

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

WHEN: October 23, 2024

WHERE: Fairfax County Government Center
Conference Rooms 4/5
12000 Government Center Parkway
Fairfax, VA 22035

AGENDA:

1. Vote: Meeting minutes from September 25, 2024.
2. Update: CoC Funding Opportunities.
3. Update: Community Engagement, Strategic Planning Contractor.
4. Discussion: NAACP Recommendations on Homeless Encampments.
5. Discussion: Process for Setting Future Agendas.

ATTENDANCE:

Name	Attending (Yes/No)	Name	Attending (Yes/No)
David Meyer, Chair	Yes	Lisa Jones	No
Adrienne Hosein	No	Maura Williams	Yes
Aimee Garcia	Yes	Megan Goffney	Yes
Ashley McSwain	No	Michael Axler	No
Cathy Benn	Yes	Pamela Michell	Yes
Claire Keena	No	Penelope Rood	Yes
Douglas Dane	Yes	Randy Shusman	Yes
Fatima Khalid	Yes	Rena Alexander-Lewis	No
Gwenn Minton	Yes	Ruth Pearson	Yes
Janet Kedzie	Yes	Seth Pearson	No
Julie Hendricks	Yes	Sue Armstrong	No
Kameron Wilds	Yes		

Non-Continuum of Care (CoC) Board Members

Organization	Name	Attending
Housing and Community Development, Fairfax County <i>Office to Prevent and End Homelessness</i>	Thomas Barnett	Yes
	Stephen Knippler	Yes
	Meghan Heaney	Yes

I. Call to Order.

- The meeting was called to order by CoC Board Chairman David Meyer.

II. Approving Last Meeting Minutes:

- CoC Board member Penelope Rood made the motion to have September 25, 2024, CoC Board meeting minutes approved. CoC Board member Pamela Michell seconded the motion.
- The minutes for the September 25, 2024, CoC Board meeting were approved with no objections.

III. Update: CoC Funding Opportunities

Annual CoC Program Competition:

- Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) Continuum of Care Manager Stephen Knippler presented an update on CoC funding opportunities to the board.
- It was reported that the CoC Application and Priority Listings were uploaded to the Fairfax County Continuum of Care website on October 22, 2024.
- The Fairfax CoC is applying for a total of \$12,027,438.
- There were two new projects entered for bonus funding, and both are being submitted to HUD for consideration. Both projects will provide permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals.
- The grants have a one-year term and, if awarded, renew annually.
- The application is due on October 30, 2024.
- HUD announcement of awards is expected to be released around March 2025.
- OPEH Continuum of Care Manager Stephen Knippler presented to the board the final project rankings (priority list).

CoC Builds:

- OPEH Continuum of Care Manager Stephen Knippler presented an update on the status of the CoC Builds funding opportunities.
- On October 25, 2024, the Selection & Ranking Committee will meet and select the project that will be submitted to HUD for consideration.
- A letter of support will be needed from the CoC Board.
- The deadline to submit the application is November 21, 2024.

IV. Update: Community Engagement, Strategic Planning Contractor Information

Deputy Director, Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH), Thomas Barnett provided an update to the CoC Board.

- It was reported that there has been some progress in speaking with local universities and identifying possible vendors.

Staff recommended:

- Begin County solicitation process.
- Having CoC Board identify related, feasible projects in the interim.

Community Engagement:

- Could consist of focus groups at shelters, community surveys, etc.

Strategic Planning:

- Gap analysis is required to be conducted annually, establish priority projects, develop performance targets, evaluate program standards for eligibility and prioritization as well as access for CoC- and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)-funded projects. There are currently no targets for the programs to be working towards achieving.
- The Board could decide if one project should be given priority over others to be the focus of increased advocacy and funding.

V. **Discussion: NAACP Recommendations on Homeless Encampments**

NAACP Fairfax County Branch representatives were in attendance to present their recommendations to the CoC Board. The Chair of the Housing Committee for the Fairfax County chapter of the NAACP presented their recommendations to the Board.

