

## Mayor's Downtown Advisory Commission Minutes ~ August 3, 2010

**Commission Members in Attendance:** Rod Austin, Barbara Berens, Margaret Borg, Brenda Desmond, Ellie Hill, Melinda Mason, Kim Murray, Susan Hay Patrick, Nick Roberts, Rob Scheben, Peggy Seel, Dave Strohmaier, Leanne Vreeland, Julie Weaver, Jason Wiener, Keithi Worthington

**Commission Members Absent:** Leslie Halligan, Julie Hilley, Laurie Johnson, David Pierce, Keenan Whitt

**Others in Attendance:** Melani Coyle (Commission Secretary); Peggy Seel, OPG; Eran Fowler, Poverello Center

**Intro and Welcome:** Susan Hay Patrick called the meeting to order.

**Public Comment:** None

**Review of Minutes:** The July minutes will be approved at the September meeting.

### Updates from Social Services Committee – Jason Wiener and Susan Hay Patrick

- **Update from ARHC on winter shelter contingency – Eran Fowler**

Eran Fowler said this topic has been on the agenda for the At-Risk Housing Committee meetings. The committee has been looking at other communities and discussing options for Missoula. Adam Ragsdale from the Missoula Housing Authority has experience with these approaches in Tucson and has been an asset to the discussion. They have discussed three approaches.

  - Voucher System: 70 people can sleep at the Poverello Center per the agency set capacity rate. They are usually 95 – 100% at capacity per the fire code. Last year there were 35 days when there were more than 95 people sleeping at the Poverello, which put them over the fire code. During the last fire inspection, they were told they were not going to be able to keep sleeping people above the fire code. Vouchers for motels are very expensive and are not feasible in a lot of cases because the motels are not going to serve the people who sometimes represent the overflow population (under the influence of alcohol or drugs, etc). There are other agencies such as the Salvation Army and YWCA that have voucher systems and good relationships with the motels that take them, and they do not want to jeopardize those relationships for the other agencies.
  - Access Church Congregations: this is one option that Tucson uses. There would be a group of churches that would be on a rotation schedule. Each church would be slotted for a week during the winter in case of extreme conditions. It would be a dorm style of housing and would be professionally staffed.
    - Kim Murray asked about transportation to the churches and Eran said that is something they are working on as well. The current policy for turning people away during inclement weather from the Poverello Center is to call the Police Department and let them know they are turning someone away so they are aware of the situation.

- Rent County Print Shop: this is not an option for this year, and could possibly be a couple of years out.

The following questions arose from this discussion:

- Susan Patrick said Cindy Wulfekuhle spoke about creating a separate entrance at the Poverello Center as an option for relocating the Salcido Center. Eran Fowler said that would absorb a portion of services that the Salcido Center offer, but they would have to turn those folks away when the Poverello Center reached full capacity. A lot of those folks sleep on the sidewalk outside the Poverello Center so staff are able to go out and check on them, but sometimes they go other places.
- Kim Murray asked if it would be possible to provide wall tents so at least they are sheltered from some of the weather as a short term option. Eran Fowler stated that upon conversations with other agencies in similar regions (i.e. Spokane, Denver) this situation arose. The feedback she received from these agencies was that any outdoor sleeping facilitated by a non-profit organization and / or government creates a liability issue. Eran deferred to city employees present on whether or not this is seen as an issue.
- Mel Mason asked how the length of stay is prioritized at the Poverello Center. Eran Fowler said that is determined by the plans the people have. People staying at the Poverello Center have a plan for how to get housing, etc and they are offered an opportunity to stay if there is a solution to a problem that is being worked on. One option is to channel voucher money toward those working on a plan, which would allow the Poverello Center to help more people have a bed to sleep in. She said that would help solve the problematic aspect of the vouchers, but money would be the problem. It could be upwards of \$14,000.00-20,000 for vouchers for the inclement weather during the winter.
- Jason Wiener asked how the amount was determined. A motel would be \$55 - \$85 a night for an estimated 35 nights; 197 people needing housing for an estimated 35 nights. Eran said she would get the information and pass it on.

