**Statewide Homeless Council**

December 8, 2015

Augusta, ME

**Council Members Present:** Wes Phinney, Cullen Ryan, Donna Kelley, Don Harden, Josh D’Alessio, Dave McCluskey, John Gallagher, Sheldon Wheeler, Jon Bradley

**Council Members Not Present:** Elizabeth Szatkowski

**Guests:** William Higgins, Mary Francis Bartlett, Brian Marchant, Angela Giordano, Thomas Ptacek, Norm Maze, Chet Barnes, Cindy Namer

**Minutes:** Scott Tibbitts

**Review of Minutes:** Minutes of October 27th approved as submitted (No meeting in November).

**Announcements:**

-Both the **Maine and Portland Continuums of Care** successfully submitted their annual funding applications to HUD on time.

-**Homeless Voices for Justice** is sponsoring a Holiday Wish Event, there will be a press Conference Thursday at 11:00. The Portland Homeless Vigil will be December 21st, at 4:00 at Monument Square.

-**York County Shelter Programs, Inc**. has officially changed its name to the **Donald H. Gean Center for Human Services.** They are also finalizing the details of acquiring the campus on Shaker Hill in Alfred, and Wes is now the Program Manager for Serenity House in Portland.

**SHC Blueprint for DHHS:**

The latest version was reviewed and discussed. There were some additional comments and suggestions which Cullen incorporated into the document. In order to keep this moving forward, a **MOTION** **was made finalize and approve the Blueprint and send it to the Regional HC’s for review, so SHC can consider their feedback at the Feb 9 meeting. PASSED.**

**New HUD Chronic Homeless Definition:**

-This seems to be getting closer to the original intent of trying to define the population, and not just about meeting a particular measure.

-HMIS will need to make adjustments to calculations and reporting.

-This may actually result in our CH numbers going up – or at lease appearing to.

-SHC and CoC’s will need to educate everyone on the new terms, including non-homeless providers like hospitals, law enforcement, GA, who may be in contact with these folks.

-The new definitions looks at “Number of Days Housed” rather than “Number of Days Homeless”, which may be easier to track and may make it easier for rural areas to identify people who qualify.

**What’s Going on at Oxford Street Shelter:**

Cullen provided a slide presentation based on data from the Oxford Street Shelter to show the impact of various programs and efforts over the past several years.

* About 2200 people pass through the shelter in a given year
* 32% to 39 % stay 3 days or less
* 54% stay 14 days or less
* Only 4 or 5% stay night after night for extended periods
* Various charts and graphs showed the drops in usage following the opening of Florence House, Logan Place, and implantation of HPRP programs and the LTS initiative.

**There was considerable discussion following the presentation:**

-This is a nice summary of information, but there are so many other factors impacting these numbers that are not considered in this report, that we really do not know for sure how effective any one program or group of programs has been

-Emptying the Oxford Street Shelter is not and should not be the goal here – ending homelessness is the goal – including for those who do not stay at the shelter - there are more and more people choosing to sleep out these days.

-There are ways to collect that information too – PATH – and if the data is accurate and entered in HMIS as required, that will allow us to access and allocate resources as needed.

-Folks struggling with addictions will not stay at the shelter because they do not want to lose their ‘works’ – is there a way – outside lockers or something – that would let them keep their belongings safe outside the shelter so they could safely stay inside the shelter?

-We need recovery programs – getting addicts into shelters is not recovery.

-This discussion is very Portland centric – What about other parts of the state?

-PCHC has doubled their Housing Staff (well, from 1 to 2) and have housed 51 more people this year over last. They have seen a 25% decrease in lengths of stay, and an overall decrease in the total number of people at the shelter. They also recently opened a 24 TH facility, but those folks were not counted in the other figures.

-We need to be sure reports like this do not lead to an overall decrease in the availability of shelter beds. Getting 25% or 35% more people out of shelters does not directly relate to a decrease in the number of people coming in – more people become homeless every day. This model is too simplistic and will be misused by people trying to justify cuts to funding for shelters.

-OSS staff pointed out that they see about 600 different people each month, but they do not need a 600 bed shelter – even with some turnover they only see about 190 on a given night.

-The projections in this report allow for future planning, but if real life numbers do not follow the projected path, you need to look at what other factors are changing and you need to address them.

-This is why PATH and other outreach efforts are so important. The state reduced funding for youth shelters because we could not get an accurate count to demonstrate the real need. If Portland has 80 or 90 people sleeping out, that’s more than a third of the people in OSS on a nightly basis who are not being counted.

-We need better data on homeless youth, especially GLBT, and those escaping abusive situations.

-Coordinated Entry and Data Sharing are going to allow for a much more accurate picture.

-The new Mayor in Portland has said they want to see 2000 new units built – some for subsidized, low income households, some fair market – that will have a big impact.

**Long Term Stayer Update:**

-The original Long Term Stayers list will be down to about 15 people soon and those may be housed in the next couple months. Of course, more people were added since the original list was compiled.

-The latest LTS report showed OSS went from 3 to 61 – that must be an error?

-We need to look at changing the definition – do we want to go from 180 days to 150?

-What about areas that are not housing LTS’s as quickly? We don’t want them to give up.

-PATH data is poised to increase and improve significantly – we may want to keep it at 180 till we have a better sense of the impact that data will have.

