



INTERAGENCY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS

Housing for all = A Stronger Montgomery

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/homelessness

HousingForAll@montgomerycountymd.gov

Virtual Zoom Webinar Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 10, 2021 | 3-5p

Members

(Present or Represented)

Bohorquez, Margarita
(representing Ruschelle Reuben)

Carranza, Valeria
(representing Evan Glass)

Chesney, Amanda

Crowell, Raymond

Demarais, Frank
(representing Aseem Nigam)

Habte, Asmara G.

Harris, Amanda

Hegel, Connor

Jochum, Kendra
(representing Angela Talley)

Johnson, Ebony (Vice Chair)

Kauffmann, Louise

London, Sharan

Roynestad, Brian

Seidel, Stan

Sinclair-Smith, Susie

Members

(Absent/Excused)

Goldman, Jeff (Chair)

Spann, Stacy

Zucker, Craig

Presenters:

London, Sharan

O'Donnell, Sean

Mauer, Marc

Sturgis, Caroline

Swan, Fred

WELCOME | REMARKS (Ebony Johnson)

Ebony Johnson convened the meeting with introductions of the panelists and welcomed the new CoC Coordinator, Bezil L. Taylor and new Commission member, Connor Hegel.

Bezil Taylor is from Detroit, Michigan and will be serving as the County's new CoC/ICH Coordinator. Bezil's professional experience includes working with youth experiencing homelessness in various capacities including managing street outreach, drop in, and transitional housing programs. Bezil is excited to join the County and sees his role as a glue that works to keep the CoC together and provided with everything they need for efficient and effective work. Bezil will also serve as the contract monitor for the coming youth drop in programming here in Montgomery County. Please reach out to connect for any reason.

Connor Hegel is the SMYAL LGBTQ Services and Outreach Specialist for Montgomery County. He has almost a decade of experience working with people experiencing homelessness, most spent working directly with LGBTQ youth. After graduating with a degree in forensic psychology, he spent eight years working for the Ali Forney Center, an organization serving homeless LGBTQ youth in New York City. While there, he worked as a Youth Counselor in multiple housing programs, including the agency's first housing site for transgender women, and served as a Program Assistant in their Harlem drop-in center. Most recently, he worked at DC's Downtown Day Services Center as a Case Manager, helping consumers locate housing, obtain benefits and identification documents, and more.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 9 MEETING NOTES

Stan Siegel motioned to accept the minutes. Sharan London seconded the motion. Meeting minutes for December 9, 2020 were approved unanimously as written. Meeting agendas, notes and presentations are posted on the [Homelessness website](#).

Sharan London reported that the Strategy and Planning Committee (SPC) with input from a wide range of stakeholders, with the assistance of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee developed the following action strategies to end and prevent homelessness by the end 2023. The goal is to make homelessness is a rare, brief, and one-time-only experience in Montgomery County.

After identifying the 6 strategies the Committee worked in smaller groups to develop action plans, develop outcomes and steps to meet the goals. The Strategic Plan was approved by the ICH on November 13, 2019 and was presented to the community at the Community-wide meeting on January 7, 2020.

The committee started implementation of the plan and then COVID-19 happened leading to reassessment of the action plan considering the pandemic. COVID impacted funding and had an increased demand on staff time. Click here to review [Strategic Plan Update presentation](#) for progress details. The updates presented highlight the progress made despite the pandemic.

Strategy 1:	<p>Reduce Racial Disparities Across the System <u>Objective:</u> Work to eliminate racial disparities across the systems that lead to people experiencing and re-entering homelessness and prevent people from exiting homelessness</p>
<u>Progress made:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SPC is exploring reasons for entering homeless in connection with race and reviewing internal tools and assessments. • DHHS has partnered with CSH to do an analysis of racial disparities within the system that impact homelessness and make recommendations as it relates to racial equity • Reviewing training curriculum and a virtual training format to provide racial equity training and coaching (a train-the-trainer model is being explored)
Strategy 2:	<p>Build and Support Strong and Adaptable Programs <u>Objective:</u> Ensure programs across the continuum of care are effectively designed, executed, and supported to meet the diverse needs and experiences of people, providing high quality, trauma informed services to all people, absent of discrimination</p>
<u>Progress made:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a homeless prevention index to identify neighborhoods most at risk of homelessness • Utilized new funding for rental assistance to provide multiple months of assistance • Shelter staff has been trained on diversion and rapid resolution • The CoC has implemented centralized shelter intake and diversion for single adults • ESG Care Act funding is being utilized to expand rapid rehousing by 150 units annually • New programs being developed for survivors of human trafficking • Funding secured and policies developed for landlord risk mitigation fund • Rapid rehousing learning collaborative has been convened • CareerCathers, a private non-profit organization, has been contracted to provide Employment Services. Expectation is CareerCathers will serve 200 people providing job development and job coaching. • A modified virtual youth count has been conducted • Youth Work Group is actively working to develop a youth coordinated entry system • Youth Drop-in Center location has been identified in downtown Silver Spring and will open this summer • A Medical Respite Program is scheduled to begin in the Spring.
Strategy 3:	<p>Build and Support Affordable Housing Solutions within the Homeless Continuum <u>Objective:</u> Increase and preserve the supply of affordable housing to ensure people within the homeless continuum have sustainable and affordable housing opportunities.</p>
<u>Progress made:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Risk mitigation fund to offer added protection to landlords and partners is now operational.

