

City of Lawrence, Kansas
COMMUNITY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS
January 13, 2009 Minutes (Lawrence City Commission Room)

Members present: Jeanette Collier, Hubbard Collinsworth, Wes Dahlberg, Katherine Dinsdale, Loring Henderson, Charlotte Knoche, Shirley Martin-Smith, Mike Monroe, Robert Mosely, Shannon Murphy

Members absent: Jane Faubion

Staff present: Danelle Dresslar, Margene Swarts, Mark Hecker, Mitch Young, Scott McCullough, David Corliss

Public present: Hilda Enoch, Sara Taliaferro, David Tucker

ITEM NO. 1 INTRODUCTIONS

Dinsdale called the meeting to order at 8:30 am. Commission members introduced themselves.

ITEM NO. 2 MINUTES

Dinsdale noted a correction on the December 9, 2008 minutes.

ACTION TAKEN

Motioned by Martin-Smith; seconded by Henderson to approve the December 9, 2008 minutes with corrections.

Motion carried unanimously 8-0

ITEM NO. 3 CCH Discussion regarding camping.

Mark Hecker and Mitch Young were in attendance to present for Lawrence Parks and Recreation (LPR) Department.

Hecker handed out a brochure and wanted to emphasize the portion on park rules. He indicated that with camping there are issues including fires and littering. He pointed out that this was not specific to homeless camping, but camping in all parks in the City. Hecker said that LPR tries to stay consistent with laws no matter what part of town they are in. He said that there is not camping allowed no matter what the group, whether it be the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, or the homeless. He indicated that a big problem with camping in city parks is that you have camping occurring next to sites such as wading pools for children, the locomotive in Buford Watson Park, and the South Park gazebo, as examples. It is an issue for the public. He said that there is also an issue with the showering situation at the community building. The main concern for these issues is the problem of public intoxication and the fact that it impacts the use of the facilities.

Hecker said that they do what they can to be consistent, but often get called out as being the "bad guy". He said that occasionally they let the camps go too long which is what happened to the camp by the river that was cleared. LPR was in their summer months and the activities that go along with that and they did not stay consistent on checking the campsites and posting them. He said that they are now going through known campsites every month and will continue to do a better job going forward of posting the camps and not letting them go on for so long. He said he knows that this is not fixing the problem, it just moves everyone around. He indicated that LPR is addressing the situation the best way that they know how.

Dinsdale thanked Hecker and asked for his opinion on how the problem can be addressed.

Hecker indicated that consistency of enforcement is the key issue. He also added that a legal campsite cannot be created without adequate facilities.

Dinsdale asked if the posting of campsites is primarily complaint driven or if staff is instructed to post them as they see them.

Hecker said that it ebbs and flows. During particular activity seasons or busy times, it is more complaint driven.

Henderson asked for clarification that both sides of the river are Parks and Recreation/City land.

Hecker said basically that is correct. He indicated that there was a very small amount of land along the river that is private property.

Henderson asked to verify that there is no public property that is not under control of LPR.

Hecker said none of which he was aware.

Collinsworth asked how many man hours and how much City funds are being used to patrol these areas.

Young said that in the summer it is a little more difficult and time consuming to patrol because of the growth of plants and grasses in the summer. He estimated about four hours a month. He said that winter is a lot easier because sites are easier and quicker to see. Average cleanup of the sites pulls in equipment, trucks, and usually about three workers. This usually takes a couple of hours to clean up.

Hecker added it also depended on the site. He said that usually on postings they go in and post and most folks pick up what they need and what they want to take with them such as their tent and sleeping bags. The cleanup is what they leave behind.

Dinsdale asked Monroe if the Lawrence Police were patrolling and posting in areas extending beyond Parks and Recreation land.

Monroe said that when they assist LPR it is a request from LPR. He said that the Lawrence Police rely on LPR to notify them when there is illegal camping. If they come upon it in other areas they take actions themselves.

Hecker added that they have also seen camping around the softball diamonds as well, but they usually are homeless just passing through town so they are gone quickly after a posting and they do not move to another camp in town typically.

Dinsdale asked the Commission for any additional comments before public comment. She said that one of the points that bothered her was that it seems like last month the CCH spoke of questions with enforcement. Talk of the ordinance was that it was mostly complaint driven. She indicated that what she was hearing now was that we needed to enforce better and more consistently. She said that we need enforcement so the CCH can either stand behind adapting the ordinance or feel more comfortable recommending continued enforcement of it as is. She said that the letter she wrote offered as a choice leaving it as it is and making enforcement complaint driven. She said she feels that this is not a consistent way to resolve the issue.

