

NORTHAMPTON HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Minutes

February 1, 2016

Members Present: Gordon Shaw, Chair, Jim Reis, Alan Verson, Rev. Todd Weir, Michael Roy. Absent, Peter Frothingham, Richard Abuza, Lynne Wallace and Alyx Akers. Also present, Peg Keller, staff, Rick Hart, President of Friends of Hampshire County Homeless Individuals, Rebecca Muller, Friends of the Homeless Board member and Lisa Goldsmith, Director of Programs at Dial/Self in Greenfield.

Call to Order: Chair Shaw called the meeting to order at 5:41 p.m. He acknowledged the guests and all present introduced themselves.

Friends of the Homeless/ Request for Letter of Support

Chair Shaw described the process which brought the guests before the Partnership. Applicants proposing housing related projects come to the Housing Partnership for endorsement, prior to submitting requests to the Community Preservation Committee. Rick Hart opened the presentation by saying:

- Friends of the Homeless - all volunteer organization, formed 20 years ago, incorporated as a 501C3 in 2002.
- Originally a support group to administer the winter emergency shelter
- Programs have expanded to include boot distribution, Happy Frog collections for lunchtime meal, rental assistance fund for first, last and security deposits.
- FOH has purchased 2 houses utilizing CPA funds and other monies
- Yvonne's House on Straw Ave. for chronically homeless mentally ill/ 6 units
- Gandara Friends House/ Maple Ave. 6 units for formerly homeless in recovery
- Process, due to successful fundraising over the years/ give amount to ServiceNet annually to operate the winter shelter at 43 Center Street, then purchase a house when funds allow, refurbish it, furnish it and deed it to another agency to operate. (ServiceNet for Yvonne's House and Gandara Center for Maple Ave.)
- Successful fundraising has made it possible to purchase a third house
- Through conducting research on community needs it has been determined that the population to be served in the new house will be unaccompanied youth aged 18-24.
- This age phase is a critical transition period that may lead to adult chronic homelessness or healthy independent living

Rebecca Muller, former Director of Shelter and Housing for ServiceNet for 14 years and now independent grant writer offered additional comments.

- FOH goal is to be aligned with other local, regional and national planning processes; HUD is very focused on preventing and ending youth homelessness. 18-24 yr. olds are identified as a high risk population segment
- 60% of kids connected with the foster care system will become homeless within 18-36 months.
- If we are ever to reach our goal of ending homelessness (for adults) we need to stem the flow
- FOH favors simple projects; save money, leverage money and purchase sound buildings that don't require a lot of rehab, then gift the buildings to the experts to run the programs for 99 years
- FOH very excited to work with Dial-Self, the western MA experts on serving homeless youth and administering affordable housing programs with support services for youth
- A number of funding applications are in the mix to secure operating funds
- Past FOH projects have been in the 400,000 dollar range. Due to the number of units envisioned with this project, (8-10) coupled with the price of properties in Northampton, this will be a \$700,000+ undertaking.
- They are looking to secure funding by the end of the calendar year.

Members reviewed the handout submitted that contained additional information. In answer to a question about program operating costs and sustainability, Lisa Goldsmith said they want to explore subsidies to provide rental income and Dial Self has some available through a program they currently operate that serves LGBT youth. They have also just completed a response to a request for proposals issued by the state (earlier today!) that would also provide resources. Ms. Muller said programs do have movement despite the fact that the units are permanent housing, because youth obtain skills for independent living and self select to move on. They “grow up” and transition out, making room for new residents.

In answer to a question from Mr. Roy, they have not yet selected a property. They have developed specifications for a physical design/wish list, selected a realtor and began a preliminary search last fall. They may consider a bridge loan. Mr. Verson asked if such properties with 8-10 bedrooms exist. Mr. Hart responded that yes, they do and a mix of one and 2 bedroom units with a common room, on a bus line, close to downtown with a small office space, in good condition is what they ideally envision. They do not anticipate any zoning issues, as they plan to purchase a property that currently operates in this manner. Discussion followed about whether it is a multi-family structure composed of unrelated family members. Ms. Muller said they would be purchasing an existing rental property. Chair Shaw noted that they may also inherit existing tenants. Ms. Goldsmith said each resident would sign a lease, part of the learning of life skills.