Strategy 4:	Coordinate Effectively Across Other Systems of Care <u>Objective:</u> Shift the continuum of care from siloed services to coordinated services. Agencies across the continuum of care work in alignment, with clarity on roles, complementary services and ease of sharing information and feedback.
<u>Progress made:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy 4 progress has been impacted by social distancing due to COVID-19.
Strategy 5:	Increase and Diversify Funding <u>Objective:</u> Increase the amount of and sources of funding to end homelessness in Montgomery County, ensuring that the availability of resources and the ease of accessing resources matches the need and aligns with the strategic plan’s bold goals and timeline.
<u>Progress made:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking funders (County agencies and local jurisdictions) to approve the shared vision to end and prevent homelessness • Encouraging agencies who come to the County for funding to agree to promote projects and programs that further the vision of the strategic plan • Conducted research to explore alternative model (i.e., Pay for Success). CSH made a presentation. • Housing as Healthcare funds were created outside of County Government to have people get out of shelter and into housing as quickly as possible. A fund manager partnership is being established with The Community Foundation. The Launch of the program will be coming shortly. • COVID-19 has resulted in Federal and State Funding providing substantial amounts of funding to prevent homelessness
Strategy 6:	Educate and Advocate for Change <u>Objective:</u> Create and support a common advocacy agenda across the homeless services system. Increase the understanding of homelessness and decrease its associated stigma across the community. Create support for the strategic plan’s bold goals and timeline.
<u>Progress made:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working on Strategy 6 is being deferred due to the pandemic.

Question: *Stan Seidel:* Has Workforce Montgomery been approached regarding providing employment services to people experiencing homelessness?

Answer: Workforce Montgomery has been approached but people experiencing homelessness is not a priority population for them at this time. *Stan Seidel* suggested inviting representatives from Workforce Montgomery to the next ICH Full meeting to speak about their programs and to ask their participation in helping those who are homeless. Stan also suggested inviting Easter Seals to speak on their success in helping veterans who are homeless.

Question: *Asmara Habte* asked if the pursuing funding for the possibility of converting/repurposing hotels into affordable housing was still being considered?

Answer: *Amanda Harris* commented that the conversion of hotels into deeply affordable housing is still being explored and Federal money will be available. This will be housing for no more than \$400-500 per month for the population who do not need case management but only require light touch services on site. *Sharan London* shared that the designation PLQs-Personal Living Quarters (instead of SRO-single resident occupancy) for the hotel conversion would help with zoning and provide flexibility.

Question: *Susie Sinclair-Smith* asked how the commission is planning to strategize to access the new resources that are coming available? Susie also suggested that recipients and end-users be included in the strategy discussion.

Answer: *Amanda Harris* commented that the Partnership and Funding Committee chaired by Mary Gies is working on how to apply and allocate the funding. Also, a representative from the National Alliance has been invited to the May Full Commission meeting to talk about the funding resources and some possible strategies. Including recipients and end users in the discussions is a good idea.

VACCINE PRESENTATION – Sean O’Donnell, Public Health Services

For vaccine information visit <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/vaccine/>.

For questions and information email PHS at C19vaccination@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Question: *Stan Siedel* asked what are the County’s plans for vaccinating staff and individual clients?

Answer: *Ilana Branda* answered that shelter staff were prioritized in Tier 1 Group 2 and were scheduled appointments. All staff who wanted the vaccination were vaccinated. Shelter residents were prioritized Tier 1 Group 2 and yesterday the County had its first vaccination clinic with over 100 vaccination administered to shelter residents at Progress Place and two shelter sites at recreation centers. The Johnson and Johnson one-dose vaccination were administered to the clients so there is no need to track people down for a second dose. The shelters are continuing to do universal testing and as vaccination doses are available will continue to administer vaccinations to shelter staff and residents. SEPH is working with Public Health Services (PHS) to have those in permanent supportive housing to come to smaller clinics to receive their vaccinations.

