

City of Lawrence, Kansas
COMMUNITY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS
March 10, 2009 Minutes (Lawrence City Commission Room)

Members present: Jeanette Collier, Hubbard Collinsworth, Wes Dalberg, Loring Henderson, Charlotte Knoche, Mike Monroe,
Members absent: Shirley Martin-Smith, Robert Mosely, Shannon Murphy, Sandra Winn Tutwiler
Staff present: Danelle Dresslar, Margene Swarts,
Public present: Terry Usina Boyer, Heather Hoy, Saunny Scott, Forrest Swall, David Tucker, Ellen Willets

ITEM NO. 1 INTRODUCTIONS

In the absence of Chair Dinsdale, Vice-Chair Dalberg called the meeting to order at 8:32 am. Commission members introduced themselves.

ITEM NO. 2 Approval of the Agenda and the February 10, 2009 Minutes

Upon introduction of this item, Dalberg asked to amend the agenda to include an item regarding the potential request by the CCH for a Study Session with the City Commission to discuss a temporary emergency shelter to accommodate the individuals who have been staying at the Salvation Army but will be displaced after May 1 when their emergency shelter closes.

Knoche asked also if the agenda could be amended to include an E-Housing Connector update in addition to her presentation under agenda item 5.

ACTION TAKEN

Motion by Knoche, seconded by Collier to approve the February 10, 2009 minutes, as well as to amend the March 10, 2009 agenda to include an additional item regarding the potential request of a Study Session with the City Commission on the topic of temporary emergency shelter after May 1, and an E-Housing Connector update in addition to the topic of Transitional Housing Providers Meeting Update already listed in agenda item 5.

Motion passed unanimously.

ITEM NO. 3 USD 497 SERVICES – ELLEN WILLETS.

Willets introduced herself as the USD 497 liaison for homeless children and their families in the Lawrence School district. A portion of her job description is to coordinate support for homeless families. The school district has three tiers of support for the program. This starts with the building liaisons, which are the first line of contact with the families. The school district is only able to provide services and referrals for those that are self identified. The schools keep records on their services and these reports are turned into the state each year. Building liaisons provide the greatest support to families of all the tiers. Support is provided to any family with children in the school district that need the services. District staff members provide referrals and information for many service

providers in the community, such as SRS, ECKAN, mental health organizations, food options, day care, and other such resources. The staff has a broad knowledge of the community resources available to these families and works closely with them to follow through. The building liaison is also able to assist the children and their families get in contact with medical support, such as eye doctors and dentists, as well as offering counseling services in the form of agency referrals or onsite at the attendance center. The schools provide backpacks and school supplies to those who are not able to purchase their own or for those who have had to leave the items behind because of a sudden relocation or other housing issue. The school also supports families in finding local resources for clothing, furniture, personal care support and personal care products. They also can provide snacks for the children to take with them after school or sack lunches when it is necessary for the day's educational activities.

Willetts indicated that the second tier of support was that the school also provides academic support in the form of tutors and Head Start programs. As families move from one end of town to the other, the third tier of support is activated. The school district can provide transportation for the students to continue to attend the same school building that they have been enrolled at prior to their housing relocation. This provides consistency in their education and their learning environment, as well as keeping them stable at school. This type of support is available to any and all students, however to qualify for free transportation the child does have to be considered homeless.

Collier thanked Willetts for coming, and asked how the school district defined homelessness.

Willetts said that they utilize the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless, which includes those lacking a fixed and regular nighttime residence. This includes students and their families doubled up, living in motels, hotels, campgrounds, cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, emergency shelter or transitional care, as well as other such places. This included families that have lost housing due to their economic situation. They also serve children that are with Women's Transitional Care Services programs while they are in Lawrence, although they frequently move on to other communities.

Collinsworth asked about the district's ability to test the mental health of the students.

Willetts said that actually occurs for all students. The schools test to look for any type of academic or mental support that can be provided. They have a strong referral process for all children in the district that may require services.

Collier asked if Willetts can think of any way that the CCH can work with the district to refer those they know to be homeless to the building liaisons.

Willetts said that many families move in with parents, and if a member of the community is aware of a family that does not have a permanent home they can contact her, and she will contact the building liaisons and they will work to form a relationship with the family from there.

Henderson asked Willetts if she knew the number of homeless children in USD 497.

Willetts said that she did not bring that number with her, but estimated that it is probably around 120-125 students, noting that it is a lower number than last year. The building liaisons provide monthly reports to her and they keep a list throughout the year. Willetts said she would check on that information and email the exact numbers to Dresslar. (Exact numbers via email were 101 students and 70 families).

