

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Community and Human Services
Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes
January 22nd, 2024

Present: Abby Horrell (Chair), Allison Greenleaf, Ann O’Hanlon, Samantha Pedrosa, Rachel Dienna, Stephanie Kanwit (via Zoom), Shauna Gary, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff), Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff), Alison C. Coleman (DCHS Staff), Stefan Caine (DCHS Staff)

Absent: Paul Almeida

Call to Order/Welcome: The meeting was called to order by Abby Horrell (Chair) at 7:03 p.m., and SSAB members were welcomed to the January meeting.

Guest Speakers update on Homelessness and Continuum of Care:

- The continuum of care is a national designation, and every county and city must have a continuum of care.
 - Office of Community Services (lead agency for the Continuum of Care)
 - Applies for federal grants and manages the homeless management information system.
 - Other providers include the Partnership to Prevent and End Homelessness in the City of Alexandria.
 - The philosophy of the continuum of care is to prevent homelessness.
 - Seventy-five percent of the program focuses on prevention work.
- Spectrum of services for Continuum of Care provided to people in the following categories: unstably or precariously housed, at imminent risk of homelessness, literally homeless, and stably housed.
 - Unstably or precariously housed is defined as someone who is late on rent or utilities, rent burdened, or whose name is not on the lease.
 - Available Resources: Eviction Prevention, Rental Assistance, Utility Assistance, Community Case Management.
 - The immediate risk of homelessness is defined as someone who has fourteen days until eviction.
 - The same resources are available to unstably or precariously housed people. Additionally, there is a homeless prevention payment that can pay a landlord or new apartment security deposit.
 - Literally homeless is defined as someone residing in shelter, transitional housing, sleeping outside or in a place not meant for human habitation, or fleeing instances of domestic violence (DV).
 - Available resources include emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter, winter seasonal shelter, PATH Outreach, and transitional housing.
 - Alexandria Shelter, Carpenter’s Shelter.
 - Winter seasonal: ACS is co-located.
 - Christ House is operated by Catholic Charities and is for single adult men.

- Once someone is in the literal homeless category, the goal is to get out of homelessness immediately.
 - Try to get into a stable housing situation (market rate, rapid rehousing) funded by HUD short-term program.
 - Provides funds for a month's rent, security deposit, and up to a two-year subsidy for subsidized housing.
 - Permanent Supportive Housing: reserved for persons chronically homeless for a year, a year over three years, and a documented disability (funded by HUD)

Funding sources:

- Programs are funded through a mix of federal, state, and private partnership funds.
 - Emergency Solution Grant (VA) is about a million dollars and is renewed annually providing primary funding.
 - Private funds include Bezos Day One Fund focusing on Rapid Rehousing for Families.
 - It provides five million dollars for five years.
 - The city of Alexandria still needs more money to meet the needs of rapid rehousing. Always asking for more rental assistance programs.

Point in Time data collection:

- Takes a snapshot of everyone living outdoors that one night.
 - Scheduled for Thursday, January 25th.
 - It requires data to be collected and sent to HUD to be used as a predictor of how programs should be funded.
 - The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) disseminates information for the region and uses it for analysis to identify gaps and needs.

Previous City of Alexandria PIT counts:

- In 2021, the total count was one hundred and six people.
- In 2022, the total count was one hundred and twenty people.
- In 2023, the total count was one hundred and fifty-two people.
- There is an expected increase to be reflected in the 2024 PIT count.

2024 City of Alexandria numbers:

- Seven hundred unique individuals into literally homelessness programs
 - That is high based on per capita in MWCOG.
 - 10 out of those people are considered street homeless.

Challenges:

- There is no federal funding for building shelters and there is a need to build permanent housing.

- The city is looking into rental subsidy programs, conducting research, and including residents and providers in the process to try to figure out the best way to have an impact.
- The Domestic Violence Shelter needs to improve data tracking to demonstrate community need this will strengthen grant applications impacting funding for services.

Resources:

- Customer call center housing stabilizing center: 703-746-5700
 - Domestic Violence direct line: (703)746-4911
 - SSAB members can find more information through the public eviction trend dashboard.
 - Lesa Gilbert will provide SSAB members with the outreach materials used during PIT counts.

Approval of minutes: The minutes from December 18th, 2023, were reviewed and accepted with changes by SSAB members, with a motion to approve by Samantha Pedrosa and seconded by Alison Greenleaf.

DCHS updates:

- Soon, Del Pepper Community Resource Center will have a parking lot vendor to help manage the parking lot in order to address people using the parking lot who are not service seekers or staff.

Ideas for future speakers:

- There will be a food insecurity report released in March, and SSAB members are interested in having a speaker on food insecurity.
- SSAB members introduced another speaker idea, which would be to have updates on domestic violence and sexual assault in the City.

DCHS employee recognition:

- In February, there is Benefits Specialist Day, and March is Social Worker Month.
 - Historically, SSAB members have collected a small collection of gift cards and provide them to staff as a token of appreciation.
 - Usually, the gift card ranges between ten and fifteen dollars.
- SSAB board member Ann O' Halen suggested an idea for small gifts to provide to the whole team.
 - SSAB members approved the suggestion, and new employee recognition will include a card with a thank you note and candy hearts for Valentine's Day.
- Another suggestion made by SSAB board members was to organize an appreciation breakfast organized with other boards and commissions in March.

Continuation of SSAB officer nominations and election

- Chair: Abby Horrell's term will end on Labor Day, September 2nd.
 - In preparation for the future election, Abby Horrell (Chair) suggested shadowing to see what the role looks like.
- Vice Chair election:

- Duties: Attend a planning meeting once a month, setting monthly SSAB agenda, signing up for projects if needed, writing a few advocacy letters on SSAB selected issues, and creating basic reports.
- Required time commitment: a fifteen-minute virtual planning call or zoom and attendance at monthly SSAB meeting.
 - Samantha Pedrosa was nominated to be vice chair.
 - Samantha Pedrosa was elected as vice chair.

Upcoming meeting dates

- Monday, February 26
- Monday, March 18

Meeting adjourned at 8:26pm