and Jen Schiller of Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH) both expressed appreciation for the members of the Peoples’ Committee and their anticipated work for the ICH. They both shared that the shelters have long ago established similar efforts proposed by the Peoples’ Committee (suggestions boxes, contract review, Consumer Advisory Council, Tenant Council, and a grievance process). Jen suggested that the Peoples’ Committee work with these groups to avoid undermining each other and ensure collaboration between the groups.

Edwin expressed his opinion that the different groups and resources do not necessarily talk to each other. The goals of the Peoples’ Committee would be to help eliminate duplicating of efforts and increase efficiencies. People experiencing homelessness would have the opportunity to provide input and share their point of views to help to streamline processes.

Amanda clarified that the Peoples’ Committee is part of the ICH and will report to the ICH in an advisory role. The work of the Peoples’ Committee is to improve the system as a whole. The goal of the suggestion box is to gather information from shelter residents on what opportunities there are to improve emergency shelter and provide them with housing. The contract review process starts with emergency shelter because several of the current 8 members of the Committee are in emergency shelter. The review will include looking at the contract and making recommendations to the ICH on what services and rules should be included and what the members recommend should be removed. Permanent contract changes must go through the County’s procurement review and process.

Funders and Partnership Committee – Sharan London

The Committee has multiple roles including overseeing the work of the Strategic Plan and the goal of increasing and diversifying funding. The Committee is currently working on drafting language to develop a Flexible Housing Fund that organizations could use to assist people experiencing homelessness to move into permanent housing.

2020 Point-in-time Results – Amanda Harris

Amanda Harris shared the highlights from the 2020 PIT count gathered in January 2020 through a PowerPoint Slide Presentation (Click Here to view slides 7-15 the [May 20, 2020 PowerPoint Presentation](#)).

Question: In terms of housing where are families being housed? Are the shelters overflowing due to COVID?

Amanda responded that the County has seen a decline in new families entering the system. This decline is due to the current stay on evictions, SEPH's diversion efforts, and additional resources to keep people housed. The decline is not expected to last, but it is giving us an opportunity to focus on individuals. In January, there were 60 families in the homeless system and now there are about 39 families. SEPH is assisting families with Rapid Rehousing (RRH), locating units, providing first-month's rent and security deposits.

Regarding single individuals experiencing homeless, there are not real hard numbers. The winter overflow shelters remain open which makes it difficult to compare this year's numbers with last year number. The shelters will remain open through the rest of the season (probably through the end of the fiscal year) because of the need to have the facility capacity to maintain social distancing even when the stay at home order is lifted.

Jen Schiller commented that MCCH has seen an increase in first-time people experiencing homelessness at the men's shelter (10-20 intakes every 2 weeks). She commended DHHS and the SEPH team for their support and hard work setting up the new shelters, quarantine, and isolation spaces. Christine Hong commented that IW is also seeing an increase of 8-10 women seeking shelter every week.

Question: How will the County handle the rise in evictions due to unemployment and loss of income once the eviction stay is lifted?

Amanda answered that the County will not be terminating anyone from housing programs during the public health emergency. We also anticipate that people in the RRH programs will have longer length of stays. There is HUD funding and flexibility in the program to extend lengths of stay to 24 months. Amanda emphasized that people need Federally funded permanent deep housing subsidies. Amanda encouraged all to advocate by calling their representatives regarding the Emergency Housing Protection and Relief Act of 2020 Bill which allocates \$100 million to emergency rental assistance programs. What is needed to help people experiencing homelessness is Federal government resources to voucher housing program.

2020 HUD CoC Funding Priorities -- VOTE

Amanda reviewed the upcoming HUD Funding competition. HUD awarded approximately \$2.1 billion as part of the 2019 CoC Competition for new and renewal projects. The ICH's responsibilities is to vote on funding priorities. (Click Here to view slides 12-20 the [May 20, 2020 PowerPoint Presentation](#)).

GAP Analysis Recommendations for the use of the HUD Funding

- Scale Rapid Rehousing to 450 units over the next 3 years. Have Added 200 units of RRH
- Refine Diversion and Prevention programs. Program fully implemented. Staff and providers have received training.
- Expand Housing First Permanent Supportive Housing. In 2018 added 21 PSH units.
- Expand Rental Assistance Program. Legislation drafted to change current regulations but have not secured.
- Expand Housing Initiative Program. The program was expanded by 240 units.