Collier said that one challenge that she sees is truancy in this population of children.

Willetts agreed, and said the first question she asks in the case of a housing relocation is can she help by getting them access to a bus. If they are not within walking distance they can ride the bus at no cost. The liaisons in the building do a great job in getting in contact with the families to see that the children's access to education is a top priority.

Henderson asked if it is known that a family is living in a car, how are they approached.

Willetts said that her staff would seek out the family and approach them to offer services. Her staff is out there working to locate homeless children within the district and their families. They work diligently to find them a more permanent place.

Henderson clarified that they are essentially providing case management to the children and their families.

Willetts agreed that yes, they are essentially doing that because of their access to resources and their ability to work directly with the families. They do what they can to support the families the best they can, but some families do not want the support and do not follow up with the building liaisons and other service agencies. You can only offer to help these families, you can not force them to seek resources.

Henderson asked if they are referring the families to providers such as ECKAN.

Willetts said yes, they are, as well as other agencies such as the Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority among others.

Collier asked if Willetts knew of any grants available for additional funding.

Willetts said that she has not seen anything recently from either the State or Federal level. She is also not sure about where the school districts role in the stimulus funds may end up. She will be sure to pass along any grant opportunities that she comes across to the providers.

Terry Usina Boyer, community member, asked how many families are involved.

Willetts estimated it was close to 75 families in both the elementary and secondary locations.

Henderson asked if Lawrence was typical of other locations.

Willets said yes in the fact that they are all required by the State of Kansas to provide this service to the students of the districts. The number of children affected in Lawrence is lower than Kansas City or Wichita, and Lawrence is also blessed in that they have many organizations that are able to help this population. The State requirements include transportation and tutoring services, however it was not new to Lawrence when that was passed. Lawrence had been doing that already.

Swarts asked about any gaps in aid that the CCH can help the school district with.

Willets said that most often the amount of time for their families to get into transitional or permanent housing is a real problem. She indicated she did not know how much control anyone could really have over that item, but housing is the biggest issue they face.

ITEM NO. 4 HMIS UPDATE – LORING HENDERSON

Henderson provided the CCH with a written report on the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). He indicated that HMIS was designed to be utilized locally by ECKAN, The Salvation Army, Lawrence Community Shelter, Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority, and the City of Lawrence. This system is one that is used throughout the state as well as nationally. The theory is that it will help to compile a local, state, or national demographic picture of the homeless population. It is a tracking device for what services are being offered to individuals in the communities. The system has had a history of being problematic.

Henderson said that as far as the local agencies go, each one has a database that they upload their information to in addition to the HMIS program. ECKAN is approved to use HMIS, but they do not because of time constraints, although they do recognize that it would be a strong resource for the agency. The Salvation Army utilizes HMIS but the data is not current, and they find a lack of effectiveness in using the system. The Salvation Army plans to stop uploading information to the system when the emergency shelter closes on May 1, but they will continue to record information on those utilizing their emergency assistance. They are the longest running local participant in HMIS. The Lawrence Community Shelter uses HMIS to enter data for demographics and services rendered. They use the system for printing reports containing this information. The Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority does not use HMIS. They collect their data through other in house systems.

Knoche mentioned that they do use HMIS when they enter data on their Continuum of Care program.

Henderson thanked Knoche for the clarification and also added that the City of Lawrence was able to use HMIS to generate reports, but they have not used it this year. The issue that the City of Lawrence has with utilization of the system is that all the agencies are not participating and using it, therefore the reports and information give the City an incomplete picture of the homeless population. They recognize the effectiveness of HMIS for agencies that are grant-mandated to utilize the database; it just does not help with the reports that would render the most accurate information because of the limited

agency participation. The Homeless Outreach team members employed through the Bert Nash grant do not enter data through HMIS either. Henderson indicated that he is planning on meeting with Carla Helm to see if they can start getting accurate data for that population.

Henderson told the CCH that MAACLink is the administrator for the HMIS system, and they are in the process of renewing their agreement with the Balance of State in Kansas using the same software provider for another year. They feel that they have worked out a lot of the problems that the software had. In Kansas City, over 150 agencies participate in HMIS, and less than 50% of the eligible agencies are participating in the state of Kansas. Resistance is coming from having previous problems with the system, not the lack of ability to participate. Potentially, it is a strong database that can be used by HUD funded agencies for their reports. The major product of the system is the demographic picture it creates. Henderson said this raises a question about the energy of the community to use the system. The agencies are not spending any money for HMIS, but a push does need to be made to get sufficient data in some form for all the agencies.