Dinsdale opened it up for public comment.

David Tucker, Homeless Outreach staff at Bert Nash, said that he felt that a regulated camping ground or reversal of the ordinance is appropriate in this case. He said that the recent event shows this. He said the main argument is that Lawrence has calculated by Point in Time counts that the Homeless population is over 300 people. He said that he feels that this number may be highly underestimated. He said that the only thing in the way of emergency shelter that Lawrence has is a 35 bed shelter, which will eventually move to 100 beds, however it is still a major gap.

Tucker added that that still leaves a minimum of a couple of hundred people still out there. He said we are basically calling these people illegal because they have nowhere to stay by outlawing camping and not providing them a camping area.

He stated that legalized camping will assist the outreach workers in helping the homeless utilize services, be it doctor appointments, food, or services among others. It will help because they will not be constantly moving around from site to site because of a fear of being found. As Hecker stated earlier, the way we are doing things now is not solving the problem. It is just moving people around and disrupting their lives. He suggested that the CCH recommend to remove the ordinance, and as an alternative allow for camping.

Hilda Enoch said that she would like to state this campground is what the community could and should do. She said that there needs to be amenities at the parks such as running water, garbage collection, and for it to be able to be acknowledged as a community park. She added that if we cannot have adequate shelter here then we need to be the next best thing which is a campground. She said that this needs to happen so the homeless are not harassed but are treated as real human beings.

Janie Burgess commented on how when she read of the bulldozing that she cried because this is not how people in a civilized community treat people. She said that she also believed that there should be a place set aside for a park for legal camping.

There was no other public comment.

Dinsdale brought the discussion back to the Commission.

Mosely said that he felt as if the Commission was losing their focus. He said that the Commission started out by trying to find a place for these people to live outside of being in the park.

Dinsdale asked what we do in the meanwhile.

Mosely said that the City has enough wealth that we should be finding these people somewhere to live instead of having a conversation about legalizing camping.

Henderson said that was complicated. He said he wanted conversation to be around what is being done for the homeless people. He asked how can we work on this issue that is practically universal, and has been present for a very long time in this community. He said that moving camps does not solve the problem for anyone. He indicated that he took exception to the draft letter to the City Commission because it did not seem like they were doing what they were asked to by the City Commission, the CCH was just turning the issue back to them. He said that he sees that there could be a camp. He suggested that the camp be allowed on a year by year basis until more shelter is available. He said that it would not be a lot of investment and that the homeless are creative and are able to survive on few resources. He recommended that there be an approved site because of outreach and lack of shelter available.

Dinsdale said that some CCH members have said that we need to stick to the Housing Vision. She said that if we do recommend a campsite the goal needs to be to move everyone into shelter. She said that is it very important that the CCH stick to the Housing Vision. She added that having a campground prevents those from having permanent shelter. She said that she agreed with Henderson that we are not fixing the problem. She said that allowing camping a year at a time and to focus on shelter size and additional permanent shelter would work in the meantime.

Dahlberg said that he agreed with Henderson. He said most importantly the outreach workers should have access to the campers and know where they can find the campers. He said that if they do not have access then they can not help to provide services. He said what we are not getting to is the reason that they are choosing to be a camper instead of seeking shelter. He said that the Salvation Army has not turned anyone away over the last couple of weeks. He said that there are some that are not taking advantage of this for various reasons. He urged that we need to help these people access services.

Dinsdale asked Hecker for the Lawrence Parks and Recreation response to this idea of a campsite.

Hecker said that if you are going to recommend this that it can not be done halfway. He said that it needs to have proper restroom facilities. He said that for a restroom there is a cost of around \$60,000. He said that there is also a liability issue. Since this is Kansas you have to ask if it is a safe place to camp. He posed the question what if there is a tornado. Is there a storm shelter and what are you looking at for the cost of that storm shelter. He said also you have to see if it causes issues within the adjacent neighborhoods. He indicated that you also have to manage trash cleanup, restroom cleanup and maintenance and things like that. He said a legalized campground would not be an easy process. He also mentioned that some places such as those along the Kansas River have many tree hazards. There are some parks that have these tree hazards yet there are still people sleeping under them, especially in the preservation area. He again urged the CCH that if they are going to recommend this it can not be done halfway. He asked them to consider in this economy where they want to put their money because this won't be an inexpensive project.