She said support services will be provided to residents through other contracts the agency has. The agency also has experience with and funds for property management and facilities coordination. They have decades of experience with engaging youth, assisting with housing search and providing support while in housing through case management. She explained the 60's reference to the agency's name.

Mr. Verson asked Lisa about the number of youth they serve. She said an overall number would be hard to determine because they do outreach in the schools, have multiple connections to the community, have 2 drop in centers (Greenfield and Orange) where youth have access to computers, job and educational information, computer usage in addition to their residential programs.

Ms. Goldsmith said they work closely with Community Action and have been strategizing on an expansion into Hampshire County for several years. They secured funding in their most recent EOHHS Runaway and Homeless Youth grant to hire a street outreach worker for Amherst and Northampton, to begin soon. Mr. Reis noted that program budgets can get stretched when staff travel geographies expand.

Discussion followed about how to define "ties to Northampton" to prioritize who is served by this program. In response to a needs assessment question, Ms. Muller said the Interfaith Winter shelter at 43 Center Street saw 25 youth aged 18-24 last year and Amherst (Craig's Door) served 33. Berkshire Community College and Greenfield Com. College both estimate 35-50 of their students are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The program is not able to serve those younger than 18 because they are not yet emancipated and are legally unable to sign a lease.

Additional discussion followed regarding anticipated resources: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human resources Homeless Runaway Youth 3 year award is in hand, the MHSA Home and Healthy For Good Program with an LGBT focus is in hand; the State EOHHS 2 million dollar RFR has just been applied for through the Three County Continuum of Care.

There was not a quorum present to vote on the support letter, but members present did endorse the project and a formal vote with a quorum present will be taken next month. The guests were thanked for their attendance and presentation.

Project Updates

155 Pleasant Street/ Northampton Lodging - Peg distributed a summary of recent activity that HAP submitted to the Community Preservation Committee. The CPC

requires annual updates so it was submitted for that purpose. They are still awaiting funding news.

Landlord Session/ Ending Veterans Homelessness - Peg reported that Steve Connor held a session January 26th for landlords in Northampton. The purpose of the meeting was to encourage property owners to rent to Veterans utilizing the HUD VASH voucher program. He is holding another session Feb. 3rd. Peg will attend and make an announcement about the NHP session scheduled for Feb. 11th.

Housing Resource Advocate - Peg distributed a job ad for a position very similar to our Community Housing Support Services Coordinator. Her concern is that the work be coordinated, rather than duplicated. The Community Action position is funded by the Emergency Solutions Grant program through HUD and also has a court presence and case management components.

CDBG Ad Hoc Committee - Peg is assembling members for the public services review committee that will hold interviews with agencies requesting CDBG funding. She is looking for new members. Rev. Todd Weir has served and is willing to serve again, and can be the liaison to the Partnership.

Action Plan Update

- Community Education/ a Gazette interview is being set up to get the word out about the landlord workshop. Peg has been in touch with the Gazette and is now trying to coordinate times with John Fisher and Gordon. The room is booked and paid for, and Mr. Roy will bring his screen for the session on the 11th. Mr. Reis reported on the meeting held with Mr. Fisher at which revisions of the service provider presentation to a landlord focus were discussed.

This event addresses community education, op eds/guest columns, landlord support and fair housing goals and objectives.

- New Unit Creation/ advocate for projects, i.e. support letters

Did that this evening: presentation by Friends of the Homeless for 8-10 new units

- Amherst Tax Abatement Program

Mr. Roy reported on a meeting held with Sandy Pooler, the Finance Director in Amherst who gave us background on their efforts (also attended by Chair Shaw and Peg Keller). More discussion will take place on this at the March meeting, to develop a strategy for moving forward.

- Expiring Use Properties Peg contacted Herb Berizen, the owner of Leeds Village who said it is still too early to engage in specific discussions. (2018 expiration). Peg will be working on the Subsidized Housing Inventory to update.

Adjourn/ the meeting concluded at 7:10 p.m. Respectfully submitted, Peg Keller