

Chittenden County Homeless Alliance

Quarterly Meeting

Wednesday, September 27, 2017

5:00 PM – 7:30 PM

Fletcher Free Library, 235 College Street, Burlington, VT – Fletcher Room (top floor)

MINUTES

Attendees: Margaret Bozik (Champlain Housing Trust, CCHA Steering Committee co-chair), Erin Ahearn (Safe Harbor Health Center - CHCB, outgoing CCHA Steering Committee co-chair), Travis Poulin (Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, incoming CCHA Steering Committee co-chair), Jane Helmstetter (VT Agency of Human Services, meeting facilitator), Paddy Shea (Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, meeting notetaker), Chris Brzovic (Chittenden County Homeless Alliance), Jan Demers (Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity), Stephen Marshall (Homeless Community), Sarah Russell (Burlington Housing Authority), Diana Carminati (United Way of Northwest Vermont), Will Towne (Spectrum Youth & Family Services), Jess Mizzi (Spectrum Youth & Family Services), Jason Brill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs), Nicole Kubon (Committee on Temporary Shelter), Mike Brown (Committee on Temporary Shelter), Johnny Quezada (Committee on Temporary Shelter), Daniel Blankenship (Vermont State Housing Authority), Elaine Soto (Howard Center), Alison Miley (Howard Center), Danielle Mund (Howard Center), Tui pate (CCV/Howard Center), Kevin Pounds (ANEW Place), Marcy Esbjerg (Community & Economic Development Office, City of Burlington), Kim Colville (Vermont Center for Independent Living), Addie Livingston (Champlain Housing Trust), Lindsay Casale (Pathways Vermont), Kelly Dougherty (Steps to End Domestic Violence), Diana Carminati (United Way of Northwest Vermont), David Przepioski (Homeless veteran), Pat McKittrick (UVM Health Network), Steve Lunna (UVM Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program), Laurel Chen (Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness), Dominic Nicoll (The Salvation Army), Erhard Mahnke (Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition), Sarah Phillips (VT AHS DCF Office of Economic Opportunity), Selene Colburn (Vermont House of Representatives), Adam Roof (Burlington City Council), Richard Deane (Burlington City Council), Ali Dieng (Burlington City Council), Chip Mason (Burlington City Council), Kason Hudman (Burlington Democratic Socialists of America), Meili Stokes (Burlington Democratic Socialists of America), Jess Aloe (Burlington Free Press), Mark Demers (First United Methodist Church), Carrie Bail (First Congregational Church), Patrick Brown (First Congregational Church), Andrea Heller (Opportunities Credit Union), Cheryl Fatnassi (Opportunities Credit Union), Lorraine A. Mogus, Dion Eleftherakis, Dennis Fisher, Albert Petrarca, Susan Sobczak, Michaela (last name not given), Ronnie McCormick, Evan F., Raghav Goyal, Mark Flynn, Mark Betit, Niko (not sure of name).

Welcome & Introductions.

Announcements/Comments:

Sister Pat McKittrick: Every Friday morning from 9-11 AM there is a coffee hour at O'Brien Community Center in Winooski.

Stephen Marshall: There are reports from the homeless community that the police are cracking down strongly. Everyone who was sleeping on church lawns on one street last night was cleared out. Someone's shopping cart was emptied and they were given a ticket for having stolen the shopping cart.

Kelly Dougherty: I'm from Steps to End Domestic Violence. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, so visit our website to check out our upcoming events.

Stephen Lunna: This Saturday in Barre there is a veterans' stand down. There are vans that will provide transportation. Contact the VWF if interested—they will drive you there and back.

Business:

VOTE: To re-elect the following Steering Committee members for another two-year term:

**Spectrum Youth & Family Services
VT Agency of Human Services, Burlington Field District Director
Burlington Housing Authority
United Way of Northwest Vermont
Steps to End Domestic Violence
Howard Center**

Motions: Margaret Bozik

Seconds: Marcy Esbjerg

Yes: Many

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Motion passes.

