



JOHN J. TECKLENBURG
MAYOR

City of Charleston
South Carolina
Clerk of Council Department

JENNIFER B. COOK
CLERK OF COUNCIL

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE AGENDA

A meeting of the Community Development Committee will be held at **4:30 p.m., Thursday, October 28, 2021** via Conference Call at 1-929-205-6099, Access Code: 759694505. The agenda will be as follows:

- Invocation
- a. Public Participation**
- b. Approval of Minutes**
 1. February 25, 2021 - Deferred
 2. September 9, 2021 - Deferred
- c. New Business:**
 1. Presentation of Annual Report on Homelessness (action may or may not be taken)
 2. Presentation and request by the Charleston Redevelopment Corporation (CRC)
 3. Presentation on Housing Strategies from the Report on Race, Inclusion and Racial Conciliation
 4. Introduction of community partners
- d. Old Business**

None

Miscellaneous Business
Adjourn

If you have a conflict with this meeting, and will not be present, please call the Clerk's Office at 724-3726. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

JENNIFER B. COOK
CLERK OF COUNCIL

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, people who need alternative formats, ASL (American Sign Language) Interpretation or other accommodation please contact Janet Schumacher at (843) 577-1389 or email to schumacherj@charleston-sc.gov three business days prior to the meeting.

**City of Charleston Department of Housing and Community Development
Annual Report on Outreach to the Homeless Population
City of Charleston
John J. Tecklenburg, Mayor, City of Charleston**

**Geona Shaw Johnson, Director,
Department of Housing and Community Development**

**Report completed in concert with:
Charleston Police Department
Luther Reynolds, Chief of Police**

**Housing and Community Development Team:
Christopher Jardin
Taliah Rice**

City of Charleston Homelessness Outreach – Annual Report 2020/2021

Executive Summary

The Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) launched an outreach program in July of 2020 focused on responding to concerns related to homelessness on the King Street Corridor, engaging individuals experiencing homelessness, and working to connect those individuals to local services. A Homelessness Specialist position was created and that staff person was able to engage 345 unique individuals between July 2020 and July 2021; 212 of which were successfully linked to care.

Despite these successes, it has become abundantly apparent that one individual is not sufficient to address the need. The majority of outreach interactions were not located on King Street, and were, in fact, scattered across the City. This has created significant barriers to follow up care or interaction which is integral to providing effective and quality support to this population.

Additionally, a lack of sufficient emergency shelter beds in Charleston County has been tremendously prohibitive to this work as, in most cases, there is literally nowhere for individuals residing outdoors to go. Up to this point, Charleston has mostly been reliant on the Police Department to address homelessness in the City. However it is neither the mandate of Police, nor their training, to appropriately respond to this area of concern.

HCD's program, following in the footsteps of many communities across the United States, has demonstrated that there is another, more effective, approach but in order for this program to reach its full potential, significant additional resources need to be allocated to it. A fully realized – and fully staffed - outreach program will not only create significantly more successful interventions but will ultimately stand to save the City considerable financial, and other, resources.

Introduction

In July of 2020, the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) created a new position titled Community Liaison and Homelessness Specialist. The role of the Homelessness Specialist is centered on providing full time outreach on the streets of Charleston to individuals experiencing homelessness, building trust with those individuals, and fostering linkages to care. This position was established in response to growing concerns related to homelessness along the King Street Corridor of downtown Charleston, combined with the absence of sufficient outreach services in the City.

At the time, aside from volunteers programs, there were no formal positions amongst any service providers in the City of Charleston specifically dedicated to field outreach. We know through various interactions over the past year that there are many individuals experiencing homelessness in our community who are open to supports but are either unwilling or unable, for a variety of reasons, to seek services at a physical location. In total, 189 individuals that the Homelessness Specialist encountered fell into this category, with an additional 53 individuals who, accurately or not, believed that they were banned from certain services. The lack of coordination between individuals experiencing homelessness and the services available in our community has resulted in certain resources being underutilized and individuals left with unmet needs. This highlights the tangible need for outreach workers who can connect with these individuals in the community to provide service coordination.

Building off the successful models of many municipalities across the Country (including the nearby communities of Columbia, Atlanta, Charlotte, and Raleigh), this program was designed to begin with the creation of two positions, with the aim of expanding to a larger team and eventually incorporating additional programs like a low-barrier micro-cleaning employment

program. However, the program has not been fully funded and the funding allocated was only able to secure a single position. Despite the fact that there has been some small increases in community outreach capacity over the past year thanks to the efforts of a few community agencies, what has become demonstrably obvious is that this program requires significantly more personnel and resources in order to sufficiently meet the needs of the Charleston community.

Successes

From July 2020 to July 2021, the City's Community Liaison and Homelessness Specialist interacted with 345 unique individuals a total of 974 times. While this position was designed to be dedicated to the King Street Corridor, needs in the community quickly necessitated a rapid expansion of catchment area. Of the 345 individuals connected with, 239 were engaged on the Peninsula outside the King Street Corridor and 102 were located in West Ashley.