"It is based on single room occupancy (conservatively at 55.00 per night) for 207 individuals (to account for a potential 10% increase in need from 2009). This estimate includes voucher costs, transportation costs, and minimal costs to administer the vouchers".

Jason asked about increasing the capacity of the fire code and Eran said that is not an option. The City of Missoula will not issue a certificate of occupancy because they cannot account for the many additions completed on the Poverello Center. In light of this, it is highly unlikely that the occupancy will be adjusted. In addition, Eran feels that it is not safe to increase occupancy, as the building can barely function (i.e. plumbing, use of corridors) with the current rate.

- Brenda Desmond asked what percentage of people at the Poverello Center have jobs. Eran Fowler said that roughly 60% have jobs or receive disability, or are awaiting disability payments. Most of them are trying to save enough money to get into housing.

They are trying to work with someone locally that would lend money to these folks to get into housing, such as help with a deposit. Many rental assistance programs screen out these folks because of their past rental history, unpaid utilities, or criminal record. The Human Resource Council has been able to assist a good number of people through their rapid re-housing program, but people have to find and secure housing on their own, which can be difficult.

- Keithi Worthington asked how other cities deal with cold weather issues. Eran Fowler said the shelter in Billings sleep 250+ people, so they haven't had to worry about it. Other communities have a blend of option, some driven by the community and some funded on a statewide level. There is no one way communities are dealing with the issue.
- Jason Wiener asked how much staff would be needed for off-site locations. Eran Fowler said for the four month winter period, it is estimated the cost would be \$24,000. They would attempt to utilize volunteers, but there would be one staff person at all times working 12 hour shifts (this is a cost estimate for 1.5 employees for 12 hours shifts, 7 days a week, 4 months a year).

Dave Strohmaier asked if that would be the same staffing for the rotating churches. He said they would probably need to overstaff to make the churches comfortable. Sleeping folks under the influence will not be an option in the churches.

Brenda Desmond said the Presbyterian Church thought they would have to staff it when it was brought up last year and a discussion of an increase in liability was discussed. Also, what about the churches having to pay for the extra utilities during their week(s)? Ellie Hill said there is a meeting scheduled on September 1 with the churches. Kim Murray suggested utilizing other public places such as a school that is not being used, the fairgrounds, etc. Whatever is decided, is there going to be backlash from that community?

Other options discussed were the Salvation Army, which has about 60 cots but will not serve people under the influence. Jason suggested the St. Patrick Hospital facilities or the old Safeway building. The committee is willing to help facilitate meetings.

*Email Jason Wiener or Susan Patrick with other possibilities.*

- **Montana Mental Health Trust Fund Grant Opportunity – Jason Wiener**

Attorney General Steve Bullock has set up a trust fund to administer money from a settlement to fund mental health issues. The first RFP will be released September 9. Details will be forthcoming at mmhst.org. The money available could be used to train police departments. Ellie Hill said the Poverello plans to include funding like the BID has provided for the Police Department in their grant application.

- **Starting an inventory of current local government spending on issues related to people without shelter – Jason Wiener**

Peggy Seel from the Office of Planning and Grants provided the [information](#) of funds that are used for those working with the homeless or to prevent homelessness. Watsons Children Shelter and Missoula Youth Homes are focused on keeping kids off the streets. There is very little money in the general fund for this issue.

Jason asked what other sources of public funds are being allocated or administered that are not on the list. He would like to have a spectrum of how intertwined the agencies are with this population.

- Mel Mason:
  - Money from the Mental Health Professions (MHP) grant is used.
  - Federal money that goes through the state.
- Ellie Hill:
  - Emergency Shelter money is used for shelter and food through Human Resource Council.
  - HB645 gives money for one time emergency shelter through Human Resource Council.
  - The VA has regional money that goes to the Poverello Center.
  - HUD has money available through the state.