VOTE: To re-elect the following Officers for another two-year term:

**Margaret Bozik, Champlain Housing Trust, Co-Chair
Jane Helmstetter, VT Agency of Human Services, Burlington Field District Director, Facilitator
Lacey Smith, Burlington Police Department, Secretary**

Motions: Stephen Marshall

Seconds: Daniel Blankenship

Yes: Many

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Motion passes.

Tribute to Erin Ahearn.

Margaret Bozik presents a tribute to Erin Ahearn, who has served as Co-Chair of CCHA for 4 years. Margaret noted that Safe Harbor Health Center (where Erin is the Director of Homeless Healthcare Programs) has been serving our community for quite a while, and that they send teams to homeless encampments to do outreach and medical care. They partnered on Harbor Place, Beacon, Bel-Aire, and they run the warming shelter. "Erin is a role model. She always recognizes people with respect and dignity. You are a lovely person."

VOTE: To fill the second Co-Chair position.

Motions: Margaret Bozik nominates Travis Poulin, director of community action at CVOEO, to be the new Co-Chair.

Seconds: Kim Colville

Yes: Many

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Motion passes.

VOTE: Review and approve the Charter with minor wording changes to the Charter: Coordinated Assessment Committee changes to Coordinated Entry Committee.

Marcy Esbjerg describes the minor wording changes (changing the name of one committee to bring it in line with the terminology we have been using and that HUD uses).

Motions: Daniel Blankenship

Seconds: Stephen Marshall

Yes: Many

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Motion passes.

See Appendix A: CCHA Charter.

Presentation and Discussion of the CCHA Strategic Plan Draft (Margaret Bozik and Jane Helmstetter)

See Appendix B: CCHA Strategic Plan Draft.

Margaret Bozik and Jane Helmstetter gave an overview of the CCHA Strategic Plan draft. Guests were given copies of the plan to follow along.

Presentation and Discussion of Coordinated Entry and Why It Matters (Chris Brzovic)

See Appendix C - Coordinated Entry Presentation

Chris Brzovic: I'm the Coordinated Entry administrator for CCHA, based out of the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO). You can get in touch with me at: cbrzovic@cvoeo.org.

Chris showed a slideshow about coordinated entry (see Appendix C).

Chris Brzovic: We are looking to help everyone get on our By-Name-List.

Kelly Dougherty: Domestic violence victims/survivors will not be on by name so as to protect their confidentiality. There will be a codename/number used instead.

Guest (didn't say name): Is there a database to help with the list?

Chris Brzovic: We use a database called ServicePoint.

Margaret Bozik: There are a number of what the federal government calls "homeless management information systems." The one we happened to have chosen is called ServicePoint. That's used by the whole state.

Guest (didn't say name): Do you partner with individuals who are actually homeless in this process?

Margaret Bozik: We do have people with lived experience of homelessness on the committee that is designing this. We've also had meetings where we have asked people who are homeless to attend and give feedback.

Stephen Marshall: Our meetings are technical, institutional, and boring, so it's difficult, but we are getting some interest. Am I the first person who was homeless to join the CCHA?

Jane Helmstetter: No, we have had a number of people over the years. But, it's been a problem to retain people.

Margaret Bozik: This all started in the '80s when we realized there were people freezing on the streets in Burlington. Out of that was born the Committee on Temporary Shelter and the Burlington Emergency Shelter (which is now called ANEW Place).

Jane Helmstetter: Over the years we have gotten better at reaching out.

Stephen Marshall: Our last Quarterly Meeting was at the Salvation Army.

Chris Brzovic: The spirit of coordinated entry is to know everyone in the community who is in need, and to know them by name. Stephen Marshall is proposing an initiative called Everyone Known to Someone to do outreach and go out into the county to make sure everyone is known.

