

**COMMUNITY HOMELESSNESS ADVISORY BOARD
WASHOE COUNTY, NEVADA**

MONDAY

9:00 A.M.

MAY 4, 2020

PRESENT:

Bob Lucey, Chair (via Zoom)
Neoma Jardon, Vice Chair (via Zoom)
Marsha Berkbigler, Member (via Zoom)
Oscar Delgado, Member (via Zoom)
Kristopher Dahir, Member (via Zoom)
Ed Lawson, Member (via Zoom)

Nancy Parent, County Clerk
David Watts-Vial, Deputy District Attorney (via Zoom)

The Community Homelessness Advisory Board convened at 9:00 a.m. in the Washoe County Commission Chambers of the Washoe County Administration Complex, 1001 East Ninth Street, Reno, Nevada. Following the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our Country, the Clerk called the roll and the Board conducted the following business:

20-036C **AGENDA ITEM 3** Public Comment.

There was no response to the call for public comment.

20-037C **AGENDA ITEM 4** Approval of minutes of the March 2, 2020 meeting.

There was no response to the call for public comment.

On motion by Member Dahir, seconded by Member Berkbigler, which motion duly carried on a 6-0 vote, it was ordered that Agenda Item 4 be approved.

20-038C **AGENDA ITEM 5** Update, discussion, and possible direction regarding a report from the Human Services and Homelessness Services Branch(s) under the current regional Incident Management Team structure focusing on the COVID-19 situation in Washoe County. Catrina Peters, Washoe County Human Services Agency and Julia Ratti, Washoe County Health District.

Washoe County Health Educator Julia Ratti conducted a PowerPoint presentation via Zoom, a copy of which was placed on file with the Clerk. She reviewed slides with the following titles: COVID-19 Homeless Response; Homeless Branch; CDC Guidance Congregate Shelter (3 slides); CDC Guidance Unsheltered Homeless; CDC Guidance Encampments (2 slides); Timeline; Actions to Date (3 slides); and Next Steps.

Ms. Ratti said she was tasked with facilitating the homeless branch of the Incident Management Team (IMT). She stated the work done to flatten the curve of COVID-19 (C19) spread amongst the homeless population was guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). She reviewed the CDC guidance for the congregate shelter and for the unsheltered homeless population. She highlighted the primary guideline from the CDC for encampments. She noted the Washoe County Health District provided guidance to the Community Assistance Center (CAC) on March 16 about reducing community spread, which was relatively early in the pandemic. She stated the closing of non-essential businesses including restaurants and casinos resulted in an increased number of individuals without access to water, restrooms, and handwashing. The community response was to open the Reno Events Center (REC), which provided sleeping quarters and helped with social distancing. She said opening the REC was a collaborative effort which included each jurisdiction and various non-profit organizations. Screening of individuals had been added, so everyone entering the REC was screened for C19 symptoms. Symptomatic individuals were taken to the CAC for isolation.

Ms. Ratti said the IMT had been developing a strong and immediate community emergency response. Moving forward, they faced the challenge of building a sustainable approach to maintaining the health of the homeless population. She summarized the actions taken to address C19 spread in the homeless population. She noted the methods of communicating with the public were not effective for providing information to the homeless population. Staff passed out flyers and did what they could to educate individuals about C19 safety and community services. She hoped the list of actions to date demonstrated the collaborative efforts involved, which included every agency and staff, and some non-profit community partners. She stated the community was in a position to follow the CDC guidance until a C19 vaccine or approved antibody test became available. She said the CDC guidance might need to be followed for another 12 to 18 months. Social distancing and concerns about C19 spread through the homeless population would be issues until significant changes occurred. She discussed the next steps for a sustainable approach. She said the exit plan for the REC needed to include some type of shelter where social distancing could be maintained. She noted new resources had become available through various agencies and the next steps would include an analysis of resources.

Ms. Ratti indicated the Board received a spreadsheet of the current bed capacity for the congregate and individual housing options in the community. She highlighted the challenge of maintaining social distancing by reviewing the capacity at the CAC men's dorm and the women's dorm under normal operations versus socially distanced beds. She stated capacity was reduced to approximately one fourth of normal when socially distancing individuals. She said additional capacity could possibly be added by repurposing the Good Shepherd Clothes Closet space, which would add 44 socially distanced beds. She noted the maximum capacity of socially distanced beds at the CAC was 96; the capacity under normal operations was 410. She said the spreadsheet had more information about bed capacity. She stated the current level of staffing was

adequate under normal operations, but it would need to increase if individuals were housed in separate spaces for social distance.