Budget Project by Type:

- Permanent Supportive Housing is expensive, and we spend about 33% of the budget on PSH
- Prevention is another large expense of 29% of the budget
- Transitional housing expense has decreased to 1%

- Rapid Rehousing has increased from 3% last year to 6%

COVID Impact on Budget/Expenses:

- Temporary Shelter funding has increased due to COVID by 28% (up from 14%)
- If the COVID modification, continue there will be an increase of 168%
- There has been an increase in RRH through additional resources
- While costs have increased due the pandemic, the COC has also received additional funding:
 - \$1M for the COVID Rent Relief Program
 - \$1M for diversion and rapid exit from shelter. Targeted to households currently experiencing homelessness and those in informal housing arrangements
 - \$1M in ESG for Rapid Rehousing
 - \$1.5M in Housing Initiative Program for housing stabilization services

Status Update on Subpopulations

- Zero: 2016 – As of 5/1, there were 5 homeless veterans identified on coordinated entry list. **The County has maintained their functional zero number of 6 for Veteran** homelessness due to Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), RRH, the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) voucher program and prevention funds from the Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF).
- Chronic Homelessness – As of 4/12, there were 7 individuals as meeting the definition of chronic homelessness. In FY20, we received an additional \$1 million in the Housing Initiative Program (HIP) allowing an additional 40 slots. We are also participating in the Medicaid Waiver project. **Montgomery County has housed over 430 people through the Inside (Not Outside) initiative**
- Non-chronic individual – We are housing other vulnerable individuals using the VISPAT scoring to determine the best housing intervention. Almost half of the 327 (48%) active homeless single adults score for the RRH option and 28% score as being able to self-resolve with some financial assistance. There are 22% scoring for PSH with high acuity with 10% with no assessment meaning that they would not engage so probably would also score for PHS. **The County has housed 201 vulnerable individuals in 2019 and 2020**
- Family Housing – Most of the families score for RRH with 12% scoring to self-resolve. Small portion scoring for PSH. **Since July 1, 2018, we have placed 375 families into permanent housing (most exiting to RRH or market permanent housings).**

Questions: Are targeted specific services designed to address the disparity with black residents who representing 60-70% of the homeless population while making up only 19-20% of the County population?

Amanda responded that the first strategy of the ICH Strategic Plan is to reduce racial disparities across the system of our homeless continuum. We have started to analyze data and what we are seeing is in our homeless system that people who are receiving services are almost proportionate to the rate they are experiencing homelessness. For example, looking at PSHs, Black individuals and families make of 64% of people experiencing homelessness and make up 54% of households exiting homelessness to PSH. So, it is not that we are not serving Black individuals and families. It is just Black individuals and families are who are coming into our system.

Housing types that HUD funds are:

- Permanent supportive housing
- Rapid Rehousing
- Joint transitional/ rapid rehousing
- HMIS staff
- Coordinated Entry staff

New funding for households fleeing domestic violence (DV)

- Permanent supportive housing
- Rapid rehousing
- Joint transitional/ rapid rehousing

DHHS/SEPH Recommendations for HUD Continuum of Care (COC) Funding Priorities

- Continue renewal funding for both permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing.
- If a DV bonus is available, prioritize rapid rehousing projects.
- If bonus funding or funding through reallocation is available, prioritize new PSH projects.

MOTION: Aseem Nigam made the motion to approve the recommendations as presented. Sharan London seconded the motion. The vote was carried unanimously to approve the recommendations with 3 abstentions.

Allocation Committee Updates – Ebony Johnson

The Allocation Committee is actively recruiting a replace a vacancy. Please contact Ilana Branda at Ilana.Branda@montgomerycountymd.gov if you would like to volunteer or want to provide any suggestions to fill the vacancy.

Regarding the COC competition, the Committee opened the opportunity to for the providers to provide feedback/recommendations. We want the providers to have as much information to prepare for the process. Due to the short timeline from when the NOFA (notification of funding availability) opens and the date to make priority submissions, the Committee encourages providers to submit any other recommendations now regarding the process, score sheets, etc. Please send all recommendations to Ilana Branda.

Announcements or Updates

Asmara G. Habte provided an update regarding the concern that people experiencing homelessness may be getting citations from the City of Rockville Police. The Police Chief of Rockville reported that the Police are working with the unsheltered families to guide them to services. The Commission members agreed that It would be helpful to have a representative from the Rockville Police Department attend ICH meetings.

Ebony Johnson suggested reaching out to Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR) or some of other employment offices regarding the employment climate in the County, unemployment rate, and projections. To explore how the ICH can partner with them to provide outreach about employment opportunities.

Jeff Goldman invited members to provide agenda items for the upcoming ICH meetings.

Jen Schiller reported that MCCH helped to coordinate the Inside (Not Outside) Initiative and have money left over from the campaign to help the community. MCCH got approval from the SEPH staff to provide tablet devices that to PSH scattered sites to provide virtual case managements to clients.

Eneshal Miller reported that many of the potential members of the Peoples' Committee do not have the equipment to do video conferencing. Jen agreed that people who are in scattered site settings do have limitations regarding WiFi and technology capabilities. This is a critical concern because people need to be connected to their healthcare providers, case managers, etc. Eneshal Miller shared that Montgomery Food Council has developed a list of internet providers that she will share with Gloria Huggins for distribution. Betsy Bowman reported that EveryMind is giving out Smart Phones to people experiencing homelessness. Lisa Lowe reported that Phoenix Computers in Rockville and Project Reboot in Gaithersburg provide computers to low-income folks with a referral.

Adjournment | Next meeting: Wednesday, July 22, from 3-5p.