

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Community and Human Services
Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes
Monday, June 24, 2024

Present: Abby Horrell (Chair), Samantha Pedrosa (Vice-Chair), Rachel Dienna, Karen Carter, Maura Miller, Ashley Caison, Michael de La Guardia, Jordan Nally, Josh Barnatahan, Shawna Gary, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff), Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff)

Absent: Allison Greenleaf, Ann O'leaf

Call to Order/Welcome: The meeting was called to order by Abby Horrell (Chair) at 7:01 p.m., and SSAB members were welcomed to the June meeting.

Guest Speaker Lawrence Smith of Alexandria Community Shelter

Shelter Programs and information:

There are two emergency shelters in the City of Alexandria.

- Carpenter Shelter, located on North Henry Street, is dedicated to families. There are only fourteen family rooms available. Alexandria Community Shelter houses single males and single females and six families.

Other Shelters:

- David's Place is a day shelter that operates Monday through Saturday between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. to meet community needs. Examples include a space to get out of the excessive heat, connection to community resources such as the Workforce Development Center and meeting basic needs such as showering or laundry. There is also a storage locker to help people keep track of personal belongings.
- The winter shelter program is only open from November to April to support the community during cold weather.
 - If an individual is not a resident, they can stay one night but be redirected to their jurisdiction in the morning.
- The average length of stay depends on the number of barriers people experience while in shelter. Individuals are usually in the shelter for sixty days, and families are generally for ninety days. Families take longer to house as some may have prior evictions or need larger housing. Another challenge is that some people do not have all the vital documents and need additional support throughout the process, impacting the length of stay.
- Requirements to enter a shelter include:
 - There is a referral process in which everyone comes from social services after being screened for shelter services.
 - City of Alexandria residency is verified through benefits screening to see if an address is listed in the city or through third-party verification.
 - Individuals and families must be able to manage daily activities independently. While some can have walkers, they should be able to move around independently.
 - There are no substance-use screening requirements for shelter access.

Additional support provided:

- There is an on-site clinic offers access to care for basic medical needs.
- There are educational scholarships for current or former residents.

Permanent support of housing:

- Affordable units for residents are provided through Bloom Apartment complex, which has ten efficiency units and five one-bedroom units in the community, for a total of fifteen units offering subsidy rent.
- Rapid rehousing is short-term funding open to everyone and used as primary funding to support residents in permanent housing.
 - After being placed, recertification occurs every three months, and community case management supports individuals and families through the transition to permanent housing.
 - Challenges with limited income and finding affordable rents that can be realistically paid after the funding goes away.
 - Complexes are seeking income requirements because COVID-19 changed the atmosphere of using rapid rehousing funds for renting.

Challenges:

- There are different challenges faced while working with families-15 single families (finding daycare, employment).
- ACS challenges: mental health challenges and elderly residents (first level not a lot of movement, medication management)
- ACS is currently full, and are 81 men on the waitlist.
- Criminal barrier-apartment complexes do not approve.
- Apartment complexes have an income requirement that can be a barrier.
- AMI is usually 60-80%, but we need affordable housing that reaches 30% of \$25,000.

Support needed:

- ACS is always seeking volunteers for job-coaching, children's story hours, meal providers, front desk coverage, and helping with resumes.
- Could always use private owners to rent to people versus apartment complexes.
- ACS does outreach to private renters to spread the word about rapid rehousing. Highlighting incentives for private renters can be like doubling the security deposit, and covering damages incurred because of the renter. ACS can use support with spreading this message.

Approval of minutes: SSAB board members approved minutes from the previous May 20th meeting.

Farmers Market Volunteer Updates:

SSAB members Nathan Barnathan and Samantha Pedroso have signed up to volunteer at farmer's markets throughout the city. They will provide updates about their experiences. SSAB members will continue to circulate volunteering information within their respective networks.

SSAB discussion about new initiatives, interests, or ideas for the coming year.

SSAB members discussed interest in a continued conversation and would like the meetings to be more interactive to better the services and programs.

- Members mentioned the interactive experience at Carpenter's Shelter.

Suggestions included:

- ACE, director of workforce development and housing community events.
- ALIVE Food Hub-SSAB members visit and can see food insecurity and how people access it throughout the City.
- SSAB members would like to coordinate a time when volunteering or collecting donations can be done as a whole board.
- September being the time for legislation there is interest in speaking to the City's Legislative Director.

Action Items:

- Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) will send the budget timeline and priority letter from the City Manager to the SSAB President, who will distribute them to the rest of the SSAB members.
- Casa Chirilagua and Community Lodgings will be contacted to see if there are opportunities to hold future SSAB meetings there.

2025 Budget process

SSAB began to discuss ways to determine their budget requests and recommendations. Members suggested engaging in conversations with other boards and continued conversations with previous speakers, such as: Division of Aging and Adult Services, Food Security Coordinator, Farmers Markets, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Workforce Development, Homeless Services, Foster Care and Holiday.

Upcoming meeting dates (third Monday of the month)

- Monday, September 16
- Monday, October 21

Meeting adjourned: 8:41 p.m.