Dinsdale asked Henderson how many people they are turning away at night.

Henderson said no one now in this weather, but in warmer weather they are turning away 15 to 20 people a night.

Murphy asked Henderson to clarify which population they are turning away.

Henderson said that those that are coming in on cold nights are not the hard core campers. He said that those people are a population that differ from what the Housing Vision defines. He added that a big part of Bert Nash outreach is the stability they offer the campers.

Knoche said that doing a campsite halfway would be a disaster. She said that if the CCH is going to advocate for a campsite that it needs to be done right. She also added that the community would know where the campsite was as well.

Dinsdale said the CCH needs to have strong support for investing in a campsite and doing it right if they are going to recommend this to the City Commission. She reiterated that this is a very difficult issue. She said that upon thinking about it for three months that she is no closer to advising to move the Housing Vision to account for camping. She said that the allocation of funds for the project may also derail the campsite recommendation.

Collier asked Tucker how many campers would be willing to go to a legal campsite.

Tucker said that 30 to 40 people are moving through the campsites locally. He said that any one campsite may have up to 15 tents. He said it is a significant number. He added that those who would use the legal campsite would be a minimum of 10 people there on a regular basis. He said that it also would depend on if they could find the people currently camping in the area. He said that it is difficult to estimate those numbers because there is camping spread out thinly throughout the entire area. He added that it is quite possible that a lot of campers would utilize it.

Collier asked if that number included Clinton Lake. She also asked Tucker to define the population camping.

Tucker said that most of the campers are chronically homeless by HUD's definition. He said a large majority have mental illness that keeps them from desiring shelter. He said that there are cases of schizophrenia and personality disorders. He stated that these people usually prefer to camp on their own. He added that they are a very creative population. He said that a lot of the campers are camping and trying to find homes as well, however they feel that society is throwing them away. He said that every time they make a home someone chases them off again. He said it would be much easier to reintegrate people if it looks as if the City is trying to help them.

Dahlberg said that a solution would be that we offer more permanent supportive housing. He said that there are people who would like to have housing but have barriers that prevent them from doing so. He said that they are still a better fit in any type of housing as opposed to camping. He said they do not fit in at the shelter and they need their own place.

Knoche said that this would not be a discussion if the Community had enough beds to offer.

Tucker said that it would still be an issue because there are still those who will not take supportive housing if given the chance. He said there will always be those who will not.

Dinsdale asked about dropping the ordinance without providing amenities.

Murphy said that then you run into liability issues.

Martin-Smith said that the homeless count was close to 300 two years ago. The Housing Vision was built on that count. She said that after the last meeting she felt that there was a strong agreement about leaving the ordinance. She said that there has been discussion today about resources and the reality is that there is not any money. She said that if the CCH really believes in the Housing Vision that they need to move forward with it. She said that she does not think that it is the CCH responsibility to change the ordinance. She said the City does not have the money to change the ordinance. She reiterated that it all comes back to the Housing Vision. She added that we can not help 100% of those camping, but there is a significant number that that they can help. She recalled that the outreach case managers were requested by the initial Task Force. She said that at that time if the City Commission could not fund a homeless shelter then they would provide outreach case managers. They said that the reason for the outreach workers is that they would work with all agencies and services instead of focusing most of their time on the campsites. She said the agreement was that we are serving this population by providing the best Housing Vision that we can.

Knoche said the Housing Vision was meant to move people into permanent housing. She said efforts have been made to move those into being housed, not to being maintained in a campsite. She said the Housing Vision needs to be our vision and we need to look at how to get them housed. It is not LPR's issue to fix.

Collier asked if the ordinance criminalized camping and if other court cases in the US such as the one in San Francisco had any effect on the City. She asked if it is only criminalization if they are arrested.

Dave Corliss, City Manager, said that staff had looked at other court findings and that the City does not find their enforcement of Lawrence Parks and Recreation policies as illegal. He said the issue here is if the CCH wants to recommend another policy to the City Commission. He acknowledged that it is a tough task and a hard decision for everyone involved.

Tucker added that the other cases were in Florida and Washington State. He said that Seattle deregulated camping on public land and they do not provide amenities. The cases are usually that of private vs. public land.

