



**MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON HOMELESSNESS**

**MINUTES**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2022**

**6:00 P.M.**

**SARATOGA SPRINGS CITY HALL, THIRD FLOOR MUSIC HALL**

**PRESENT:**

**Rev. Kate Forer (Co-Chair), Tom Roohan (Co-Chair), Andrea Love Smith, Stephen Towne, Kate Halliday, Maggie Fronk, Hannah Hurley, Sherie Grinter, Lindsey Connors, Jules DeAngelo**

**1. Welcome**

Rev. Kate Forer opened the meeting.

**2. Review of Agreements**

Rev. Kate Forer reviewed the agreements from the previous meeting. These agreements include: being collaborative, not reinventing the wheel, listening to listen and not just to speak, respecting others' opinions, operating with a sense of haste, and educating in good faith.

**3. Overview of Last Meeting**

At the last meeting, the Task Force discussed its three point charge. The first item was to discuss whether or not Saratoga Springs needs a low barrier shelter.

**4. Definition of "Low Barrier"**

Lindsey Connors discussed that there is not a technical HUD definition of a low barrier shelter. They do define an emergency shelter, which is what Code Blue looks like now; you aren't supposed to check IDs or criminal history and no access to the shelter should be denied.

The definition by the Interagency Council on Homeless includes a shelter model that emphasizes welcoming guests in as they are, while having clear and simple behavioral expectations that apply to anyone residing in the shelter. These expectations are focused on maintaining a safe environment for all. Staff are trained in trauma informed care and de-escalation techniques in order to help residents understand and conform to these expectations. This model attempts to remove as many preconditions to entry to the shelter as possible i.e., sobriety, unemployment, etc.

Hannah Hurley mentioned one thing to keep in mind is to make sure that we set the regular standards. There are some other low barrier shelters in New York State that could be partners or models. We don't want to compromise back into a medium barrier shelter, which we already have in place.

Sherie Grinter shared her study on the difference between a congregate setting such as Code Blue and a Housing First program set up like a hotel. A congregate setting has cots next to cots, with no place to relax, no place to keep your belongings especially if you are working, no place to keep medications, etc. She surveyed 28 people over at Code Blue. Out of the 28, 2 voted for congregate setting, 22 voted for the

Housing First set up, 3 wanted a tent city with a community room built in the forest, and 1 wanted tiny houses.

Lindsey Connors mentioned that Housing First is more of a theory and less of a particular program. Housing First means housing first before anything else. What Sherrie Grinter describes is what we would call a SRO, or a single residence occupancy, meaning one person to each room.

Maggie Fronk interviewed two local facilities in Albany and Schenectady that are doing low barrier shelters. In their facilities they do ask for ID, they do know the names and identities of the people that are there, and they craft the rules. Some of them have restrictions of what level of sex offenders can be placed there. Low barrier doesn't necessarily mean we don't ask for ID or do other things. Each one of them has a slightly different iteration of what the rules are.

Hannah Hurley stated that this would bring the shelters more to a medium barrier. A lot of people who are out on the street with chronic illness is because they need to get their papers together. That is a key step that low barrier shelters help them with to really take control of their life.

Jules DeAngelo shared that he used to be homeless. He lost everything including documents. If asking for ID, resources need to be provided to help obtain these documents.

Stephen Towne stated that we have a lot of information here that we can inventory the variables and begin to pick off which ones to include in our definition of our local low barrier shelter. He will compile this for the next meeting.

Lindsey Connors discussed being careful about slipping past the definition of a low barrier shelter into policies that would be in place. The definition and policies that might be put in the Task Force's recommendation have an impact on funding sources. Removing certain barriers might remove certain funding sources, and vice versa.

## **5. Interview Q&A with Local Low Barrier Shelter Providers**

Maggie Fronk reported on Bethesda house, which is located in downtown Schenectady, across from a church. The church allows use of the site for Code Blue. Since 2010, they have established a day program, 24 residential units, including 16 permanent housing beds, social workers daily, medical services on site, a food pantry, and on site daily case management. In 2018 they added a low demand shelter on the same site. It has 14 beds, and is open to guests from 5PM to 8AM. It has a dormitory style arrangement with cots, and accepts both men and women. They occupy the same room with no barriers. The doors open at 5PM for dinner. Guests are given the option for showers and laundry before lights out at 10PM. Adult men and women, including those with criminal records, on the sex offender registry, actively using substances, and with mental health diagnoses are welcome. The guests leave at 8AM everyday so that staff can clean the facility. They may come back at 9AM for the day program that shares the same place as the overnight shelter. In past seasons they have had 3 people they had to bar from the shelter for violent behavior against others. Guests may be actively using drugs or alcohol, but they cannot use on site. While they have 14 beds, they can go up to 21 guests. They have options to make sure no one is omitted from the shelter because beds are full. They are certified by New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance.

They always have one staff member on front desk security, and one other staff member throughout the night from 5PM to 8AM. At 6AM a licensed clinical social worker comes in and begins engagement work services. During the summer months that is just one person, but in the winter months during Code Blue, they actually need 3 people due to demand. At 7AM a case manager comes in to identify the

stabilization services for that day. They work with the Department of Social Services, the Department of Community Services, local church leaders, and volunteers who have been beneficial to the support of the program.

