



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

DRAFT
MEETING MINUTES
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
HOMELESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (HAC)
UNITED WAY OF BROWARD COUNTY
COLKER CONFERENCE ROOM
1300 SOUTH ANDREWS AVENUE
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA 33316
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2023 – 1:00 P.M.

July 2023 – June 2024

		<u>Attendance</u>	
Paula Yukna, Chair	P	3	0
Lilli De Lucca, Vice Chair (arr. 1:28)	P	3	0
Fiona Johnson	A	0	2
Robin Martin	P	3	0
Amy Schimelfenyg	P	3	0
Barry Somerstein (dep. 2:08)	P	3	0

Staff

Lisette Palmero, Staff Liaison, Homeless Initiatives Program Manager
Luisa Agathon, Neighbor Support Manager
Marie Joseph, Homeless Initiatives Coordinator
Carla Blair, Recording Secretary, Prototype, Inc.

Communication to the City Commission

None.

I. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order at 1:03 p.m.

II. Determination of Quorum

It was noted a quorum was present.

III. Public Sign-In

IV. Agenda Items:

a. Approval of Minutes

Approval of the November 9, 2023 meeting minutes was deferred until the next meeting.

b. Strategic Plan

Chair Yukna requested that the members list the three top priorities they would like the Committee to address. Ms. Palmero added that part of the Committee's role is to help the City create a Strategic Plan for reducing homelessness in Fort Lauderdale.

Mr. Somerstein stated that he felt there can be no Strategic Plan without addressing more than three items, and that he wished to discuss more than three priorities. Ms. Agathon explained that establishing the top three priorities is intended to provide a way for the group to begin thinking about what needs to be addressed; if a member wishes to list additional priorities in the beginning, the Committee can narrow them down later.

Chair Yukna advised that her top priority would be shelter, clarifying that this would mean moving people from the streets. Mr. Somerstein commented that he felt this goal should refer to both emergency shelter and housing, transitioning individuals from one to the other.

Ms. Schimelfenyg observed that her top priority would be getting concrete information about the City's homeless population, including how many individuals are homeless as well as their actual needs. She emphasized the importance of solid data about the homeless population, the resources available to them at present, and what is needed in the future, including affordable housing. Mr. Martin stated that information is available through Broward County, which conducts sheltered and unsheltered point-in-time counts of homeless individuals. These counts can be broken down by municipality.

Ms. Schimelfenyg continued that her second priority would be working with the City Commission on how to address the needs of the City's homeless population.

Mr. Somerstein commented that part of the issue in Broward County is that many of the entities that work to help the homeless population are working separately instead of together. He felt Broward municipalities should coordinate better with one another, as well as with the County, to develop a plan.

Mr. Somerstein continued that other priorities include funding sources and legislative action. If legislative action is implemented more effectively, it could generate revenues that can help the homeless population. This may include affordable housing incentives for developers. He cited the "pay or go" incentive in particular, which provides funding rather than housing. While this satisfies a requirement, it does not satisfy the need for housing.

Mr. Somerstein added that he felt there is a variety of funding needs on which there should be a focus, as well as the provision of services in connection with housing. He concluded that his prioritized topics would be:

- Sheltering
- Integration of activities with the government
- Funding
- Services

Chair Yukna asked how much Broward County assists in helping the homeless population. Ms. Agathon replied that the County serves as the chair of the continuum of care (CoC): all homeless individuals must be registered through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which is managed by Broward County. The County is also a funding provider for a number of agencies.

Mr. Somerstein recalled that a “Home for the Holidays” campaign had been a concentrated effort between the City, Broward County, the business community, the faith-based services community, and social services. These entities worked together toward an effective result. He recommended more efforts with this type of cooperation.

Mr. Martin advised that the Home for the Holidays campaign was very specific: it established a clear goal for a specific location and its population, acting on a specific decision made by the City to move individuals from a camp. The Committee is tasked with helping the entire City.

Mr. Martin also noted that there are already four shelters operating in Broward County, one of which no longer accepts County funds and is privately operated. He felt part of the problem is that homeless individuals are not being moved from these facilities into their own apartments or other affordable housing units as quickly as possible.

Mr. Somerstein emphasized the importance of expanding the circle of entities involved in providing services. He pointed out that social services, the government, and the faith-based community are doing the best they can to serve the homeless population; however, there is a need to expand beyond these entities.

Mr. Somerstein continued that the business community’s support could play an important role in influencing local government to develop a legislative policy. It would also be important in working with the development community to come up with ways to provide for and fund affordable housing. These partnerships can result in recurring funding that does not come from the government.

Mr. Somerstein advised that it would be helpful to understand what funding sources are currently contributing to address homelessness. He also wished to discuss how recommendations are made for other funding sources, as well as whether or not it is possible to leverage these funds and use them collectively.