Henderson said it is important to stick to the main task, but there is no other body or group to speak up for this population. He said that issues will come up from time to time that aren't in the Housing Vision, but still apply to the population.

ACTION TAKEN

Motioned by Henderson to recommend the City Commission approve a regulated campsite, provisional for one year, equipped with porta-potties and a dumpster, and the services of the outreach workers; seconded by Dahlberg. The motion failed 3-5-2.

Dinsdale said that the City Commission requested the CCH provide direction for them in reference to the homeless campsite.

Corliss explained that the majority of the group can have a prepared statement as well.

There was CCH discussion on wording of a majority statement to the City Commission and the place of the Housing Connector and permanent supportive housing in the Housing Vision.

ACTION TAKEN

Motioned by Martin-Smith to recommend to the City Commission that they continue to move forward with the Housing Vision; seconded by Knoche.

Dinsdale asked for CCH comments.

Henderson said that he did not understand how this was providing guidance to the City Commission. He said that all the CCH is saying is that they are sticking with the Housing Vision.

Dinsdale said that in saying this they are saying that the CCH is recommending that the City Commission stays with the current ordinance.

Henderson said that that needs to be clear to the City Commission when the CCH is responding to the camping issues. He said also the Housing Vision should include problems that deal with the homeless. He said that we need to be able to address them. He said that permanent supportive housing is the most expensive part of the Housing Vision.

Knoche said that this is a Housing Vision. She said that Mosely started off the conversation by saying that we are straying off from our Housing Vision. The campsites is not a housing problem, it is an emergency situation.

Murphy added that this is another population that we are working with. She said that this population needs to be part of our vision.

Knoche said that all of the Commission members represent agencies that deal with other issues as well. She said that the way she saw it, camping was not a housing issue. She said the fact that we have a limited amount of permanent supportive housing is where we need to be looking, not finding a way to make it easier for them to camp. She added that the CCH needs to stay to the Housing Vision. It is very hard to do permanent supportive housing.

Collinsworth read from the Housing Vision that said "Emergency Temporary Housing is a parallel alternative to the shelter, where people can obtain immediate housing while awaiting a spot in TH or other longer-term housing, working to address housing barriers". He asked if there was a way to adjust the Emergency Temporary Housing summary to add the campers.

Swarts said that the Emergency Temporary Housing is for that population who were not going to be comfortable in the shelter for whatever reason. She said that in the Housing Vision they would be able to go somewhere. She said that this population likely has mental instability and substance abuse problems, and they are more targeted to permanent supportive housing. The Housing Vision acknowledged that it would be a little harder to work with this population. The Emergency Shelter component is more for families and individuals who are a paycheck away from being homeless, and is a fairly easy population to get back into housing.

The motion passed 7-3.

Dinsdale noted that she would draft a letter to the City Commission. The letter would be an addendum to the motion and would be a strong statement to move forward with all components of the Housing Vision, and to continue with the current ordinance as written. Dinsdale also requested that the draft minutes from this meeting be submitted to them as well.

Henderson wanted the record to show that his vote did not mean that he does not believe in moving forward with the Housing Vision.

ITEM NO. 4 RECEIVE ANNUAL CCC REPORT – SARA TALIAFERRO

Taliaferro presented the 2008 Annual report for the CCC. She asked if she could present the annual report today and then come back next month and report on 2009 goals.

The report can be found [here](#).

Henderson asked if Taliaferro can talk about their facilitating vision.

Taliaferro said at this point that the CCC needs to be proactive in working with groups. She said that they would like to do an informational presentation to LAN and invite them to work with the CCC on a vision. She said that they want to identify concerns and move them into a position to have positive interactions concerning issues, such as ways they can be involved in decisions concerning shelters in their neighborhoods. She wants for the CCC to be a proactive partner with organizations like LAN.

Dinsdale said that now that the CCC has the organization and training of the facilitation project under their belts they are ready to run with it. She asked if the CCC and the CCH can have meetings to see how they move forward.

Taliaferro said absolutely and that the CCC also has a mentor working with them to ensure that they are successful.

ACTION TAKEN

Motioned by Martin-Smith to extend the meeting to 10:15 am; seconded by Henderson. The motion passed.

ITEM NO. 5 FRIENDS OF RECOVERY REINTEGRATION HOUSE UPDATE – SHANNON MURPHY

Murphy said about 9 months ago they looked at a need for a men's detox facility. They then decided that it was actually a reintegration process that was in demand.

