



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, MAY 9, 2024 – 1:00 P.M.

July 2023 – June 2024

Attendance

Paula Yukna, Chair	P	6	0
Lilli De Lucca, Vice Chair (dep. 2:18)	P	5	1
Tony Baday	P	1	1
Ray Dettman	P	3	0
Robin Martin	P	6	0
Amy Schimelfenyg	P	6	0
Barry Somerstein	P	6	0

Staff

Luisa Agathon, Neighbor Support Manager
Marie Joseph, Homeless Initiatives Coordinator
Jorg Hruschka, Chief, Volunteer Services
Kayla Weinberg, Community Court Assistant
Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner Warren Sturman
Renee Manchoy, Community Outreach Coordinator for Commissioner Sturman
K. Cruitt, Recording Secretary, Prototype, Inc.

Communication to the City Commission

None.

I. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Yukna called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. Determination of Quorum

Roll was called and it was noted a quorum was not present.

III. Public Sign-In

Members of the public in attendance were asked to sign in at this time.

IV. Approval of March [sic] Minutes

Mr. Somerstein requested the following corrections to p.9, paragraph 4 of the April minutes:

- Add the mention of a joint meeting between the Homeless Advisory Committee (HAC) and Affordable Housing Advisory Committee (AHAC) as an item to be discussed further at a subsequent meeting
- Also to be discussed at a subsequent meeting, include an update on the status of a meeting between the City and County as it relates to the Unauthorized Public Camping and Public Sleeping Bill
- Add a recommendation from Mr. Dettman regarding the items he felt the Committee should prioritize

Motion made by Mr. Somerstein, seconded by Mr. Dettman, to approve [as amended]. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

Chair Yukna introduced Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner Warren Sturman, who explained that as a physician, he sees homeless patients on a regular basis and is familiar with many of the medical and other issues facing the homeless community, as well as the shortage of available shelter space.

Commissioner Sturman advised that for several years, the City has discussed repurposing the County's old stockade to assist the homeless population. He referred to a recent news article which identifies homelessness as a growing problem and moral obligation for the City while also pointing out the effect homelessness can have on the overall feeling of safety in Fort Lauderdale. To address these needs, Fort Lauderdale is considering the use of the stockade as a homeless assistance center.

Commissioner Sturman continued that beginning in October 2024, Florida's Unauthorized Public Camping and Public Sleeping Bill will take effect. Fort Lauderdale and Broward County have different interpretations of this bill, which prohibits any overnight camping in public spaces such as parks or sidewalks. The bill would make it possible for an individual to sue the City if they allow homeless persons to camp in these locations.

Commissioner Sturman recalled that it will be illegal under the new law to remove homeless individuals from a location, even if it is for their own safety, unless there is somewhere for those individuals to go. He noted that Broward County has several shelters which serve homeless individuals, although these shelters often address only a portion of the homeless population and may have barriers in place, such as prohibiting persons with a criminal record or those who abuse drugs or alcohol.

In order for the City to comply with the new law, there must be a "low-barrier" or barrier-free shelter; however, this could result in leaving individuals with substance abuse issues or criminal records on the street, which affects the community's sense of safety.

Commissioner Sturman explained that Broward County has repeatedly discouraged use of the old stockade as a low-barrier shelter because creating a shelter of that type could allow criminals to congregate there. The City, however, believes a low-barrier shelter is better than the alternative of no shelter. The Commissioner is working with Broward Health to find a way to provide medical services to the City's homeless population.

Commissioner Sturman advised that there are three options the City wishes to consider for the stockade:

- Make it an intake facility for homeless individuals
- Provide a service center for the homeless population, offering health services and other basic services, such as assisting with identification or providing access to telephones
- Provide a low-barrier shelter

While these options will not resolve the problem of homelessness in Fort Lauderdale, it can provide a location that improves community safety while assisting the homeless population through services. Although Broward County administration is not in favor of this use of the stockade, it may be possible to develop plans for that facility if enough Broward County Commissioners are on board with the proposal.