Swarts said that one of the issues approaching is that the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) is requiring HMIS reports for all funded agencies. This gives the state a picture of homelessness in Lawrence and other communities with the participation of the funded agencies. Funding will hinge on the participation in the HMIS. The question raised should be in Kansas City where they have a high level of utilization, how did they encourage and successfully maintain the participation of the agencies.

Henderson indicated that the Kansas City region started with a different software program that worked in the same way. The original software they used was much easier and much more user friendly. The agencies had gotten used to that network and the idea of the data entry. When HMIS was implemented there was already a base of agencies that were willing to persevere and work with the system because they saw the good in the other program.

Knoche commented that LDCHA was in a situation where they are getting something useful from it.

Swarts said in order to make HMIS effective in Lawrence it needed to be determined who should participate and how to keep them participating in order to receive accurate information.

Knoche indicated some concern stems from the fact that all the agencies already have their own data entry mechanisms, so HMIS does not usually give the agencies anything extra to add to the data they are already gathering. It is a duplicated effort.

Swarts said that since all agencies have their own reporting systems, Lawrence needed to determine as a community if it is worth it for everyone to use. It is the closest thing to a one-system approach for getting to the same information.

Collier asked who would be mandated by the ESG to utilize HMIS.

Swarts indicated that Women's Transitional Care Services (WTCS), Lawrence Community Shelter, The Salvation Army, and First Step House at Lake View are the grant recipients. The Salvation Army will still need to participate after their emergency shelter closes because they are still receiving grant money for homeless prevention services. WTCS is exempt from HMIS because of the confidential nature of the domestic violence shelter.

Dalberg asked Swarts if all the agencies are currently using the system.

Swarts said that the only struggle has been with First Step House at Lake View, but the other agencies are using it. First Step House has had a lot of staffing changes, and since HMIS was not an ESG requirement in the past it has not risen to the top of the Staff priority list, but it has to be discussed now with the new requirements.

Henderson asked the CCH where they should go from here on the issue of HMIS.

Dalberg said that it did not look like they had a choice but to begin to use the system.

Swarts said that with the ESG grantees it will be required, but the CCH might want to consider forming a subcommittee to brainstorm if it would be a good idea to encourage participation from all qualified agencies, and if they did participate what would the community really get out of it. If the subcommittee determines that it is something where the benefits would be strong, then they can decide who should participate and how the argument can be present to encourage participation. It needs to be easy in the realm of everything else that agencies report.

Dalberg asked if it would make sense to have the three CCH representatives that currently utilize the HMIS form the subcommittee.

Swarts said that that makes perfect sense, and if anyone else wanted to join they would be encouraged to as well. Part of the reason that it is not being used is that agencies do not see the value in it for them, but they may utilize it if they see the value that it provides to others or the community as a whole.

Dalberg asked if there was public comment on the item.

Terry Usina Boyer, community member, introduced herself to the CCH and indicated that she recently moved back to Lawrence from Portland. She told the CCH that the solution to the HMIS issue of having to enter data in the agency system and then again into the HMIS system could be as simple as additional software. There is probably an extraction program available for the HMIS software to make it compatible for use with the agency's individual software programs. She did not know if there was possibly a confidentiality issue with some of the agency databases, but there are a lot of resources at KU that can be contacted for assistance with this type of extraction software information.

Knoche indicated that there are frequently confidentiality issues with the agency data that they process and what can be entered into HMIS.

Usina Boyer said that the community needs to set a vision and determine as a community that there is a benefit for using the system. She offered her assistance to the CCH if they wanted assistance in researching extraction software or any other help she can provide. Her phone number is 503-421-9979.

David Tucker, homeless outreach team, agreed with Knoche's earlier comment that the HMIS is a lot of duplication of data. They have their own system of data entry, but if the City required it and they could utilize the data, then they would participate. He indicated that he did not believe that it was a requirement of the original PATH agreement.

Swarts responded that as part of the original Outreach Case Managers program, the data was supposed to be gathered and input in HMIS.

Tucker said that they might be utilizing it then, he was not sure.

Knoche asked if Henderson could get information from MAACLink regarding extraction programs and if there are any available. It would make the system a lot easier to use for the agencies.

Henderson said that he would contact MAACLink.