- There was a total of six recommendations presented to the CoC Board. The floor was opened for discussion and the CoC Board Chairman David Meyer facilitated a review of each recommendation.
- A board member stated that of the six recommendations, recommendation number one, which requests that shelter space be provided for individuals living in an encampment prior to the closure of the encampment, will be the most challenging. This is an issue that the County has been addressing in terms of emergency shelter. It was recommended to blend this recommendation with the issue of having additional emergency shelter and other resources.
- A board member suggested that the guidelines should have stronger language to reflect the ramifications of clearing an encampment when there is no alternative shelter space for those at the encampment to go. The guidelines should be shifted to reflect that encampments should not be cleared without having additional shelter space available for those individuals who have been living in the encampment to access.
- A board member asked if there is something that could be given to those individuals living in the encampment in the moment that is beneficial to the individuals if they must be cleared from this encampment. Something that is hopeful like a night or two stay in a hotel.
- A board member asked what the average number of people in encampments was that would be impacted by this recommendation. Deputy Director, OPEH, Thomas Barnett reported that staff estimate there are 200-300 individuals countywide that are unsheltered on any given night. Ethical questions come into play when individuals in encampments are offered shelter beds and other incentives over someone who is maybe sleeping under a bridge or in their car.
- A board member asked how many individuals were removed from the pump site encampment. It was reported that during the last couple of weeks there were only 10 individuals staying at this encampment. The maximum number of individuals living at this encampment at one time was around 40 individuals.
- A board member asked how do you define an encampment? This is something that needs to be determined by the board when writing the guidelines. An additional question is: Are we talking about encampments on county property or private property? The ownership of the location does affect the decision matrix of what can be done during the closures of encampments.

- A board member asked if there was an estimated number of what the county would classify as encampments right now. Staff reported that this estimate is not currently available. Generally, to consider a location as an encampment there would have to be more than one person sleeping together in that place. It was mentioned adding an element to the Point in Time count that is conducted in January to capture the number of encampments in a particular area once there is a definition of what constitutes an encampment.
- Recommendation #2 requests that at least two weeks' notice of an encampment closure be provided to those living in the encampment and the public. A board member asked for clarification regarding what the point is of communicating this information to the public. It was clarified that the point was to communicate with the occupants and those individuals who are working with them directly, and the NAACP feels that the best way to do this is through issuing a public notification.
- Currently a minimum of two-week notice is established to give individuals staying in encampments, but there is nothing stated for providing a notice to the public.
- A board member stated that two weeks' notice is not enough and that most public notices are sent out at least 30 days ahead of time. This would provide enough time for anyone who was able to aid to respond. The clearing of larger encampments may require longer notice.
- A board member stated that there needs to be a working definition of who these recommendations are addressing. There needs to be specific language in the guidelines that define the population, or the NAACP needs to provide a definition of the population that these recommendations are addressing. There are challenges to working with 40+ individuals in comparison to 1 or 2 individuals.
- Recommendation #3 is requesting that there be mental health staff among the county employees including CIT police officers that are sent to clear encampments. It was noted that there are already policies in place that require mental health professionals to be present when clearing an encampment. The NAACP clarified that this procedure needs to be written out under the guidelines and noted that the police department agrees.
- Recommendation #4 calls for the presence of witnesses during an encampment closure. A board member asked why the NAACP feels that witnesses are needed. A representative from the NAACP reported that just by having witnesses it ensures that individuals will behave better. In the case of a potential violation of an individual's civil rights, the NAACP suggested that a witness is there to give an unbiased testimony. Witnesses could be present to provide real-time data of what is involved in clearing an encampment. A board member stated that in asking some high-level professionals to participate in these clearings it means that a witness is not necessarily needed. It was reported to the board that the team lead is not usually a police officer but someone from human services. There are also police officers with body cameras present during the clearing of the encampments that are recording the event.
- A board member questioned if by providing public notice will there then be adequate time for advocates to become engaged? Guidelines could state that advocates could not be turned away and they could be considered witnesses.
- A question was raised whether more press coverage would help to make the situation become more visible for others who could provide assistance with funding and other needs. The NAACP representative reported that while these recommendations were being drafted it was argued that having the press there could be violating the privacy of the homeless population. There was also an argument against having social workers who work with the homeless

present because they could be seen as an enforcer. The recommendation is to have non-County government representatives present.