To better manage the need, the program has been successful in building some increased capacity through partnership development. The City of Charleston through the General Fund co-funded a mental health outreach position with Charleston Dorchester Mental Health, and that individual accompanies the City's Homelessness Specialist two days per week in field outreach. The City has also been successful in linking with the Charleston Wellness team, a nonprofit volunteer initiative, which provides street medical care to individuals experiencing homelessness.

As the year progressed, additional partners began to join as well, including medical residents from MUSC, and staff from Veterans Affairs and the Department of Mental Health. These partnerships have enabled Outreach programming to build a more thorough wraparound service model.

Linkages to care has been a significant theme of the City's outreach program. The Homelessness Specialist has been successful in connecting 212 people to services in our community (primarily the Navigation Center). Approximately 80% of the individuals engaged in this program have lacked documentation of any kind (i.e. identification cards, social security, birth certificates) and the Homelessness Specialist has had success in supporting individuals to obtain documents. This a foundational step to being able to access many other supports in our community.

This program has also achieved success in beginning to shift the culture of the CPD and other departments (i.e. Parks, Livability, BNS) to redirect calls for service related to homelessness to HCD's outreach program. Seventy-three (73) calls and emails for assistance were received by the Homelessness Specialist from CPD alone and that number continues to grow as more and more City employees become aware and are reminded of this program.

Challenges

One of the greatest challenges the program has faced emerged shortly after it was established. Within the first months of the programs existence the prevalence for calls for service, quickly grew beyond the confines of King Street into the rest of the city. With the staff power of a single individual, the ability to respond to multiple calls in different parts of the city was obviously unfeasible. Due to the time sensitive nature of these calls, often by the time the Homelessness Specialist arrived on the scene, the individual in question had already vacated the area.

The geographical scope and density of calls has led to tremendous difficulty in our program's ability to consistently engage and follow up with individuals which was one of the primary goals of this initiative. A lack of sufficient resources to support service coordination in

Charleston as a whole is evidenced by the fact that of the 345 individuals City Outreach engaged, less than 50 had been connected to any local service provider prior to the initial point of engagement.

Those individuals experiencing homelessness who on their own make strident efforts to access services often struggle to make the necessary connections due to a lack of capacity within existing resource systems. For example, of the 345 individuals the Homeless Specialist engaged, 318 were identified as struggling with their mental health. Of that number, 186 individuals were open to receiving mental health services, yet only 62 were successful in connecting to those services. Similarly, 267 individuals were identified as struggling with substance use. Of that number, 134 were open to receiving some type of service. Unfortunately, even though they were open to receiving support, readily accessible substance use services are not available in our community.

To cite a specific example, there is 65-year-old man who wanders the streets of downtown Charleston daily asking for food and shelter, lacking any resources of his own. His struggles with mental health and substance use complicate an already complex situation and contribute to his regular arrests. While he has achieved some success in connecting to mental health services, these efforts have been significantly impeded by an inability to maintain his appointments due to his transient nature and frequent trips to jail and the hospital. This is just one of many examples of individuals struggling in our community who fall through the gaps.

As illustrated by the above example, perhaps the most pronounced challenge highlighted through this Outreach initiative is the lack of sufficient emergency shelter options (and limited affordable housing) for individuals living outdoors. It is of significant concern that, in a County

with a population of over 400,000 people, there are extremely few shelter beds available at any given time, and zero in any immediate sense.

While shelter beds are by no means the ultimate solution to addressing homelessness, they are a necessary stop-gap until housing units become available. We know from the City's recent Comprehensive Plan that Charleston needs 7000 rental homes affordable to persons earning 30% AMI or lower in order to meet the present need, a number that continues to grow. Recognizing that adding that amount of units to the current housing stock, in any immediate sense, is immensely challenging, the Charleston community must resort to mitigating the need by creating spaces for people to obtain shelter until they can get enrolled into the necessary programs or supports that make housing attainable. Having a regular bed could have a profound impact on the ability of individuals like the gentleman referenced above to maintain connection to services and break out of a perilous cycle.

An Alternative to a Police-Focused Solution

An additional focus of this program has been to redirect calls to police related to homelessness to HCD. To that purpose, HCD has regularly worked to educate both CPD and the general public on HCD's outreach efforts. As mentioned, the Homelessness Specialist received 73 calls and emails from the CPD for assistance in the past 12 months (this does not include all calls from CPD to HCD) and this number has continued to grow, both from the CPD and other City departments such as Parks and Livability.

Of particular concern, the movement to make Charleston a more desirable and livable community for all citizens has increasingly shifted in the direction of criminalizing homelessness in an effort to generate an immediate response that satiates the frustrations of the community. A

2014 report from the *National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty*, that examined 187 U.S. cities' responses to homelessness since 2009, demonstrated that punitive approaches provide quick-fix band aid solutions but draw attention and resources away from effective solutions that produce long-lasting change (Bauman, 2014).