Guest (didn't say name): It would be great if that system could also apply to shelter beds, especially during the winter. Sometimes if you apply to a bed at 2 shelters, and end up at one shelter, the other shelter might not know that you no longer need that bed. There have also been issues in years past where people applied for a motel bed, but they didn't have ID, so they couldn't get shelter. Some communities use a fingerprint scanner to help keep track of who is using services to help people who don't have ID. Could you do something like that?

Jane Helmstetter: yes, coordinated entry could do something like that.

Guest (didn't say name): I'd like it applied to emergency shelters too.

Marcy Esbjerg: That's the way some communities do it.

Presentation and Discussion of Burlington City Council Resolutions

Several City Councilors (Deane, Moore, and Roof confirmed) will be presenting recent resolutions and their process for community input. A facilitated discussion with attendees will follow.

See Appendix D: Burlington City Council “Resolution Relating to Referral to Ordinance Committee: Ordinance changes concerning quality of life issues in downtown core ****revised version****”

(Sponsored by Councilors: Wright, Knodell, Hartnett, Paul, Shannon)

See Appendix E: Burlington City Council “Resolution Relating to Referral to Public Safety Committee: Examination of service and care options related to the support of Burlington’s homeless community ****revised version****”

(Sponsored by Councilors: Roof, Moore, Bushor, Paul, Knodell, Deane, Shannon, Mason, Wright, Dieng)

Burlington City Councilors in attendance (how they were seated l-r when viewed by audience):

Adam Roof

Chip Mason

Richard Deane

Ali Dieng

Chip Mason: None of us who are here were sponsors of this first resolution [*see Appendix D*], but Ali and I will take back comments to the committee. Lines 20-24 are the key part.

Lines 20-24 say: “NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council directs the Ordinance Committee to draft an ordinance that creates a criminal penalty for repeat offenders of these types of violations of aggressive and disruptive behavior, such as, but not limited to, public urination, public drunkenness, littering, and sexually aggressive catcalling and that the Ordinance Committee shall bring such an ordinance back to the full Council as soon as possible but no later than the council’s second meeting in November.”

Cheryl Fatnassi: I’m Chery Fatnassi from Opportunities Credit Union. The ordinance seems punitive. Maybe it would be better to incentivize avoiding those behaviors.

Travis Poulin: I’m Travis Poulin from CVOEO. How do these resolutions come about?

Chip Mason: Any individual counselor can submit a proposed resolution. We usually see it on Thursday, then it comes to us for a vote on Monday. This was sent to the Ordinance Committee, and then they will bring it back to the full city council.

Mark Flynn: I’m Mark Flynn, working with Stand w/the Poor, a political action committee. Are you familiar that there are Vermont state laws that pertains to this? 12 V.S.A. 1025 (c), 12 V.S.A. 1974 (b), 12 V.S.A 121-123, and 20 V.S.A. 2900. So, why make a city ordinance if we already have state laws that covers this? [*See Appendix F: Stand w/the Poor handouts.*]

Adam Roof: Yes, we are learning what type of authority the city has to deal with these sorts of behaviors. Initially, the proposed resolution just targeted people who are downtown, which didn’t seem right—ordinances should apply to the whole city. Also, they referred to things like stabbings, which are already illegal. I asked for sexually aggressive catcalling to be added to the list of aggressive behaviors, which obviously isn’t related to homelessness. I wanted to broaden it to address behaviors, not people who are homeless.

Danielle Mund: I'm Danielle Mund. I work at Howard Center, but this is my personal opinion. How do you hold people such as college students accountable for bad behavior?

Adam Roof: We are working with the colleges on how to manage behavior downtown. I was concerned that we shouldn't have one set of rules for one segment of our community and another set of rules for a different segment. It could lead to selective enforcement. For instance, college students vs. the homeless. BPD does have some extra patrols set aside for the college neighborhoods and when bars are let out.

Ali Dieng: Two resolutions are in front of you, and they are very different.

Before I was on the City Council, there was a resolution to ban smoking, and people liked it.