- Staff reported that they often receive requests for the homeless outreach workers to be present when an encampment is cleared. The outreach workers are not encouraged to show up on the day of clearing because they need to be able to engage with that individual and still work with them, maintaining trust long after the encampment closure.
- A board member recommended that there needs to be some clarification added to recommendation #5 and that it should state that homeless people should not be arrested for being homeless. Having police officers involved that are trained in de-escalation is important.
- Regarding recommendation #6, which requests that the belongings of the homeless people who are being removed from the encampments be stored for 60 days, it was stated that this recommendation requires money, effort, and coordination of storing individuals' items.
- A board member stated that the County already has the Facilities Management Division enlisted to dispose of things. It was asked if there could be a transitional place for those items to be taken. There are a lot of empty office buildings that could possibly be converted to store items. The items would have to be stored in plastic containers and tagged. Establishing a chain of custody for these items would be difficult. Also, it would need to be ensured that items that are being stored are not hazardous.
- The board member who is overseeing the temporary overnight shelter in Reston was asked to provide information regarding how they are handling the storage of items from the recent encampment that was closed. It was reported that right now the participant's belongings are being stored in a County storage facility on site that was not being fully utilized. Many of the participants were provided with luggage because they did not want to place all their items in storage and preferred to carry it around with them during the day. This has resulted in a great deal of luggage being left all around the grounds of the two shelters in that area.
- A board member asked for an example of the items that the participants are storing compared to what they are dragging around in suitcases. The board member overseeing the temporary overnight shelter in Reston was not sure but commented that some of the tents at the encampment held furniture and other items one would see in a house.
- It was concluded that after the board weighs in on all these recommendations a response will be drafted and sent to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chair.
- A representative from the NAACP reported that all these recommendations were implemented in Reston. It was recommended that the timeline of how the process was implemented in Reston be shared with the CoC Board.

VI. Discussion: Process for Setting Future Agendas

- CoC Board Chairman David Meyer asked what direction and what are the priorities of the board for the next 6 months.
- Further, where does the board see a need for additional resources, and if additional resources are not possible then how does the board keep funding at its current level. The allocation of funding season is starting, and the board needs to be a part of those discussions.
- A process for setting future agendas was discussed. It was reported that right now, the previous meeting minutes are reviewed, staff recommend an agenda with timely items needing CoC Board input, the board chair provides additional input and makes the final decision on the agenda, and then an agenda that is sent out to the board members.

- Assisting with setting the agenda will provide an opportunity for board members to have a voice on what is being prioritized and how they are spending their time versus having agendas being developed mostly by staff.
- A board member stated that prioritization of individuals accessing shelter should be addressed and is an immediate need.
- A board member shared that with the pandemic there was a lot of money that was given by the federal government to provide additional space to house individuals. That is not the case now. There is no longer the additional funding available to provide extra space. What can the board focus on to make changes now? What trends can the board focus on during the meetings? It was determined that the board needs to have subcommittees within the board to help break down things and focus on individual projects. The board starts to make movement by having individual teams determine a focus area that is then brought to the board in its entirety. Working subgroups can help the board move forward even in the absence of a contractor to develop the strategic plan.
- It was stated that once the board has some clarification, the board will need to provide an update to the Board of Supervisors to make them aware of what the CoC Board is working on and to encourage partnership.
- Staff stated that a proposed structure, agenda, and some sub-committee recommendations will be sent out to the board prior to the next meeting.
- The next meeting is scheduled for December 4th, 2024.