ITEM NO. 5 TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROVIDERS MEETING UPDATE AND E-HOUSING CONNECTION UPDATE (AMENDED) – CHARLOTTE KNOCHE

Knoche passed out information to the CCH regarding the Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority. She said that the LDCHA offers transitional housing for the homeless through the HOME program in the form of the Tenant Based Rental Assistance Program (TBRA), which is a temporary housing program that provides up to 24 months of rent subsidy and grants for utility deposits and security deposits for homeless families. In 1998 they also began setting aside HOME funds for their Project Able clients, as it is an eligible program.

Knoche said that the Transitional Housing providers in the community met last month and it included invitations to all agencies that provide this service. There was representation from all but two agencies present at the meeting. The group will continue to meet quarterly, and the next meeting will be in May. The discussion included looking for better ways for agencies to track clients on waiting lists. They also talked about issues with coordination of services as the clients move along and their service needs change. The question becomes how can they work together to facilitate those different types of service levels. The goal of the program is to get clients from transitional housing into permanent housing.

Collier asked about the last page of the report and where the data comes from.

Knoche replied that all the HOME funds are pulled into this report. There is no requirement through the HOME program to serve homeless families. LDCHA has always kept track if the families that are admitted to a housing program had been homeless.

They made the decision on their own to target homeless families with the HOME program funds. The first HOME grant target population for them was large families with children. Families were those that were the most in need on their waiting list.

Dalberg thanked Knoche for her report and then asked for an update on the E-Housing Connector.

Heather Hoy, LDCHA, said that there are currently nine landlords that are willing to be on an email list regarding families in need of housing. Three properties have been offered as vacant, but there is no guarantee of reduced rent or waiving fees. Two families have been presented for services, but neither came through a service provider so they are waiting on paperwork and case management for these families. The LDCHA board approved using HOME funds for utility and security deposit grants, and the City has approved the LDCHA requested amendment to the usage of those funds. There are now \$500 grants available to the families on the Connection. The current family in the program is a success story, and both the family and the landlord have been able to effectively work together. The LDCHA will send out a press release on the program once they have some Participation Agreements from the providers, and they are keeping an eye on stimulus funds that may be utilized by the program for homeless prevention.

Swarts said that the State has received additional funding for the ESG program as well. It is looking like rather than traditional funding for emergency shelter, the focus will be on homeless prevention activities. There may be some additional funding for the community in this form. The City of Lawrence is waiting to see how the Stimulus will be disbursed, and hopefully it will be something that can benefit the E-Connector.

Collier mentioned that ECKAN will be eligible to receive funds as well.

ITEM NO. 6 CITY COMMISSION STUDY SESSION DISCUSSION (ADDED THROUGH AMENDMENT TO THE AGENDA)

Dalberg told the commission that this discussion was requested by Dinsdale to determine if there is a need to request a Study Session with the City Commission on the topic of a temporary emergency shelter to accommodate the homeless after May 1 when The Salvation Army closes their facility.

Swarts said that the discussion needs to be if the CCH supports requesting a Study Session. Staff can move forward with the request, but the agreement of a request needs to come from the group.

Henderson said that he was unsure of what a Study Session would study. If the CCH is going to go in and ask for something, then this might possibly be the venue to do that. When The Salvation Army stops their emergency shelter on May 1 he hopes to have an interim second building to use as an overflow shelter. The facility will not have day activities as it will only be a nighttime shelter. It would have to sleep as least as many people as The Salvation Army currently sleeps. It will have a couple of bathrooms and a small kitchen area. He is looking at buildings, but there are not a lot around to use. Most have potential political problems or do not have the necessary facilities. The

Lawrence Community Shelter cannot invest too much money in an interim building. The vision is to get the agency into a new shelter building and not to pay too much money to maintain an interim building. It is still a year before they will be able to move and utilize a new location. One idea of an approach to a Study Session is to ask the City for political support with regard to taking an interim shelter into a neighborhood. It would facilitate the process quite a bit if the City showed support for the interim shelter. Whatever the CCH decides, this is an issue that needs to be moved on as quickly as possible. He still is not sure what a Study Session would study, but at the same time Lawrence Community Shelter needs the support of the City Commission.

Swarts said that Dinsdale's thought was to ask the City Commission to support an interim shelter for the Lawrence Community Shelter between May 1 and the time that they are able to move into a new facility. Facilities that exist in the community currently can be used temporarily while they work to achieve their Housing Vision. It might also include discussion regarding the proposed homeless text amendment to the Development Code .