Member Dahir expressed appreciation for the work that was done and for how quickly it was accomplished. He expressed concern for the safety of homeless individuals. He asked whether there was an approximate timeline for moving out of the REC. He noted he was not trying to rush staff, but he expressed concern about the housing analysis provided by Ms. Ratti. He inquired about the next steps. Ms. Ratti thanked Member Dahir for acknowledging the work completed thus far. She said she had been a facilitator, but the work was performed by staff from the three jurisdictions. She stated the next steps involved three components: the C19 response, the development of the Our Place properties and the update of the CAC contract, and the Built for Zero initiative which was a long-term strategic approach to homelessness. She said the three components needed to be kept on track while ensuring that any decisions made to keep people safe from the virus were informed and aligned with ongoing operations. She was not aware of a definitive timeline for vacating the REC. She recognized each jurisdiction had its own governance and decision-making process, and the community would need to continue to work together.

Member Lawson asked whether there was information about the number of homeless individuals who tested positive for C19. Ms. Ratti replied the number of housing placements were tracked. She said Human Services Agency (HSA) Program Specialist Catrina Peters would provide that information in a presentation later in the agenda item.

Vice Chair Jardon asked when Our Place was scheduled to open and how many beds would become available. Ms. Ratti replied representatives from Washoe County were better suited to answer the question. She noted there were 80 to 90 women currently staying at the REC, so those beds would be relieved if women were moved to the Our Place campus.

Ms. Peters said she had information about the housing triage team, but Human Services Agency Director Amber Howell was available to discuss Our Place.

Using the Zoom app, Ms. Howell noted there were two populations of women; 50 individuals resided at the CAC throughout the year and there were 30 to 40 in the overflow shelter. She said both groups would be moved to the Our Place campus no later than June 1. The women currently at the REC would move to the Our Place campus. She indicated two modular buildings were purchased to ensure CDC guidance for social distancing was observed.

Vice Chair Jardon asked how many beds would become available for men at the CAC. She wanted to know about the shortage of beds that would result from vacating the REC. Ms. Ratti replied the women's shelter at the CAC accommodated 50 individuals under normal operations and 17 individuals under the social distancing model. The women's move to Our Place would relieve 17 beds at the CAC. She

reiterated the smaller, separate populations made staffing more difficult. She mentioned there were 375 beds at the REC and 80 to 90 percent of those beds were occupied by women. Vice Chair Jardon said she had been planning for the reopening of the REC because it needed to reopen for business to return. She indicated the City of Reno would make a statement at a later date. She mentioned it was difficult for the City of Reno to bear the burden of the CAC and the REC; adding that it answered all calls for both locations. She said the City of Reno could not bear any more burden on the issue, so a plan for getting help from regional partners was needed.

Ms. Peters conducted a PowerPoint presentation, a copy of which was placed on file with the Clerk. She reviewed slides with the following titles: Housing Triage Team; Timeline; COVID-19 Response Housing Placement; HSA Housing Placement Team; Criteria for Placement; and Placements to Date.

Ms. Peters said the housing placement team (HPT) reviewed the existing processes and identified bottlenecks during the first housing meeting. She said HSA staff was reassigned to staff the HPT. She noted staff mobilized quickly in response to this very dynamic situation and they continued to perform outreach with medical providers and community partners to ensure they understood the process of referring someone for housing. She reviewed the various sources of housing referrals. She noted the referral form was very short and HPT staff conducted a brief questionnaire to ensure individuals who were referred were absolutely unable to self-isolate. The questionnaire was also used to determine special needs to ensure the appropriate level of care was provided for each person. She indicated the HPT had identified two housing locations: 43 beds at the Well Care Behavior and Medical Clinic and 300 beds at the Edison Housing location. Through the Well Care contract, individuals received medical monitoring three times per day, assistance with medications, and access to an advanced practice registered nurse. Staff was in the process of obtaining medical monitoring for the Edison site so individuals could be placed there. She said the next step after individuals were placed into housing was awaiting test results. Those who tested negative for C19 were discharged from housing while individuals who tested positive remained isolated until the epidemiology team deemed them ready for discharge. She noted that Behavioral Health Program Coordinator Frankie Lemus served as the HPT Manager, HSA Case Workers served as Triage Team Leads, and HSA support staff filled any other case management needs. She reported the HPT received 19 referrals, made 17 placements, and had eight people housed at the Well Care location to date.

Ms. Ratti asked about the number of homeless individuals placed in housing by the HPT. Ms. Peters responded 12 of the 17 placements were homeless individuals.

There was no response to the call for public comment.

On motion by Member Lawson, seconded by Vice Chair Jardon, which motion duly carried on a 6-0 vote, it was ordered that the report for Agenda Item 5 be accepted.

