

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE
MEETING REPORT
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2024 @ 7:00 P.M.**

Attendees: Councillor Emily Lazzaro, Committee Chair; Councillor Justin Tseng, Committee Vice-Chair; Councillor Anna Callahan; Council Vice President Kit Collins; Councillor Matt Leming; City Clerk Adam Hurtubise; Pastor Gerry Whetstone, Public Health Director MaryAnn O'Connor; PDS Director Alicia Hunt; other participants as noted in the body of this report.

Chair Lazzaro called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m. on February 13, 2024 via Zoom. The start was delayed by a committee meeting immediately beforehand. The purpose of the meeting was to address several papers referred to the Committee.

Chair Lazzaro thanked participants for attending. She said the first item on the agenda is reviewing the Governing Agenda. She said she wanted to discuss Paper 24-023 first, regarding a warming and cooling center in Medford. She said Vice President Collins also wanted to speak about another ordinance.

On the warming and cooling center, Chair Lazzaro said she has an idea on how long it can take to set up something like this. She said she has worked with Pastor Gerry Whetstone, who was on the Zoom link. Multiple City officials and department heads were also on the Zoom link. Chair O'Connor said that representatives from neighboring cities are also interested in having this conversation.

Chair Lazzaro invited Pastor Whetstone to speak. Pastor Whetstone said that there is a problem with people experiencing homelessness in our communities. He said we sometimes don't see people who are experiencing homelessness. He said that the Malden warming center was the first one in our region. He said that the Malden warming center runs entirely with volunteers. He said many people have a misunderstanding of those who are homeless. He said we are in the hospitality practice. He said homelessness is on the rise. He said we practice hospitality. He said that the pledge is to provide a warm, safe place. He said the key is that those who are experiencing homelessness are people and they are constituents.

Councillor Leming asked about the land situation for the warming center and about the \$130,000 budget. Pastor Whetstone said that the building belongs to the First Church of the Nazarene, which he pastors. He said the first year budget was \$60,000-70,000. He said the center provides a shuttle and provides meals. He said the warming center pays a portion of utilities. He said a large part of the budget is security. He said that the center provides blankets as well to ensure that the location is safe health-wise. He said that the largest chunk of donations come from individuals and businesses that support the center. He said he also uses CDBG money and some ARPA money. Chair Lazzaro said that Malden recovery coaches also staff the center at night. He said his

center has helped more than 100 people find secure housing and more than 200 people enter into recovery.

Social Worker Alysia LaGambina from the Department of Public Health said she works with individuals in recovery or people who are using substances, those who are unhoused or facing eviction. She said the main concern is eviction in housing, affordable housing, inability to pay rent, and similar issues. She said that community members use multiple means of communication to let us know that there are unhoused people living in Medford. She said that the unhoused population is also a transient population.

Vice President Collins said she appreciates this overview. She said that the Health Department and the Office of Prevention and Outreach and the team there always does a terrific job. She also thanked Pastor Whetstone. She said that the housing crisis is a regional issue and so too is the homelessness issue. She said we have to think about regional capacity and how we are contributing to that.

Chair Lazzaro said many of the people at the Malden warming center attended Malden High School and the former Malden Principal is a volunteer at the center. She said that a Medford High graduate now goes to the Malden warming center. She said it is the duty of everyone in the region to work together to do the best we can for the people around us.

Director O'Connor said she met with Somerville, Cambridge, and Arlington last week. She said we started the conversation as a coalition to look into moving this forward. She said Somerville's shelter is ARPA funded right now. She said Cambridge and Somerville have different issues than Arlington and Medford have. She said space is an issue as well. She said funding will also be an issue.

Chair Lazzaro said that running out of ARPA funding will be an issue for everybody everywhere.

Councillor Leming asked if the regional funding issue could impact warming centers who band together and seek funding together, and he asked if Medford might have a smaller homeless population because it lacks the services to help the homeless population. Director O'Connor said that we have homeless people who might not be on the streets but may be staying on a couch somewhere. She said she wasn't sure what would happen if all the warming centers banded together to seek funding, but that banding together might lead to more success than an individual Medford request would.