Mr. Martin suggested that he could bring forward some of this information at the next meeting. He felt there should also be recognition that the City offers a high-performing continuum of care in comparison to many other efforts across the country.

Ms. Schimelfenyg requested more information on coordination between Fort Lauderdale and Broward County. Ms. Agathon suggested that the County representative in charge of the CoC Board could be invited to make a presentation to the Committee.

Mr. Martin explained that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds homeless services across Broward County. They also fund local providers, including private entities such as the Salvation Army, through the established continuum of care. These providers include both governmental and non-governmental entities.

Mr. Martin continued that after HUD funds, the second-greatest funding source is the County's General Fund. Broward County generates funds and allocates them toward specific projects addressing homelessness. These funds pay for the three emergency shelters, as well as programs for outreach to the homeless population. Other sources of funding include individuals, companies, and foundations, which contribute to individual services providers.

Mr. Martin stated that while the Committee must focus primarily on Fort Lauderdale, he has found that the homeless population, and the services provided to them, must be integrated. Services for this population are concentrated in that part of the County, with shelters in Pompano Beach, Hollywood, and Fort Lauderdale.

Mr. Martin concluded that he felt the City is taking important steps by increasing services to the homeless population, including Police services and outreach. Mr. Somerstein observed that one goal of the Committee should be to help these dedicated service providers become more efficient.

Vice Chair De Lucca arrived at 1:38 p.m.

Mr. Martin asked if Staff can find out the capacity of privately operated shelters, such as the Salvation Army facility. He pointed out that those facilities may have unfunded beds, which means they cannot operate at full capacity.

Mr. Somerstein cited the example of the Bahia Mar partners, who have created a system in which funds from the sale of each unit are placed in trust funds that are eventually donated to the United Way or the Broward Community Foundation. The donated funds are committed to specific uses, including affordable housing.

In addition, the state of Florida has enacted legislation which will provide bonus unit credits for developers who include affordable housing in their projects. Mr. Somerstein expressed concern, however, those developers often elect to contribute toward an affordable housing fund rather than provide affordable units. Half of these dollars are committed to use by the County, while the other half go toward the City. Mr. Somerstein concluded that it could be very helpful if the County makes a commitment that their half of the funds provided by Fort Lauderdale developers must be used toward Fort Lauderdale's affordable housing program.

Mr. Martin stated that privately operated shelters, such as the Salvation Army and Broward Partnership for the Homeless's Homelessness Assistance Center, are restricted

by Ordinance regarding the number of people they may serve. These shelters may be constructed to accommodate a larger number of individuals, but may not be able to house individuals to full capacity. He suggested that the Committee consider encouraging the City to consider changing this Ordinance.

Ms. Schimelfenyg requested clarification of what constitutes affordable housing. It was clarified that different pieces of legislation have different standards regarding the level of affordability that must be provided in exchange for a given benefit.

Chair Yukna stated that she would like to focus on households that are not seeking affordable housing, but have low to no income. Mr. Somerstein agreed that rather than focusing on affordable housing, the Committee should focus on housing for the homeless.

Leann Barber, member of the public, advised that affordability is based on average median income (AMI), which is currently \$67,000 for Broward County. The lowest income for which income-restricted housing is built is 30% of AMI. Other income levels for which affordable housing is built include 50%, 80%, 100%, 120%, and 140% of AMI. This means a household earning up to \$100,000/year may qualify for some form of income-restricted housing.

Mr. Somerstein commented that the conversation on affordable housing should include consideration of the land inventory available through the government, as well as existing and new funding sources. Ms. Agathon noted that the identification of public land on which housing can be built is one of the action items under housing. Mr. Somerstein asserted that this should be included under data.

Ms. Agathon reviewed the topics suggested by the Committee members, which included shelter, housing, funding, and integration of services.

Chair Yukna stated that she would like to see a count on the availability of temporary shelters. Ms. Agathon replied that this can be included under data. Vice Chair De Lucca added that this count should include non-governmental entities and nonprofits that provide shelter.

Ms. Schimelfenyg asked if there is a comprehensive database of services for the homeless population which lists the specific services provided. Ms. Agathon replied that Broward County has a resource guide which lists the resources available throughout the County.

Mr. Martin reiterated that there are not enough shelter beds to house everyone, nor is there enough affordable housing. The County is seeking to recruit landlords who are willing to work with prospective tenants who may have already experienced evictions but are now receiving dedicated government funding or another form of rent security; however, one difficulty is the shortage of units into which these tenants can be placed.

Chair Yukna asked if there is the option of the type of emergency shelters which are opened during weather emergencies, such as hurricanes. Ms. Palmero explained that these shelters are located in the northern part of the County and include a facility operated by the Salvation Army, as well as a shelter in the city of Hollywood. These facilities open up extra beds in times of inclement weather.