Commissioner Sturman concluded that while the stockade may not be the answer, there is a need for a facility of this type to assist the homeless population. He requested that the Committee members advise him on what they would like to see at that facility, and asked Chair Yukna to serve as his point of contact on this issue.

Chair Yukna asked what would be necessary to refurbish the stockade, including a potential funding source. Commissioner Sturman advised that different parts of the facility are in good and bad shape.

Mr. Somerstein referred to the City's Home for the Holidays program, recalling that the committee overseeing that effort consisted of members of the business community, county government, faith-based providers, and various agencies. This committee is currently being reestablished. He pointed out that it costs more to assist homeless persons than to house them.

Commissioner Sturman stated that his intent was not to address rapid re-housing, but to deal with homeless individuals who "fall through the cracks" with regard to services. He noted that it is very expensive for individuals to repeatedly access emergency health care services. Broward Health has indicated they are willing to assist the homeless population through preventative or primary care.

Mr. Somerstein advised that while health care is a key component of the services Commissioner Sturman had discussed, some funding could be used to provide housing or shelter as well as health care. He asked if this has been discussed by the City or County

Commissioners. Commissioner Sturman replied that Broward Health is not likely to assist with funds for housing, as there will be a cost to providing health care services.

Mr. Dettman asked for clarification of the Broward County Commission District in which the stockade is located. Commissioner Sturman replied that this may be County Commissioner Lamar Fisher's district. He also cautioned that there is likely to be a "not in my back yard" reaction from any district in which a facility may be located.

Mr. Dettman also recalled that when the stockade was previously discussed as an option, some County Commissioners had indicated it was offensive to house homeless individuals in a prison facility. Commissioner Sturman recommended referring to the facility as a potential homeless assistance center, or another more positive term, rather than a stockade, as well as ensuring the facility does not resemble a prison.

Mr. Dettman asked if Commissioner Sturman plans to reach out to other Fort Lauderdale Commissioners before making a proposal to the County. Commissioner Sturman explained that the City Commission has passed unanimous resolutions in favor of repurposing the stockade as a homeless assistance center. He reiterated that the City and County read the new Unauthorized Public Camping and Public Sleeping Bill differently from one another: the City interprets the legislation as requiring the County to provide some type of shelter to move people from the street, while the County feels this is the City's responsibility.

Ms. Schimelfenyg requested clarification of how many individuals could be sheltered at the former stockade. Commissioner Sturman replied that this number varies, and noted that the facility may or may not be used to provide shelter.

Commissioner Sturman again requested that the Committee members communicate their ideas to him on how the former stockade could be used to assist the homeless population. He also noted the importance of creating partnerships and coalitions so the result is not a "City vs. County" issue.

Commissioner Sturman concluded that there are resources available to assist homeless persons, and his intent is to establish connections between these resources.

V. Agenda Items:

a. Recommendations from Taskforce

Jacob Torner, representing the Task Force for Ending Homelessness, recalled that in April, the Committee had requested that recommendations be brought forward regarding potential areas of focus for them in the future. He recommended that the Committee consider the following three areas:

- Policy action:
 - Address affordability, including rent increases

- Remove regulatory barriers such as single land use zoning
 - Ensure right to counsel is provided during evictions
 - Promote interdepartmental collaboration
 - Declare local state of emergency at the City or County level
- Public services:
 - Permanent housing interventions
 - Community Court
 - Homelessness prevention
- Public engagement:
 - Connecting with the community through homeowners', civic association, or Town Hall-style meetings
 - Provide digital access to services
 - Project Home Again, which encourages housing owners, developers, landlords, and more to support the CoC

Mr. Somerstein asked if there is interdepartmental collaboration between other governmental agencies and service providers as well as in the City. Mr. Torner replied that there are typically two levels of coordination: the Continuum of Care (CoC), which is designated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and overseen by Broward County government, and a managing entity in Broward which oversees mental health and substance abuse issues.