Jason said this list is to determine what spending is being done to treat the issue. Who has jurisdiction over funds at the local level? What is already being spent at the local and state levels? When looking at a ten-year plan, the inventory of funding should be discussed as part of the comprehensive plan. Mel Mason said including money directed to a specific purpose rather than being simply discretionary could be more confusing if added into this information. Ellie Hill said Watsons Children Shelter and the Missoula Youth Homes aren't considered homeless. Peggy Seel said the Poor Fund was started about 16 years ago to provide food, shelter and medical assistance.

*Jason asked if the committee has other information for the inventory list, please forward to Peggy Seel. Once the information is combined, it will be emailed to the committee.*

- **Interagency Council on Homelessness technical assistance with ten-year plans – Jason Wiener**

Jason is working on the preliminary steps on behalf of the city to create a ten-year plan. The link is to an agency that helps communities create a plan to deal with homelessness. The first step is to get a commitment from the jurisdiction. Steps two through four are already being done, but step one has not. It is something that needs to be discussed.

Rod Austin said it is the logical way to go.

Susan Patrick said it is a huge undertaking and it requires civic investment. There is a meeting scheduled with the Mayor to discuss the plan.

Kim Murray asked if this plan provides a housing model. Jason said the approach is housing maintained by the government and vouchers. Kim said there will be a lot of push back from the public because of the perception of the plan. Education will be very important for the public to understand the plan and the process. Brenda Desmond said it will be a tough sell to the public. Education will definitely be important. Kim said the educational component will need to be very thought out. Julie Weaver said the plan has to be done right and implemented correctly.

Keithi Worthington said the plans show it saves money with police, fire, hospital, etc. There will need to be concrete numbers and information ready for implementation.

Mel Mason said the needs assessment is important. It will be key in terms of where the plan goes and how the community reacts to it. Cindy Wulfekuhle, in connection with the Mayor, is putting together the assessment and there is a draft survey that will be handed out to homeless people. A consultant will be hired. Jason is going to consult with the USICH federal agency on the RFP/Q for consulting services.

### **Crime and Prevention Committee statistics and discussion of alternatives to fines for aggressive panhandling tickets – Rob Scheben**

Keithi Worthington took the tickets that were discussed at the July meeting and broke them down further for panhandling, solicitation from roadway and hitchhiking/solicitation from roadway tickets. Her [summary](#) included defendants with addresses, not including those listed for the Poverello Center and Missoula 3:16. The top person has \$13,000 in unpaid tickets to the City. There is a pattern of the type of offenses for this person and it is associated with the costs to the City.

Statistics from the summary:

- 30 people created 50 of the panhandling charges
- With all offenses by repeat offenders added up, it totals 19.1 ticket per offender, hence the term revolving door in Municipal Court. There is a lot of cost to the Police Department, tax payers, etc.
- Total number of additional offenses to be associated with homelessness. The significant offenders create 19.1%.
- There is over \$100,000 in unpaid tickets owed to the City. As the offenses continue to be committed, that number will go up.

Kim Murray thanked Keithi for getting the numbers for the summary. She asked if the time of day was looked at for the tickets. Keithi said she would have to run different information in order to get the time of day.

Mel Mason asked if 50 offenses were made by 30 people, does ticketing for panhandling have an effect on people doing it? It seems that there is not a lot of repeat for this. The vast majority has at least two of those tickets.

Rob Scheben said there is a meeting scheduled with Judge Loudon and Pat Morgan next week. Kim Murray asked if Rob has spoken with Judge Anderson, and he has not yet.

Ellie said there has been a noticeable change with Nicole (need last name) as the downtown officer. It has driven more people into the courtyard. They are hanging out other places less because they know they will get a ticket. Having an officer downtown definitely helps.

### **Miscellaneous business and discussion**

Susan Patrick reminded the committee to email comments and suggestions on the winter shelter to either her or Jason Wiener.

#### **Date of next meeting:**

September 7, 2010  
Jack Reidy Conference Room  
1:30 – 3:00 pm