She said that grants and other applications are now being looked at to move the program forward. She said that it is in the planning stages but they have made very good ground in developing processes and moving forward.

Knoche asked how many beds they are looking at.

Murphy answered between 5 and 10.

Knoche asked if the target population was the recently incarcerated.

Murphy said it is transitional middle ground for those coming out of treatment and out of incarceration. She said that supportive services should be available before hit independent living. She said a lot is in house and then transitions to out of house programs.

Dinsdale asked if they had a timeline.

Murphy said not at this time.

Monroe left the meeting at 10:00 am.

ITEM NO. 6 E-HOUSING CONNECTOR UPDATE – CHARLOTTE KNOCHE

Knoche introduced Heather Hoy to present on the E-Housing Connector update.

Hoy said that she has been in the process of interviewing landlords and came up with a list of landlords that they felt may be sympathetic to the cause. She asked all of the landlords 13 questions. She also added that she felt that the CCC facilitation would work great with these types of interviews. She reported that currently no landlords have indicated that they have facilities or finances to do this project. She said, although this is what they all said, each one she spoke with has already been helping someone in some capacity. She indicated that most have willingness to hear the situations, and if they have a place most indicated that they would do what they could to help. She said that she is working on a confidentiality agreement to work with these families. She also added that they have to adjust the Connector. The landlords said that they would want the first month's rent and a security deposit. She said that they feel like they are already case managing, and the element of the case managers was of real interest to them. They want to have a very open relationship with the case managers. She said that there are a lot of managers that do month to month leases, but no one could do it for free. She said that she hopes to have the interviews done by the end of January.

Martin-Smith asked Hoy if she could provide a summary after she completes the interviews.

Hoy said yes. She added that they are also working on additional grants to obtain vouchers. She said that that will open up more opportunities for housing vouchers.

Martin-Smith said that some of the obstacles that Hoy encountered are things that this commission can work on to make recommendations.

Knoche checked with the CCH to ensure that they still have their support even if they have to adapt the Connector to what the landlords will be willing to do.

Dinsdale said that she thought that what they were saying today still meets the same goal.

Knoche said that what they were finding is that they need to adjust the proposal. She said that instead of the database of properties we have a list of landlords. She said it is a case of contacting the landlords with a needs summary.

Dinsdale authorized LDCHA to pursue and work on a model that will do that. She asked if it was only for families.

Knoche said that a family can be defined as one or more people. She said what they did not envision the E-Housing Connector doing is working with the chronically homeless.

Henderson asked if a landlord is willing to hear about a family in need where does that money come from.

Martin-Smith told him that it is up to the CCH.

Hoy said that there is a chance that some landlords might make a situational decision based on the need for a security deposit and first months rent. She said that it is a business that they are running and they have to weigh those types of things in.

Dinsdale told Hoy that the CCH will plan on seeing her back next month.

Hoy added that Family Promise is coming to their meeting next week on the 20th at 9 am.

Collier said that it will take creative funding. She offered to give Hoy a list of landlords that she has worked with in the past.

ITEM NO. 7 SALVATION ARMY UPDATE – WES DAHLBERG

Report is postponed until February meeting.

ITEM NO. 8 FAMILY PROMISE UPDATE – KATHERINE DINSDALE

Dinsdale said that there was nothing new on Family Promise this month except that they were at full capacity and everything is operating well.

ITEM NO.9 2009 PIT HOMELESS COUNT – MARGENE SWARTS

Swarts reminded everyone that the count was on January 28 and it was from 8 am to 8 pm. She said that the United Way of Douglas County was going to be the home base and there are plenty of volunteer opportunities available. She reminded everyone that the volunteer link is on Survey Monkey and you must register and attend a volunteer training session if you are interested. She said that there will be a county count and a city count and that every part of the county has been mapped out.

Dinsdale mentioned that she registered and that she felt it was important for all the commission to volunteer.

ITEM NO.10 OTHER BUSINESS

There was none.

ITEM NO. 11 MISCELLANEOUS/CALENDAR

Dinsdale informed the committee that Jane Faubion has resigned her position.

Swarts told the CCH if they know of anyone interested to let her know and she would forward the information.

ITEM NO. 12 ADJOURN

ACTION TAKEN

Moved by Murphy, seconded by Martin-Smith to adjourn. The motion passed.