Mr. Martin confirmed that this collaboration occurs, but noted that it could be better, as some programs operated by the City could be more successful if they were aligned with similar County operations. He felt the Committee may wish to consider making a recommendation that this collaboration be improved, but cautioned against becoming too granular when making recommendations.

Mr. Somerstein asked if the recommendation should be for more interaction between governments and agencies. Ms. Agathon noted that the CoC is working to create a multi-municipal advisory committee in relation to the Unauthorized Public Camping and Public Sleeping Bill to determine how homelessness can be addressed on a County-wide basis in light of this legislation.

Mr. Torner recalled the Committee had requested information on the practices of other cities. He recommended that the members look at the activities of cities such as Austin, Texas, Denver, Colorado, Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Gainesville, Florida.

Chair Yukna asked what entity would be empowered to declare a state of emergency. Ms. Agathon clarified that the Mayor may declare a state of emergency for the City, while the County Administrator and County Mayor can take this action for Broward County. Declaring a state of emergency can make funds or support available from outside the City, depending upon the nature of the emergency.

Mr. Dettman asked if any other U.S. cities have declared states of emergency with regard to homelessness. Mr. Torner replied that several cities have done so, including Denver and Los Angeles.

Mr. Torner advised that such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), HUD, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) may look at their existing contracts with a municipality and determine if additional funds can be provided to that municipality. He was not certain that all of the cities which have declared emergencies received significant federal resources.

Mr. Martin stated that Fort Lauderdale compares well with other major cities regarding its shelter rates. In addition, county and state governments and agencies must agree with a declaration of emergency before funds are provided. He noted, however, that the declaration of emergency is not necessarily a bad idea, as Broward will be one of the most heavily impacted counties under the Unauthorized Public Camping and Public Sleeping Bill, and is at a significant disadvantage when compared to other communities that have more rural space or greater resources.

Mr. Martin requested feedback from Mr. Torner regarding Commissioner Sturman's proposal regarding refurbishment of the stockade, pointing out that the Commissioner's understanding of the current system it may not be entirely accurate, as there are already two homeless assistance centers with a working intake process. He felt the emphasis should be on more housing, as the only homeless individuals who cannot currently access the assistance centers are those in need of greater medical care than those centers can provide, or those who are actively using drugs.

Mr. Martin continued that there are also individuals with mental health needs and who are abusing substances who can live in permanent or rapid re-housing as long as they do not break any rules or laws.

Mr. Martin asserted that there are five categories of homeless services with the County, and cited the funding allocations to these categories:

- Outreach (\$1.6 million)
- Shelter (\$10.5 million)
- Rapid re-housing (\$1.5 million)
- Permanent supportive housing (\$13.1 million)
- Prevention (\$430,000)

He characterized this as an out-of-balance investment in the available services, stating that significantly more should go toward rapid re-housing. Another challenge to re-housing is the identification of affordable rental units.

Mr. Martin concluded that he did not feel there is a need for another homeless assistance center or emergency shelter.

Chair Yukna asked what other types of options are being considered. Mr. Martin replied that one possibility is “container homes.” Chair Yukna pointed out that existing Code does not permit these structures at present. Mr. Martin advised that the County is currently reviewing this option.

Mr. Martin concluded that the final argument against an emergency shelter in a building like the stockade is that individuals living in those facilities are still homeless. The intent is to bring individuals out of homelessness and house them in normal appropriate apartments and homes.

Vice Chair De Lucca addressed prevention, pointing out that many individuals earning low incomes fall through the cracks of the system, particularly as an effect of medical debt. She recommended that hospital intake include a way to identify these individuals and assist them before they fall into homelessness.

Mr. Dettman asked if facilities such as churches may be able to provide sleeping areas. Mr. Torner replied that many churches are prohibited by zoning from building supportive housing units. He also agreed with Mr. Martin that there is no need for more emergency shelter in Broward County, and that the former stockade should be repurposed into supportive housing rather than used as an intake or assistance facility.

