



**MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON HOMELESSNESS**  
**MINUTES**  
**THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2023**  
**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, Maggie Fronk, Hannah Hurley, Sherie Grinter, Lindsey Connors, Jules DeAngelo

**Welcome**

Rev. Kate Forer opened the meeting.

Rev. Kate Forer recapped the unanimous vote at that last meeting on the need for Saratoga Springs to have a year round shelter for the unhoused community. The next meeting will be April 20<sup>th</sup> at 6pm. The following meeting will be April 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Tina Potter: Commissioner, Saratoga County of Social Services**

Tom Roohan introduced Tina Potter to speak to the Task Force about funding.

Code Blue (NY Code Rules and Regulations 304.1) requires emergency measures for the homeless during inclement weather below 32 degrees. The County submits a plan to the state, and the state provides funding to reimburse the County. Currently, the primary provider of Code Blue is Shelters of Saratoga.

The other funding source is temporary assistance under NY Code Rules and Regulations 352.35. Social services meet with individuals to form a benefit plan for needs in housing, health care, treatment, or other support services to get them back to self-sufficiency. Recipients have to comply with eligibility requirements, which include employment programs, training programs, child support, and drug and alcohol treatment.

The State does have some applications that can be made directly to the state for shelter development. The County works with non-profits directly.

The County has tried to track Code Blue but individuals can come in and say they are someone else. They don't have to do the same things they would for temporary assistance.

If individuals have resources of their own, they would have to use those resources first to meet their needs. Cases are looked at individually. For example, if someone has a couple of thousands of dollars, the County would expect the individual to use some of that money. If someone has some funds but has a car payment, the individual would be allowed to use those funds to meet that need without it affecting assistance.

In the past couple years, some individuals have built relationships through Code Blue. This has worked to move these individuals into shelters, and then into permanent housing. If the individuals have disabilities, mental health issues, etc., then their independent living plan is modified. There still are requirements, but modifications can be made.

### **Stephen Towne: Characteristics Defining Low Barrier Shelter**

Stephen Towne shared objectives for a low barrier shelter. The first is finding a year round shelter for the unhoused to go. The second is reducing the number of unhoused living on the street. The third is providing access to services that would assist in helping the unhoused get back on their feet. He proposed that a low barrier shelter should include all adult men and women except those who are disruptors to themselves, staff, and the shelter. Those with pets, sex offenders, those who are unable to care for themselves, those who are non-ambulatory, those refusing case management assistance, and those unwilling to abide by the law should not be included.

Maggie Fronk stated the housing first approach means that having a safe place to lay your head at night is a fundamental human right. A housing first program does not require that someone be in services.

Lindsey Connors stated that pets can be someone's whole family and a great coping mechanism. It might be inappropriate in a congregate, but could be doable in a single unit setting.

Rev. Kate Forer proposed a motion that Saratoga Springs needs a low barrier shelter that is as inclusive as possible, but is subject to definition by the agency that runs it. Tom Roohan seconds.

Stephen Towne stated that defining low barrier is critical to this whole thing. It is important that the Task Force doesn't leave the definition open to the agency to decide what to do.

The Task Force discussed how detailed the definition from the Task Force should be, and decided to table the definition of a low barrier shelter to the next meeting so that the members can consider which criteria to include. Stephen Towne will circulate his proposed definition.

Hannah Hurley reported on a shelter called Pearson Center Housing Options. Statistics from 2005 show that there were 167 that were being helped by emergency shelter and 143 by transitional. In 2007 we see a swap to where 40 were helped by transitional, and more by emergency shelter. Recently, 200 were helped in the emergency shelter and 19 in transitional.

The Person Center Housing Option program started as outreach program. The low barrier shelter is funded from social services, hospitality support, and the community. In its first year it was able to help 47% of people in the shelter move into transitional housing, working with the city and the housing authority for funding. There are no eligibility requirements outside of age (anyone over 18). Families were not admitted, but the program helped to get them into housing separately. Average length of stay was 45 days pre COVID; now it is up to 60-70 days. The staff- to-guest ratio suggestion is 1 social worker for every 15 people, and round the clock staff. Speaking with neighbors once a location is decided and giving them plans, etc. is key. The

shelter meets with the guests to go over the rules to stay. The program received donations of about half a million dollars.

Andrea Love Smith reminds the committee the need to consider that the goal is to get a shelter in as soon as possible. Shares that that Code Blue will be closing soon. Hopes that in the next meeting discussion on how that population can be supported as the new shelter is built.

**Public Comment:**

Lou Benton expressed concern about losing the site that Code Blue has. He suggested that the City consult with the state agency that would have to approve a shelter.

Deo, who used to be a social worker, stated they understand that it is a tough adjustment to go from following the rules, to this idea of people are going to do what they are going to do, with minimal restrictions. If we leave the definition of a shelter up to someone else, it can be a slippery slope. They also expressed support for eliminating gendered language.

Dina Henke reported that she was raised around homeless and addiction. The Task Force should keep in mind that if it chooses William St., it is altering the life paths of these children in a negative way. Science tells us that children can perceive threats in their environments. Her experience aligns 100 percent with the evidence. It changed the trajectory of her family.

Racheal Dooley stated that the City has a serious homeless problem that needs attention. Considering placing a shelter near a school is dangerous for our children. Innocent children should be protected more than the homeless. Two homeless people were smoking pot outside the school. Police were called twice.

Jan Vandercar, a parent of a student at Spa Catholic, stated she is opposed to a shelter at the Williams Street location. The Task Force should revisit the concept of deferring decision making to the operator of the facility. The track is dormant in the winter time. A shelter doesn't have to be one location.

Courtney Manning stated that our children, not sex offenders, are the most vulnerable group. She is disappointed that SOS, law enforcement, and the hospital are not at the table.

John Dooley stated that in every population there is always a small percentage that actually causes the issues. Mayor Kim has repeatedly referenced those at the garage as needing a low barrier shelter the most. People need our help, but just not at a location by a school.

A community member suggested a meeting of the Task Force with school parents, the Mayor, and the Commissioner of Public Safety. The Task Force and City Council must take safety into consideration. We can and should help the homeless, but we must protect our children. She also shared that the Task Force meeting without all the members present is a disservice.

Laura Shaffer reminds the Task Force that it is appointed in the capacity to serve. We do need a homeless shelter that it inclusive. We should discuss what the needs are and who is to be served,

before we talk about a location. Rushing this is going to lead to failure. To pull the trigger to meet the deadline of July 1<sup>st</sup> will be detrimental to our community and those we are trying to serve.

A community member reported that the priest used to take her father's catholic school class to visit shelters and it helped them develop a life of service.

Deo also stated that it is important that we keep the narrative accurate and factual and not based on moral panic and fear. Given that many children have been abused by priests, we may want to consider not having a shelter near a catholic institution. The unhoused in Saratoga have not posed a threat to any children to her knowledge, but teenagers in the community have shot at them with BB guns.

Tom Roohan adjourned the meeting at 8:20pm.