I was one of 2 councilors who voted no to this first resolution.

I didn't know that we had a state law to punish people who don't pay fines. I think the people in that committee didn't work to find that.

Niko (not sure of name): We share the feeling that this ordinance could contribute to targeting of certain individuals by the police. And, it doesn't address the root causes, and getting into criminal trouble sets people up for further problems.

Stephen Marshall: We did a survey about bathroom access, and got over 100 responses. *[Stephen gave a copy of it to the city council.] [See Appendix G.]*

Adam Roof: Let's talk about the second resolution *[see Appendix E]*. I've been working on getting informed about homelessness, the root causes, what the city does, and what the city council can do. As that was happening, some things (for instance the stabbings) happened in our community. The resolution by Councilor Wright was narrow, with a narrow response to a broad issue. I was concerned that in the eyes of the community, including the homeless, that would seem like that was what the city thought of homelessness. So, I accelerated getting my resolution out (faster than my original timeline). My resolution calls for there to be a diverse set of people working on homelessness. We will do that through the Public Safety Committee. We'll have two meetings coming up about this.

They will be:

October 19, 2017, 5:30 PM - 7:00 PM, at the Fletcher Free Library
and

November 9, 2017, 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM at the Fletcher Free Library

We are looking for programs to tell the city council what they do, and what the city council could do to help: actionable items. None of the city council are experts in this field, and I want them to learn more about it.

Stephen Marshall: We are the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, but we focus almost always on Burlington. It might also be useful for you to consult with other towns.

Erhard Mahnke: I'm a 40-year resident of Burlington, and have worked in the homelessness field for 30 plus years.

I think this is very well-meaning, but one immediate concern that comes to mind is that these folks all have very difficult jobs, I hope this doesn't become an extra burden for these service providers who are already overtaxed.

The street outreach program lost funding, and then these issues came back to the fore this past year. You should try to get more funding for the street outreach program again.

We don't have enough housing, rental assistance, or services for those who need it. We need more money at state, federal, and city level.

I share the ACLU's concerns regarding criminalization. A lot of things were de-criminalized because in the past having these things be criminal offenses tied up a lot of the city attorney's time.

Adam Roof: Regarding the city attorney, we don't yet know how these things would be handled.

Johnny Quezada: The money is being spent regardless. Once one of these crimes is committed, we probably exceed the amount of money to punish them than we would have spent to help them to prevent the crime, not to mention the loss of life.

Sarah Russell: We have 2 resolutions, and it seems like a bit of a conflict. If you criminalize these people, it will set up more barriers for us (Burlington Housing Authority, etc.) to get them housed.

Dennis Fisher: I was formerly with the Burlington Emergency Shelter. I was homeless for 6 months. People are shooting up. I find needles.

Adam Roof: The opiate epidemic is something the city is focusing on in a lot of different ways. Opiates and homelessness interface at times, but they don't completely overlap.

Carrie Bail: I'm Carrie Bail from the First Congregational Church in Burlington. We have an open bathroom for the hours we are open, which we sometimes question because of things that happen in there. I have noticed a lot worse behavior on our property since the street outreach team left. There has been urination and defecation on the property, leaving needles, etc. We care deeply about people, but we need help. We don't want the criminalization, but need an alternative.

Adam Roof: We went from 6 on the street outreach team, down to 4 (including losing the leader of it).

Marcy Esbjerg: I can understand why Erhard is a lobbyist and I'm a government worker. Everyone can always use more resources. We've got a lot of money that comes into this county to address homelessness, and I'm not convinced that we need more. We need to make sure we are doing a good job with coordinated entry to be more efficient and effective with the current array of services we already have.

Ali Dieng: We need to have a sober house (a place to be safe, do yoga, meditation, etc.), provide bathrooms. We want to systematize everything, but we need to make sure to come down to the level of the people we serve. We need to sit with the homeless and know them by name, sit down with them and know their stories. Understand the issues from the bottom.