Mr. Somerstein asked where Broward County proposes to provide a site if they do not wish to use the former stockade. Mr. Torner replied that there has been no specific proposal from the County at this time. The County is establishing a working group across municipalities to address this issue, with the goal of ensuring that homeless persons do not end up in jail.

Vice Chair De Lucca left the meeting at 2:18 p.m.

b. Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust Information

Ms. Agathon recalled that at the April Committee meeting, there were questions regarding Miami-Dade County’s Homeless Trust Fund. She advised that she would send information on this program to the members in addition to today’s discussion.

The Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust Fund ensures that for every dollar, one cent is allocated to the food and beverage tax. 85% of this tax goes into the Homeless Trust Fund and 15% goes toward assistance to individuals experiencing domestic violence. Approximately \$12 million to \$14 million is collected each year from this tax, which is supplemented with both private funding and HUD dollars.

The Homeless Trust Fund is the CoC for Miami-Dade County. It was established in 1993 and serves in an advisory capacity to the County Commissioners.

Mr. Martin asked for the estimated total funds available through the Trust Fund, including HUD dollars. Mr. Torner estimated that the Trust Fund's operating budget is near \$40 million, approximately \$20 million of which comes from the food and beverage tax and \$20 million from HUD. By comparison, Broward County is investing \$25 million.

Mr. Martin advised that another factor is that the CoC's score affects how much funding it receives from HUD. The County has a low score in some areas which has prevented them from accessing more HUD funding. The score measures a number of factors reflecting a CoC's performance.

Mr. Torner noted that recidivism is one key factor affecting Broward County's score, as roughly half of the individuals with whom the Task Force works are individuals who were previously in housing. He explained that these individuals are often placed in housing units but not provided with supportive services, which makes it difficult for them to succeed.

Mr. Somerstein asked if there was action the Committee may take which could increase the scoring of Broward's CoC and make them eligible to receive more funds from the federal government. Mr. Martin advised that a number of new projects are underway in the community, including medical and family outreach, so the CoC can better serve Fort Lauderdale. Resources could go directly toward this type of outreach.

Mr. Martin explained that this is a difficult issue to address, as there is a need for more funding at every level. There is also a need for longer-term policy decisions, such as City review of zoning. He concluded that there is no quick answer.

Ms. Schimelfenyg asked why Broward County does not have a surtax similar to Miami-Dade's program. Mr. Martin replied that the community does not want additional tax increases.

Ms. Agathon further clarified that at present, all taxing, such as the bed tax, goes to the County. The City does not directly receive any portion of these funds.

Leann Barber, member of the public, stated that within the last six months, it was suggested that the County reallocate a portion of the \$82 million raised by the bed tax toward solutions for homeless persons. There was resistance to this proposal from the tourism industry.

Mr. Dettman asked if the Committee could receive minutes from Broward County Board of County Commissioners meetings. Mr. Martin replied that he could send these documents to Ms. Agathon's office, which could then distribute them via email to the Committee members.

Mr. Somerstein asserted that the Committee should begin compiling a list of its recommendations, and spoke in favor of including the following:

- Declaration of emergency
- Zoning
- Respite care/beds

Chair Yukna stated that she would like the Committee to make a presentation to the City Commission on this issue, and requested that by the June 2024 meeting, every member bring a list of items that could be included in this presentation.

Mr. Somerstein suggested isolating one to two major issues that could be implemented, and bringing back any additional recommendations at a later date. Chair Yukna concluded that at the next meeting, the Committee would come up with no more than three items to be presented to the Commission.

Mr. Dettman asked if the Committee can send recommendations or concerns to other entities, such as Broward Health. Mr. Somerstein stated that interconnectivity between stakeholders should be part of the Committee's recommendations. He also felt the City, County, business community, and stakeholders should hold a consortium in order to address how they can work together and help one another to address the issues surrounding homelessness.