A 2018 study, published in *Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law & Society*, of un-housed individuals in the San Diego area found that “the criminalization of homelessness has the net effect of destabilizing and reducing the safety of communities by creating an environment in which the most vulnerable citizens do not have a right to feel safe and protected.” (Welsh & Abdel-Samad, 2018).

Another research study by the Urban Institute in 2020 highlighted that “Restrictive Public Space Management measures lead to a cycle of public calls for people experiencing homelessness to be displaced, outstanding legal obligations that can escalate into criminal charges, and further deprivations that prolong homelessness. This cycle is detrimental to those experiencing homelessness, and criminalizing homelessness does little to resolve public space conflicts and instead increases the costs of public systems.” (Urban Institute, 2020).

Evidence from municipalities and regions across the United States overwhelmingly shows that enforcement is not an effective tool to address homelessness and in fact, in most cases, makes it demonstrably worse. Yet we continually rely on enforcement because, like so many communities, this is where the most resources are allocated. The fact remains that it is neither the Police Department's mandate - nor their training - to address the needs of individuals experiencing the daily trauma of not having a safe space to sleep.

In spite of this, continued efforts are made to better equip CPD to develop the tools and resources to address homelessness, even though homelessness is foundationally not a police

matter. A proper response to addressing the often complex needs of an individual experiencing homelessness requires more than responding when there is an issue or crisis, but is contingent on consistent engagement and follow up. The level of consistency required firmly falls out of what is practical or realistic for police. We look to police because we currently have nothing else to look to.

Efforts like HCD's Outreach program provide another way if adequately resourced. For instance, in the similarly sized City of Eugene, Oregon, "the Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets (CAHOOTS) program uses a 911 system for reporting homelessness but dispatches medical and mental health crisis workers instead of police officers ... After this program began, Eugene saw a reduction in public safety spending that saved the police department \$8.5 million a year, on average, from 2014 to 2017. Out of 24,000 CAHOOTS calls in 2019, only 150 required law enforcement backup" (White Bird Clinic, 2020).

Conclusion

There are tangible steps Charleston can take to build on the successes outlined in this report, and to mitigate the challenges. Primary among those steps is to substantially increase funding to the Outreach Program. Substantial evidence supports these strategies and indicate that it is feasible for the City of Charleston to make a significant impact on homelessness in our region.

By ignoring the abundance of learnings provided by a multitude of communities across the Country, Charleston stands to make mistakes made innumerable times before, and continue to squander resources by focusing on strategies that ultimately contribute to the problem.

References

- Bauman, Tristia. 2014. *No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in US Cities*. Washington, DC: National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty.
- Urban Institute (2020). *Alternative to arrests and police responses to homelessness: Evidence-based models and promising practices*. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103158/alternatives-to-arrests-and-police-responses-to-homelessness.pdf>
- Welsh, M., & Abdel-Samad, M. (2018). You're an embarrassment: Un-housed people's understandings of policing in downtown San Diego. *Criminology, Crim. Just. L & Soc'y*, 19, 33.
- “What Is CAHOOTS?” White Bird Clinic, September 29, 2020, <https://whitebirdclinic.org/what-is-cahoots/>



October 21, 2021

Mayor John Tecklenburg and Members of City Council
c/o Ms. Jennifer Cook, Clerk of Council
80 Broad Street
Charleston, SC 29401

RE: Charleston Redevelopment Corporation

Dear Mayor Tecklenburg and Members of City Council:

This letter requests City Council approval to disburse the remaining \$266,667 budgeted in 2019 to support the Charleston Redevelopment Corporation ("CRC").

As you are aware, the CRC is a non-profit organization formed by the City of Charleston, the Historic Charleston Foundation and the Charleston Housing Authority. The CRC focuses on the development and preservation of affordable housing in the Charleston area and helps secure local, state and national funding for long-term housing affordability. The CRC includes the Palmetto Community Land Trust, which places land in long-term trust protection to ensure affordability and accessibility for future generations. More information about the organization is at www.palmettoclt.org.

The CRC is an active organization. Since 2019 the CRC has acquired Sea Islands Apartments on Johns Island, and the North Central Apartments downtown. The organization has constructed new single family homes in Rosemont and Maryville/Ashleyville, and is financing numerous other projects throughout the City. With the City's support, the CRC's efforts has ensured affordable and attainable housing for over one thousand (1,000) members in our community.

In 2019, staff recommended \$400,000 in the budget for the CRC to be derived from the \$10MM LDC funds to support the CRC's administrative and operational costs. City Council approved \$133,333.00 of that amount in 2019. This letter requests allocation of the remaining \$266,667. These funds will continue to support the CRC's proven track record of enhancing the affordable housing options in our community.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We appreciate the City's financial support of the CRC, and Council's efforts to enhance affordable housing in Charleston.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Eli Poliakoff", written over a horizontal line.

Eli Poliakoff
Chairman, Board of Directors
Charleston Redevelopment Corporation
Palmetto Community Land Trust

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F.A. Johnson II", written over a horizontal line.

F.A. Johnson II
Chief Executive Officer
Charleston Redevelopment Corporation
Palmetto Community Land Trust