Evan F.: There was an article in Seven Days about these issues, and there was a comment that people who have homes have the option of drinking inside. In other words, a lot of people drink, but in the privacy of their home, whereas homeless people don't have that option. Also, why not have porta-potties in City Hall Park and clean them twice a week?

Stephen Marshall: We have a community that's fractured. People who are homeless can't even rely on the place that they camp to be protected by the police. We have to stop thinking about ordinances that

restrict behavior, and start thinking about how to help make people whole. Every public place in this city should open their bathrooms because they are in violation of the law this minute.

Richard Deane: To the business owner who has a bathroom, and is concerned about people shooting up in their bathroom, how do you address that?

Stephen Marshall: That's a separate issue. We need safe places for people to inject.

Mark Flynn: Someone made a comment about what the ACLU said. The ACLU was joined by Vermont Legal Aid, and Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform also commented against it.

[See Appendix H: ACLU-VT and VLA Letter to Burlington City Council re Criminalization, and Appendix I: VCJR letter to Burlington City Council re Criminalization]

Mark Flynn: A church was also against criminalization. There is obviously a lot more support for the Roof resolution than the Wright resolution.

Our state law says that every public building must allow the public to use their bathroom. Every time a place says "customers only," it is violating the state law. That includes not just public libraries, etc., but merchants, churches, etc. Lack of public bathrooms led to a hepatitis A outbreak in San Diego.

Selene Colburn: I'm Selene Colburn, a former Burlington City Councilor, and now a State Representative. I was happy to hear Adam say they wanted to look at working with the state laws. At the state level, we are working on decriminalizing poverty, mental health, and similar issues. The City of Burlington may be moving at cross-purposes with the state.

(Not sure who said this): We keep hearing people mentioning the stabbing incidents, but these aren't really about that. We don't even know if there's a correlation between quality of life and violence in the downtown.

I encourage you to look at—I've heard a lot of support for people to do something—anything to help end bad behavior downtown. It would be nice if there were other options.

Carrie Bail: Someone shoved paper towels in our toilet and caused \$1,000 of damage.

Margaret Bozik: If we had a low-barrier shelter all year long, 24/hours/day, that would give people a place to sleep.

Lindsay Casale: I'm Lindsay Casale. I've worked on homelessness for a decade. There is no correlation between quality of life and violent crime. Recently, New York dismissed 644,000 outstanding warrants for charges related to quality of life crimes. Criminalizing them doesn't prevent violent crime, and it's a burden on the system. The research doesn't support these sorts of things.

Kelly Dougherty: I'm Kelly Dougherty with Steps to End Domestic Violence. As a service provider we are so stretched thin, so going above and beyond to work on systems issues is really challenging, so we need more funding to address things.

Dennis Fisher: I used to be on the Adult LIT committee, and Jane has been trying for years to find a place where the inebriated could be safe overnight.

Jane Helmstetter: We do have the low barrier shelter now, but it would be great if it were year-round and during the day.

Mark Flynn: It's a race to the bottom for a tourist town to lock up the bathrooms. It's a civil rights issue. We should offer help to places that keep their doors open. There are insurance risk pools and things like that. Paris France had a problem with public urination, and police enforcement didn't work. They created flowerpot urinals. NYC also tried to get tough on it, and now they're decriminalizing the noise, public urination type things, etc. We have a state law not to criminalize public inebriation. Some people are too poor to pay fines (35% of Burlington residents are impoverished) – you can't put people in jail for being poor.

Diana Carminati: This has been a very interesting and informative discussion. I hope, leaving here, we can all give some thought to these real issues in Burlington, and find a way to stay engaged with one another, so we all feel safe in our downtown and neighborhoods.

Richard Deane: I've been quiet tonight because I've been listening, and I've learned a lot. We shouldn't conflate people who are homeless with behavior issues, and they are not the same thing. There are people who are misbehaving in the public realm who are not homeless; perhaps they have a mental health issue or something else.