Chair Yukna asked if these facilities are currently open at all times. Mr. Martin explained that these facilities only open when the Broward County government, through the CoC, declares an emergency due to cold weather. This allows for emergency housing on a limited basis. It is not, however, safe for an extended period of time.

Mr. Somerstein commented that the cost of not housing homeless persons is significantly higher than the cost of housing them. This is primarily due to health care costs, including emergency room treatment. He asked if there has been consideration of bringing health care services “more in line” with services for homeless persons, as this could lower costs. Ms. Schimelfenyg noted that this is part of the city of Jacksonville’s plan.

Mr. Martin replied that this has been looked into by different groups, and that hospitals do not want to be involved in housing. Hospitals have a small amount of respite funding through which they partner with groups that provide a number of beds for individuals who are not sufficiently healthy to live on the street or in a shelter without medical assistance.

Mr. Somerstein explained that his intent was to take an inventory of groups who understand the cost of providing health care to homeless or indigent persons. Mr. Martin suggested that if hospitals could be convinced to invest a portion of the money spent on health care for homeless individuals into housing instead, this could significantly reduce health care costs; however, he reiterated that hospitals do not want to “get into the housing business.”

Mr. Somerstein stated that this would not be the same as involvement in housing, but would instead offer a way for hospitals to save money by paying a percentage of housing costs.

Ms. Agathon again reviewed the topics discussed by the members, as well as the subsections to these topics:

- Shelter
- Housing
 - Data
 - Ordinances
 - Integration of public lands
- Funding
 - Legislative advocacy
- Integration of operating services
 - Stakeholder outreach
 - Creation of more affordable units

Mr. Martin advised that in order to develop a specific Strategic Plan for Fort Lauderdale, the Committee should have a clearer idea of the role that the City wants to play. He felt Fort Lauderdale's Strategic Plan should be a subset of Broward County's Strategic Plan, and recommended securing a copy of the County's most recent Strategic Plan with regard to homelessness. This could provide a framework for what the City wants to do and how to accomplish it.

Ms. Agathon recalled that presentations were made at the November 2023 meeting by representatives of agencies who are currently providing services. There was also discussion of some of the direction given by the City Commission, including congregation at intersections, coordination of services, and safety of neighbors.

Ms. Agathon continued that in January 2024, the City Commission will hold another meeting to discuss priorities. She recommended that the Committee Chair attend to listen to this Commission discussion. She concluded that she would like the Committee to think further about the bigger picture, including larger investments and more sustainable action.

Ms. Agathon advised that at the January 2024 meeting, the members may wish to focus on one of the key topics they identified, such as the availability and capacity of shelter and the current Ordinance in place.

Mr. Somerstein left the meeting at 2:08 p.m.

c. Discussion

Reniese McNeal, program manager for Healthy Start Coalition, explained that she works with families and pregnant women experiencing homelessness. She asked if the Committee members attend other meetings in Fort Lauderdale or Broward County, pointing out that these meetings often discuss some of the data and information the Committee would like to have.

Mr. Martin stated that he serves as the liaison between the CoC Board and the Committee, which means he will share information from both groups with one another. He will gather some of the information requested by the Committee from the CoC and bring it back to a later meeting. He also clarified that any individual may attend any public meeting; however, if two Committee members are present at the same meeting, only one of them may speak at that meeting due to the requirements of Florida's Sunshine Law.

Mr. Martin continued that if a Committee member has specific questions, it may be easier to request that he bring information back from the CoC, as that entity may not discuss the specific information regularly. He can provide that information in his capacity as liaison. Staff may also be able to provide information as well. Any requests that he bring back information must be made at Committee meetings due to the Sunshine Law.

Mr. Martin commented that at the next Committee meeting, he would like to ensure that all members have copies of the three priorities, as well as what is currently in place. He pointed out that the Committee should address the specific issues the Commission has directed them to address.

Ms. Palmero noted that the issues the Commission wants the Committee to address may change, based on the updated goals and priorities the Commission will discuss in January 2024.

Ms. Palmero announced that December 12, 2023 was Homeless Memorial Day. A service was held at First Baptist Church on 3rd Avenue. This event is held once per year. Names of every homeless individual who passed during the year are read at the service.

Ms. Palmero continued that Community Court will now be located near the County's bus terminal at 18 NW 1st Avenue. It will open at this location on Wednesday, December 20, 2023.

V. Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Committee at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 2:27 p.m.

Any written public comments made 48 hours prior to the meeting regarding items discussed during the proceedings have been attached hereto.

Next Meeting: January 11, 2024

[Minutes prepared by K. McGuire, Prototype, Inc.]