Mr. Dettman asked if it would be possible for a member of City Staff to address the zoning issues which can affect the response to homelessness.

Ms. Agathon suggested that the Committee hold a joint meeting with the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee (AHAC), which may also be preparing recommendations to make to the City Commission. Mr. Martin agreed, pointing out that in order to decrease homelessness, more affordable housing must be available.

c. Debriefing on City Site Visits

Ms. Agathon reported that she and Assistant City Manager Anthony Fajardo visited four cities around the country in order to determine what Fort Lauderdale can do better.

- Vancouver, Washington: declared a state of emergency in order to establish "pallet communities;" because the emergency was limited to three years, they are now working to determine how to maintain these sites; there have been fewer community calls for service, and a private nonprofit manages sites and provides case management and intake; the sites provide sanitary facilities, refrigeration for food, and technology services; each shelter costs roughly \$1 million to operate and serves 20 individuals, who may stay no longer than 60 to 90 days; the goal is to stabilize individuals and move them into permanent housing
- San Diego, California: implemented a law prohibiting camping on the streets, which meant they needed to build their shelter capacity; established tents at different locations, and is working on how to manage the summer heat with these tents, as there is no cooling available; each site provided roughly 300 beds and wraparound

services, including bathrooms, laundry, food, and security; it costs approximately \$7 million to run the sites

- Tampa, Florida: Catholic Charities operates two sites in Pinellas County and the city of Tampa, including a campground; individuals are assigned areas for their tents, and containers have been retrofitted to provide housing for up to three individuals; containers are considered transitional housing and are rented at a rate of roughly \$200/month; other sites offer pallet homes and apartments; it costs \$2.2 million to operate one of the sites and \$1.9 million for another, with wraparound services; the land is owned by Catholic Charities, and the city provides some funding; some container beds are respite beds contracted by hospital services
- Gainesville, Florida: a stockade has been retrofitted to provide roughly 140 beds with wraparound services; the city pays approximately \$1 million; 26 beds are funded by veterans' services, and four respite beds are available from hospitals; the area is located in an industrial area

With regard to San Diego, Mr. Martin commented that the one-year costs of the Central Homeless Assistance Center total approximately \$20,000 per cot, including in-kind services. He characterized this as comparable, but reiterated that it is better to move an individual into an apartment through rapid re-housing and provide services there. He also noted that individuals who have lived on the street for a significant time have had the opportunity to stay at emergency shelters, but may not want to go there; however, they might choose to live in their own unit if that is an option.

Mr. Somerstein commented that the model in which land is provided by faith-based services should be considered further, as this would mean the cost of land is not a factor. Mr. Martin stated that while he has worked with churches to house families on church property, this only succeeded when the clientele consisted of single mothers with young children.

Mr. Somerstein suggested that another consideration could be surplus government-owned property, in which case land costs may also not pose a problem. He asked if an inventory of the City's and County's surplus lands has been taken to determine whether there may be suitable and cost-effective sites. There may also be excess properties owned by other entities, such as the water management district and the School Board, which could be part of the conversation for affordable and/or rapid re-housing. He also noted that an analysis could be done of what a public-private partnership (P3) might include.

Ms. Agathon confirmed that the City has conducted an inventory of its surplus lands and is working to review potential County locations as well. Mr. Martin added that there may also be City- or County-owned small single-family homes which could be managed by nonprofit entities or their management companies.

d. Discussion

Ms. Agathon briefly reviewed the backup materials provided to the Committee members, which included an overview of County and City funding.

Mr. Martin stated that the County has hired a consulting team to review as many stakeholders as possible and then report on the ways in which the CoC may be improved. The consultants will address the new law as part of their overarching plan as well. They would like to debrief the Committee and hear their thoughts. Ms. Agathon stated that she would add this to the next Agenda.

VI. Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Committee at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 2:58 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: June 13, 2024

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