

September 8, 2022
Homelessness Subcommittee Meeting

THE HOMELESSNESS SUBCOMMITTEE met in a meeting at the Bell Building Second Floor Conference Room at 215 D Street. Councilor Tousley called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER

PRESENT: Councilor Tousley; Councilor Schroeder; Councilor Forsmann; Laura Von Tersch; Shelby Sieracki; Brianne Drury; Gabe Iocaboni; Dawn Ortiz; Sarah Reeves; Emily Ashby; Amanda Cox; Michelle King; Kari Ravencroft; Molly Pollastrini

II. DISCUSSION RE: WORK DONE TO DATE

Community Development Director Von Tersch reported that staff's first effort was to identify properties suitable for a homeless shelter. This property had to be located within the C-4, C-6, M-1 or M-2 Zones and within a quarter mile of a transit route. Staff sent out 1,500 letters and has heard back from 130 people: 59 who were not interested and 71 who were. Most of the people interested were located around City Hall, Idaho and G Streets. Others were on 21st Street near the intersection of 12th and East Main. Staff is building a record of everyone who said "yes" to be able to provide to the non-profit community to begin a contact list. Ms. Von Tersch stated that another idea would be to potentially build a tiny house community, partnering with the School District for construction. Whether these houses were considered long-term or short-term would determine the amount of amenities available in each home.

Michelle King asked if the list of those interested takes into consideration the city's requirements for parking, bike racks, fencing, etc. Ms. Von Tersch replied that it does not. Ms. King then asked if those within the BID could also be determined as the City charges extra fees to those properties.

Councilor Tousley explained that this first meeting is to try to determine how the group would like to move forward. There are non-profit representatives present, but the goal is to get more to attend. The Council has also asked that other governmental entities within the Valley be invited to participate. He said it will be important to identify objectives and others to contact.

Molly Pollastrini asked what is being done about the creation of a homeless shelter now, adding that it should be up and running by October. She noted that the Salvation Army is not willing to take on this task again this year unless they are paid substantially more than last year. Ms. King added that they are asking for \$350,000 for 6 months and would not implement the shelter unless funded 100 percent. Mr. Iacoboni agreed with comments offered about long-term needs and short-term needs. He said there is a need for a warming shelter when the weather gets cold and a long-term shelter after that.

Michelle King noted that in the past, adults were coming to the Youth Resource Center asking to be let in due to the cold weather, but this was not possible. In this community, the only unlocked building with heat during the night is the Post Office but there are no restroom facilities available.

It has to be determined where the City will allow a long-term solution, but it is also extremely important for them to be cognitive for the liability of the community for displaced individuals.

Gabe Iacoboni reported that First Step for Life ran a warming shelter in 2019 but were not willing to do it again in 2020 after they realized how much work it was. Many agencies were contacted to take this on, but the problem was liability. He noted that it took the Adult Resource Center 16 months to get the Salvation Army up and running, with location and money being the biggest issues. Grants and personal donations came through to make it ultimately possible.

Councilor Forsmann said focusing on the short-term needs to get a warming shelter in place should be the effort of this group first. Michelle King said she believes it is important to have both. Even if a temporary facility could be found, that only focuses on the winter months. Because it could take up to six months to get a long-term facility up and running, it is important to start now.

Molly Pollastrini said she believes there is nobody else in this community who would take on a warming shelter, adding that the Adult Resource Center was the last hope. Gabe Iacoboni added that the group chose the Inland Cellular building because it was the one place that fit all the requirements and criteria established for such a facility.

Ms. King reported that in 2020, the Adult Resource Center worked with United Way who led the charge with Tri-State serving as the fiscal agent. This effort was stopped in Legal due to liability. She added that when discussions first began, 20 non-profits attended a meeting with nobody willing to take on the risks.

Councilor Tousley stated that he was told that money may be available through the Washington Department of Commerce. Emily Ashby replied that money is collected from recording fees at the County level. A portion of that is allocated and some has been used to fund the housing coordinator position. Michelle King noted that some of the money has also been utilized to put folks up in hotels.

Councilor Forsmann stressed that it would be valuable to have Clarkston and Asotin involved in these discussions. Ms. King agreed this would be great for the long-term, but said it's sad that something can't be done to get a warming shelter in place now. Gabe Iacoboni added that there isn't even time to get a warming shelter in place due to funding and lack of a building. He noted that is why the Adult Resource Center came to the City to see if they had any buildings that could be utilized.

Mr. Iacoboni explained that the point in time count shows homeless at 140 to 150 people. He noted this is an imperfect way to measure it. When combined with eviction rates and rising costs, those numbers are diabolically opposed to each other.

Ken Krahn said he believes this group is fighting a losing battle until a few things happen. He suggested that there is a need for an internment camp or a controlled environment within a confined area for the homeless where they can learn a skill or trade. He said these people cannot continue to roam free and provided with handouts. Mr. Krahn noted this should be paid for by the federal government and taxpayers of Lewiston should not be required to take on this expense.

Emily Ashby reported that individuals who need services are often not aware that services are available to them. She said this is why a shelter with multiple services is necessary. Ms. Ashby added that people who are unhoused are not criminals. Councilor Tousley added that the homeless population is in this situation for many different reasons.

Molly Pollastrini stressed that it would be very helpful to have a city building in order to move forward. She noted there is no longer any money available as the Council “knocked the legs right out from under the cart”. She added that there is no affordable housing in the valley, noting that the city can expect to see an unprecedented amount of unhoused individuals.

III. NEXT STEPS

It was determined to schedule the subcommittee meetings bi-weekly, with the next meeting on Thursday, September 22, 2022, at 3:00 p.m. at the Bell Building.

Emily Ashby said she works with commercial property owners who are interested in addressing housing in this area, as well as non-profit organizations. She said she would share the invitation for the next meeting with these groups.

Sarah Reaves reported that Tri-State Hospital could act as a point of contact for those people coming through Emergency and Minor Care to let people know where they can go.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Lewiston Homelessness Subcommittee, the meeting was adjourned at 4:22 p.m.