-We should change the language to ‘Long Term Homeless” – not “Stayers” which implies they have to be staying in a shelter to be counted at all.

-The work we have done with LTS is showing great results, but this is not the only strategy or the only population we should be working on.

-With the LTS effort, we did not wait for HUD, or for dedicated funding – we jumped in and started working. We need to apply that same sort of effort to new initiatives, whether that is a new LTS definition or something totally new.

**Opiate Epidemic:**

-Sheldon agreed that there is currently a disconnect between what is happening on the streets and the reports that his office is receiving, which consistently show zero wait lists for rehab services. The reports show that over 50% of Substance Abuse Service Providers are meeting the 7 to 14 day access time frames. Anecdotally, we hear the situation is much worse, but if the information is not being recorded it will not show up in the reports.

-There is a strong push to have the money follow the person – the Mental Health side of DHHS is very close to that already, but the Substance Abuse side is not set up that way.

-A recent study from Brandeis University found that Incentive Based Funding did not show significant benefits, or drawbacks, in terms of service delivery. However, there may be a disincentive to capture accurate waitlist data.

-DHHS has updated their computer systems and are moving from monthly to daily required entry for Substance Abuse data. At this point, however, they do not even have a clear guideline for when someone gets placed on a waitlist – is it when they first call to inquire about services, when they have their first face to face meeting with a worker, when they are determined eligible for services.

-Many agencies, shelters included, do not even bother trying to make a referral call if they know there are no openings available or that the person is not going to be deemed eligible.

-Mental Health has documented Unmet Need and kept waiting lists for more than 20 years. Substance Abuse will not be able to achieve the same level over-night, but it has to happen soon.

-Maine’s Prescription Monitoring Policy is considered one of the most robust in the country, partially because it was designed so that patients have to ‘opt-out’, rather than opt-in.

-70% of heroin addicts start out abusing other opiates, prescribed to them or someone else. Maine is now looking at Doctors who prescribe large numbers of opiates and addressing this issue directly with them. DHHS is not allowed to disclose this information to law enforcement – yet.

-That’s good, but only solves part of the problem. If you stop that doctor from filling those prescriptions, the people he got hooked will just start looking for other ways to meet their addiction, either through another doctor or illegally. There need to be treatment and recovery services in place to offer to those folks.

**Affordable Housing:**

-The Affordable Housing Working Group is wrapping up but there is still time to provide input until Friday through the [www.MaineHousing.org](http://www.MaineHousing.org) website.

-John said many LIHEAP projects were awarded points during development for stating they would provide a certain percentage of units for homeless households, but without a subsidy, many of those households are not able to stay in their unit. MaineHousing had wanted to provide HCV subsidy to homeless households to help them get into these units, but HUD now says that any such vouchers made available must first be offered to current residents before they can go to new homeless applicants. However, any new projects, without current residents, could use vouchers designated for serving homeless households. MaineHousing is still looking for ways to utilize the 100 vouchers.

-It was suggested that any RFP on this should look carefully the term Homeless – there is considerable difference between a family that is circumstantially homeless for a few days and a family that has been homeless for an extended period of time.

-There are many projects developed through the CoCs that have or will be losing operations funding. Can MaineHousing look at providing vouchers to these projects so that they can continue to meet their obligations to serve homeless populations? John said he was willing to consider that.

**Continuum of Care Updates**:

-Point-in-Time planning is under way. There is discussion of expanding the count beyond just one night. Information about forms and trainings will be available soon.

-The CoC Leadership Group continues to work on Coordinated Entry and Data Sharing.

-The scope of work for the Veteran’s Technical Assistance Grant has been drafted.

-Discussion continues with the VA, SSVF and VASH programs. Before she left Carol K. had asked HUD for a waiver on the 65% CH guideline for VASH, saying it was difficult to identify CH Vets in most of the state, and this contributed to the vouchers were not be utilized. Cullen stated he would now argue against that position, saying we do have CH Vets, and the VASH vouchers need to go to them – we just need to do a better job finding them.

- This is not just about numbers or lack of numbers- it is in line with our efforts to connect the right people to the right resource. VASH are designated for CH Vets and that is how they should be used. There are shelters using S+C and other subsidies to house Vets, some CH Vets, this is not a good use of resources.

- There were VASH vouchers at Portland Housing Authority sitting unused because the VA could not coordinate the Service Component.

**- A MOTION was made that SHC oppose the waiver and urge the VA to maintain the 65% criteria to target this resource to CH Veterans. PASSED.**

**Policy Committee**:

-Federal Budget agreed to in November takes some sequestration pressure off, but still not enough to totally cure the cuts.

-Senator Collins is looking at FUP modernization and Foster Youth who end up homeless.

- **MOTION to send Sen. Collins a Thank You Letter for her efforts and support. PASSED.**

-The State Affordable Housing Bond passed, providing $15M for Senior Housing development.

-Proposed changes to GA could mean more asylum seekers ending up at shelters if cannot access GA. Comment period on this goes until Dec 29th.

-Shalom House was awarded the BRAP RFP.

Preble Street is finalizing their Homeless Youth Count Report, and have already been asked to conduct another. They are working with schools and communities to identify homeless youth and hope the information will impact programs and policies.

**Next Meeting: Jan. 12, 2016**