Sean O’Donnell reported last week with very little notice the State provided Johnson and Johnson one-dose vaccination to Montgomery County. PHS very quickly coordinated between their immunization team and SEPH to mobilize a clinic on Tuesday at three shelter sites to provide vaccinations to homeless shelter residents and staff. The efforts of testing and vaccinations of staff and residents lowers the risk of introducing COVID infection in our homeless population.

Question: *Amanda Chesney* asked how long does immunity last after vaccination?

Answer: *Sean* answered length of immunity is still unknown. We are hopeful it is an extended period and there are indications that the vaccines do work with variants. Everyone’s immune system works a differently—when does a persons’ immunity response start is a question. Because of these unknowns, PHS is asking people to continue to use precautions by testing, wearing masks and social distancing.

Question: Due to the fact that individuals in the shelters have various health conditions, how is screening done to ensure the vaccine is safe for them and who are their advocates?

Answer: *Ilana* answered Montgomery County has the Healthcare for the Homeless team which partners with Kelly Collaborative to provide primary care services for shelter residents. *Sean* added that before vaccinations are administered people are screened to ensure they are not sick (i.e., flu-like symptoms) which would interfere with the effectiveness of the vaccine. Also, questions are asked about allergic reactions. There is a mandatory observation period of 15 minutes and extends to 30 minutes if someone reports an allergic reaction in the past.

REIMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATE – Marc Mauer Co-chair, Reimagining Public Safety Task Force and Caroline Sturgis, Office of the County Executive

Reimagining Public Safety Website: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rps/taskforce/>

Marc Mauer reported that last summer County Executive (CE) Marc Elrich in response to growing national concern around issues of race and the justice system established the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force. Bernice Mireku-North and Marc Mauer co-chairs the 45-member task force. The task force was aided by 3 dozen county officials and staff who contributed information and analysis. After months of meeting engagements with different organizations and individuals, conducting surveys and community forums, the task force released their final report and recommendations.

The Task Force assessed what do we as a community expect and ask of police, public safety, and social services organizations? What kind of shift in responses should we think about to both enhance public safety and address racial bias in the system?

The group looked at 5 focus areas:

1. 911 and 311 call responses—How are these calls handled? Should police respond or some other agency?
2. Montgomery County Police Department budget—How are we spending our resources on public safety?
3. MCPD programs—Look at recruitment, hiring and training. Are the police complying with national standards for what good policing should look like?
4. Alternative programs to police and jail interaction—Look at specialty courts for people with substance abuse and mental health issues with an emphasis on diversion programs.
5. Best practices for crisis response and social services—When there is an underline mental health issue that is triggering the behavior, who and what should be the response to those situations?

Key Recommendations:

- Shift certain responsibilities from MCPD to County agencies and community organizations
- Revise law enforcement recruitment, training, and public encounters with civilians
- Implement and/or explain alternative responses to crime
- Collect and analyze data to address both racial and social disparity

Since the release of the Task Force's recommendation, members have met with the CE, the County Council, and conducted Community Forums to discuss the final recommendations.

Caroline Sturgis added that the recommendations have been shared with the executive branch and county departments for organization. Some of the recommendations are simple and can be implemented quickly versus those that are more aspirational and long ranging. The CE wanted the recommendations to be ready to include in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 recommended budget which will be released next Monday, March 15.

In addition, last November underneath the reimagining public safety umbrella, a comprehensive top to bottom audit was started of the Police Department. The audit is looking at systemic racial challenges within the department's policies and procedures, ranging from the way police apply law enforcement policies out in patrol to recruitment (i.e., how individuals are hired, trained, disciplined, etc.). A preliminary report of the audit's findings and recommendations will be available early summer around June.

Question: Were the recommendations presented to the CE from the Decriminalization of Homelessness Task Force included in the Reimagining Task Force's work and recommendations?

Caroline answered that the CE did receive the report and included funding for some of the recommendations in the Recommended Budget for FY21. The County Council has final approval of the budget and the funding was removed. The FY22 recommended budget will be released on Monday and Caroline encouraged the ICH to stay tuned. Caroline volunteered to return to discuss the FY22 budget.

Raymond Crowel expressed his thanks to the ICH members for all the work they do. He shared that DHHS has been on a parallel course to address the issue of how to provide mobile crisis response to people experiencing mental health issues.

Announcements:

Valeria Carranza announced that Councilmember Glass' office is working with Senator Van Hollen's office to monitor the benefits of the American Rescue Plan that the House just passed. Montgomery County will receive \$304 million of the \$1.9 trillion package with significant funding toward mortgage relief, utilities, and rental assistance. Valeria will continue to monitor and send information to be disseminated.

Next meeting: ICH Full Commission meeting Wednesday, May 5 at 3-5p via Zoom platform.

Adjournment