The biggest rule the shelter has is that you cannot leave for the night and come back; this cuts down on alcohol and drug use. Everyone's identity is known and is in the coordinated entry system. Everyone utilizing the shelter is reported to DSS due to funding requirements. Guests are able to work on goals for income, housing, and stabilization if they wish. The length of stay could be up to 6 months depending on need. DSS will extend stays if there are challenges and staff shows that the guests are working on goals.

The total shelter costs are about \$250,000 for the year because they already had the facility. DSS pays \$65 for an occupied bed each day, which will increase next season. Older guest can have a lot of intense medical needs. The shelter has an agreement with Ellis. Twice a week Ellis staff and a psychiatric nurse practitioner are available at the shelter. At first the downtown business had concerns about unhoused people in front of their shops, but they have a street outreach team that canvass the area, and offers the day program as an option for the day. Law enforcement's role has been mainly to guide people to services they might not know about.

Lindsey Connors shared her interview with IPHA (working shelter model), which includes a year round shelter, a Code Blue shelter, and medical services. Albany Emergency Shelter is a 24/7, 365 shelter. 30 homeless adults can be housed overnight. Case management services and housing priorities are provided. The shelter provides three meals a day, linen services, and open access to the showers.

In 2014, due to increased shelter need in winter, Safe Haven was created. They are open November 1<sup>st</sup> through April, from 4:30PM to 8AM. The shelter is only open to adults, and does not require ID checks or sobriety, but does not allow use on site. It started at 15 beds, but now serves 50-55 people a night. During the daytime when the shelter is closed, a Community program runs in the space.

The Albany Emergency Shelter provides wrap around services, including help finding housing, obtaining IDs, life skill training, domestic violence services, and counseling. There is a medical respite program for those discharged from a hospital who shouldn't be in a congregate program. The shelter receives referrals from DSS only, and it has to comply with DSS requirements. Guests are encouraged to meet with a case manager, but it is not mandatory. Sex offenders are allowed and are tracked. They must register with local law enforcement after a few days of stay. Level 3 offenders (highest level) are not placed here; an alternative site is found.

Both shelters require guests to be ambulatory. They do need to be able to walk out on their own, and sleep on a cot.

The State regulates one staff member to 19 unhoused individuals. The shelters try to staff as heavy as possible—2 at night, 3 in the evening, etc. Security checks are done by checking bags and using wands. Essentially it is a check for weapons. The budget includes a 25 bed contract with DSS. Step federal funding and private donations bring in \$1.1 million a year. Safe Haven is 100% Code Blue funded, with a \$616,000 budget that DSS pays. Tom Roohan reported that Tina Potter from Saratoga County Department of Social Services will speak about funding at the next meeting.

## **6. 2022 CoC Data on the Saratoga County Homeless Population (CARES NY)**

Maggie Fronk shared a report from January to December 2022, focusing on the adult only population including couple or singles without children. The number of single adults are: 413 year round, 379 seasonal, and 133 in outreach programs. These numbers are not unduplicated. Over half reported a mental

illness, and almost a quarter reported both alcohol and drug use disorders. A shelter would need to provide intensive case management to ensure proper supports are in place to work with the clients.

**7. Initial Assessment and Recommended Next Steps Provided to SOS by Erin Healy Consulting in November 2019**

Lindsey Connors discussed consultant Erin Healy's 2019 recommended next steps to Shelters of Saratoga, which were started and stopped due to COVID. Healy found need for a 24-hour shelter option with essential centralized services, such as a navigation center with beds. She also identified a lack of outreach and rapid response capacity.

The Task Force discussed the need to vote on whether a year round shelter for the unhoused is needed in Saratoga Springs. The Task Force voted in favor of a year round shelter for the unhoused, 9-0.

**8. Public Comment**

Noah Shepard recommended advertising for the community to help. He has had issues with Shelters of Saratoga in the past. He goes work about five days a week, and SOS didn't have consideration for that. He suggested having a house split for able bodied workers.

Dina Henke reported on living through homelessness as a child. Her children attend Spa Catholic. Placing a homeless shelter near a school places children in dangerous situations. If the facility doesn't turn anyone away based on criminal history, potentially a convicted school shooter could be in a facility located next to a school. If there is a chance something could happen to a child, then it would be irresponsible to place the shelter next to any school.

Courtney Manning stated that defining a low barrier shelter is important for funding and location. While the unhoused population is a vulnerable population, children are the most vulnerable and we have an obligation to protect them. A stipulation should be passed that any location for the shelter would not include property immediately adjacent to any of the schools within city limits.

A community member stated that the New York State Clean Air Act prohibits smoking within 100 feet of schools. The William Street location is within that barrier.

Sam Brewer stated that the answer to homelessness is to get people into permanent housing. Shelter facilities that will be built are short term, and will need staffing. There are various ways to work with local housing for permanent solutions.

A community member shared that a quick google search shows that a child is 90% more likely to be abused by someone he or she knows. Most of the properties surrounding the Williams Street location, aside from the Saratoga Catholic School, are Public Housing Authority or properties that accept Section 8.

Giovanni Virgiglio encourages due diligence when considering a location and suggests looking at shelters already operating near schools. Currently a shelter in downtown Albany operates close to the Arbor Hill Elementary School.

Tom Roohan adjourned the meeting at 8:20 pm.