Pastor Whetstone said he participated in the ribbon cutting for the CHA Behavioral Health Clinic in Malden yesterday. He said that the number one cause of homelessness is mental health, often joined with substance use or substance abuse. He said we shouldn't just look at City buildings because that will be limiting.

Prevention and Outreach Manager Penelope Funaiolo highlighted efforts that City officials including the Mayor have undertaken. She said that it is about the continuum of care, not just about individual communities' CDBG funds. She said that this is a systematic issue. She said that this should be a collaborative approach with state officials and with other cities and towns. She said that every other state in America operates on a county system but that there are 351 individual fiefdoms in Massachusetts. She said it is critical to provide a dignified place to be.

Chair Lazzaro said that a warming center catches people right before they hit the pavement as a final last gasp. She said it is not the safety net that people deserve but that the least we can do is make sure people are not freezing to death. She said then we can work on housing stability and a fully-staffed City Hall.

Director Hunt said it is helpful to know about some of the systems that are in place and some that need to be a little more robust. She said we can use 15% of the funding we receive for public service agencies. She said we don't have a public service plan. She said we get \$215,000 per year to allocate, and she put this in the context of a \$130,000 budget for the Malden warming center. She said it is hard to find a building that can be a resiliency hub. She said we are also working on bringing in more after school programs and daycares.

Chair Lazzaro said that the building that hosts the Malden warming center is also a daycare.

Councillor Leming asked about the requirements for daycare centers and warming centers are the same. Chair Lazzaro said probably; she said the requirements for a warming center could be less than those for a daycare.

Ms. LaGambina highlighted that people she was working with were well informed about the warming center but they were reluctant to leave their encampments over concerns about their personal property which would have had to have been left behind. She said that there was a fatality behind National Grid. She said that the police station is always an option and the Police Department has had people in the lobby overnight. She said last year we did a better job allocating resources and funding to agencies we serve. She said that we haven't had any numbers to support funding despite our own data that we are collecting. She said that anyone in our recovery coach program or recovery readiness program is eligible for a scholarship.

Manager Funaiolo said that we also do not highlight where unhoused people are congregating or gathering.

Chair Lazzaro said that this topic is very important to her and thanked everyone for attending.

Vice President Collins said that she seconded everything that Chair Lazzaro said and thanked participants and Chair Lazzaro. Vice President Collins moved to keep this

paper in committee (Councillor Leming second)—approved on a roll call vote of five in favor and zero opposed.

Chair Lazzaro next turned to the Governing Agenda, Paper **24-006**. She said that there are a number of papers in committee, including one to draft a Wildlife Feeding Ordinance.

Chair Lazzaro went over the focus areas of the Committee. She also highlighted relevant City ordinances.

Councillor Callahan departed at 8:22 p.m.

Vice President Collins said she wanted to see how this conversation evolves just as the warming center conversation evolved.

Councillor Leming highlighted the plant-based medicine resolution.

Vice President Collins discussed the need for an ordinance to address overgrowth such as branches, weeds, and vines. She also discussed allowing City staff to have enforcement authority around some activities if they become problematic.

Councillor Tseng discussed the need for Gender-Affirming Care and Reproductive Healthcare protection ordinances. He said he would have some updated ordinance language for this and other items.

Vice President Collins discussed the CCOPS ordinance, which requires the annual submission of reports by agencies that use these technologies. She said that the first meeting would be this committee's April meeting. She also discussed housing-related ordinances.

Director Hunt discussed the Housing Stability Notification Ordinance.

Chair Hunt discussed Emergency Vehicle and Equipment replacement. Councillor Leming said that this would likely require us to know what the budget is first. Vice President Collins said that no Councillor is currently the lead on this project. She said that rather than creating a maintenance plan for emergency equipment, this is more about reconciling our emergency fleet with our capital spending documents.

Vice President Collins said she would like to list the wildlife feeding ordinance as an action item and she would circulate a draft of language.

Vice President Collins moved to receive and place **24-006** on file (Councillor Tseng second)—approved on a roll call vote of four in favor, zero opposed, and Councillor Callahan absent.

Vice President Collins moved to adjourn at 8:38 p.m. (Councillor Tseng second)-- approved on a roll call vote of four in favor, zero opposed, and Councillor Callahan absent.

Chair Lazzaro adjourned the meeting at 8:38 p.m.