Henderson said that is what he understood from Dinsdale as well, but he still does not know what good a Study Session would do.

Swarts said that it takes a little while to establish a Study Session. There is not a meeting of the City Commission next week. Anything that comes out of the meeting today will likely land on the agenda for the City Commission meeting on March 24th. This is getting really close to the May 1 deadline. Another thing to remember is that the City Commission elections are coming up shortly as well, and there will be a minimum of two new commissioners. Since the Study Session will likely be after the election, it may give the CCH an opportunity to meet with the new City Commission and make sure that they support the same Housing Vision. The new City Commission will already be aware of The Salvation Army's plan to close the emergency shelter, but not necessarily familiar with the Housing Vision and the view of the CCH.

Henderson said he likes that approach to the Study Session. It is a broader base to look at, and his agenda will be to politely explore the sense of the fact that the City is yet to determine what their position is in this issue. He wants to know how the City will support the shelter and other services. It would be a good idea to meet with the new City Commission.

Swarts added that one agenda item can be the discussion of the temporary emergency shelter site and the City Commission's willingness to facilitate this in some way after the closing of The Salvation Army's shelter and before Lawrence Community Shelter can fully utilize a new site. Another agenda item is to see if the City Commission still supports the Housing Vision. Third might be conversation about City support in backing and helping the Lawrence Community Shelter locate a new facility with regard to the text amendments, site plan approval, etc.

Henderson said that he would prefer to review the Housing Vision with them, not ask if they support it.

Knoche said it had been a while since the CCH has done that with the City Commission.

Swarts said that an update on the Housing Vision including the progress of the E-Connector would be good to review with them since so many new steps have been taken with it. The Study Session could help in educating the new City Commission on the CCH and their Housing Vision.

Knoche asked Swarts about the Homeless Count numbers and when would they be available.

Swarts said that she will know more Thursday after the P-I-T Count meeting she is attending, but actual numbers will likely not be available until April, which is on track with the original estimate provided from the United Way of the Plains.

ACTION TAKEN

Motion by Dalberg, seconded by Collinworth to request a Study Session with the City Commission regarding an interim overflow shelter, review of the Housing Vision, and assisting the Lawrence Community Shelter locate a new facility. Staff will facilitate the request.

Motion passed unanimously.

ITEM NO. 7 PUBLIC COMMENT

David Tucker indicated that he would be returning in April to present his homeless campsite proposal. He wanted to come to this meeting to offer his contact information to the CCH members. He is willing to speak to anyone regarding his upcoming proposal. His phone number is 785-423-4154 and his email is homelesswarrior@gmail.com.

Forest Swall, community member, told the CCH that he once served on a homeless concerns committee but as time went on it lost steam. He has recently become aware of the CCH and the work that they do for the community. He applauds them for the initiatives that they are taking. The question for him is to whether the City of Lawrence has accepted ownership about the homeless population in the city. He does not see a clear commitment by the City in this situation. He is here representing the Unitarian Fellowship in Lawrence. He has become very interested in homelessness. There are two or three members on the Social Action committee for the Unitarian Fellowship that are looking into programs such as Family Promise. Janey Burgess has also expressed concern regarding the fact that the Community is not responding to the situation of The Salvation Army's emergency shelter closing and that there is no way to address this issue. It is a matter of concern. So few people attending this CCH meeting shows him that there is a lack of awareness of the CCH in this community. It would be helpful for those in faith congregations to send out mailings to be reminded that the CCH is meeting and they can be there in a position of support. It will help for them to learn about community services and what other things are going on, such as the programs that the school district offers. Right now all they are getting is a fragmented picture of issues in the community. Swall thanked the CCH again for their work, and that the Lawrence Unitarian Fellowship will be giving them support.

Swarts said that the City of Lawrence does offer a list serve that notifies committee members and interested citizens of the upcoming meetings. Staff can send Mr. Swall that information.

ITEM NO. 8 MISCELLANEOUS/CALENDAR

Swarts reminded the CCH that the April meeting will include a presentation of the proposal of a homeless campsite from David Tucker. The meeting is not intended to be a discussion on camping. The understanding from Staff is that there will be a finite proposal for the project, and then the deliberation of the CCH to determine whether or not to recommend the project to the City Commission. There will also be a report on activities by the homeless outreach workers.

ITEM NO. 9 ADJOURN

ACTION TAKEN

Motion by Knoche, seconded by Dalberg to adjourn the meeting at 10:15am.

Motion passed unanimously.