20-039C **AGENDA ITEM 6** Update, discussion, and possible direction regarding RFQ 2020-09 CAC Shelter Operations that closed on April 20, 2020 and the process that may be followed to award a contract in the future. RFQ 2020-09 solicited for an operator for the Community Assistance Center emergency shelter and support for individuals who are experiencing homelessness. City of Reno.

City of Reno Housing Neighborhood Development Manager Monica Cochran said the agenda item was originally intended to be a presentation by possible vendors, but it would be a brief update on the request for quotation (RFQ) instead. She stated Washoe County and the Cities of Sparks and Reno worked together to develop an RFQ which was released in February. She said the proposals were originally due in March, but the due date was postponed until April 20 because of COVID-19 (C19). She indicated proposals were reviewed by staff the week of April 20. Due to a variety of reasons surrounding the C19 response, the decision was made to postpone the RFQ discussion until June. She mentioned there were variables which would affect how people were housed responsibly with social distancing.

Vice Chair Jardon confirmed there was only one submission for the RFQ from Volunteers of America. Ms. Cochran said that was correct. Vice Chair Jardon asked whether the deadline for submissions had passed. Ms. Cochran said yes.

Member Dahir thought having the right information was most important in facilitating decision making. He knew the Built for Zero initiative had been approved and that would help the homelessness issue. He noted the homeless were human beings whom everyone wanted to help, and he wanted to have facts to determine how best to help them. He hoped the RFQ would provide that information. Ms. Cochran responded the three jurisdictions worked together to develop the RFQ; accountability and the desire for metrics to ensure the Board would receive the information they needed were primary components they included in it.

Vice Chair Jardon confirmed the RFQ would be discussed in more detail during the June meeting of the Board. Ms. Cochran concurred, stating variables such as social distancing, temporary housing at the Reno Events Center, and future direction from the Governor about reopening the state required more analysis. Vice Chair Jardon expressed concern about the RFQ, which she said was approximately \$2.5 million over budget. She said the proposal would need to be reviewed in detail because that was a significant overage.

Chair Lucey said Vice Chair Jardon raised good points about how the community approached homelessness from a broader perspective. He noted the C19 pandemic forced operational changes to allow for social distancing and proper sanitation. He thought the community had forgotten that the Community Assistance Center (CAC) and the homeless shelters were intended to be emergency shelters to get people off the streets, feed them, and give them safe shelter. They were not intended as long-term or even short-term housing. He noted the jurisdictions worked with developers and

community agencies to develop housing projects but had not been able to transition those individuals out of emergency shelters. He implored this Board and the boards of each jurisdiction to reassess how to address homelessness within the region. He stated allowing persistent long-term housing at the CAC and emergency shelters could not continue. Trying to disperse homeless encampments emerging in both downtown cores, the river, and throughout the region was not effective either. He stressed the need for a comprehensive regional approach to get homeless individuals out of the CAC, away from the river, and into truly transitional housing. He noted the costs for service providers would continue to increase if individuals were allowed to remain in emergency housing for the long term. He hoped the review of the RFQ would include discussion of a new regional policy.

There was no public comment or action taken on this item.

20-040C **AGENDA ITEM 7** Board members announcements, reports, and updates to include requests for future board agenda items.

Member Berkbigler expressed doubt that the full impact of COVID-19 (C19) on the homeless population would be appreciable by June 1. She thought closures and downsizing increased unemployment and might increase the number of people experiencing homelessness. She conjectured the full impact of C19 on the homeless population would need to be addressed at some point in the future. As an example, she asked how employment would be impacted if restaurants reopened at a 50 percent seating capacity. She noted those types of variables were not known. She wondered how many people would become homeless because of C19 and how that might impact the homelessness situation. She knew June 1 was too soon to address the issue, but she wanted staff to be aware of this concern for future discussion.

Member Dahir mentioned his concern about the river from the perspective of the Truckee Meadows Water Authority. He thought the current situation created an opportunity for a designated camping location for the homeless with defined guidelines. He expressed a sense of urgency because the encampments on the river were already a significant issue which might be exacerbated if the C19 situation became more difficult. He said things would get worse before they improved and the situation would linger, so he thought it was important to consider addressing the encampments.

In response to Members Dahir and Berkbigler's comments, Vice Chair Jardon suggested the Board convene in mid-May. She thought tracking individuals experiencing homelessness as a result of C19 was critical in the event federal funding became available. Tracking those individuals might be beneficial when requesting reimbursements for housing and support services. She was unsure how tracking might be accomplished. She wondered whether individuals entering the shelters were asked if C19 contributed to their homelessness. She expressed concern about an increase in encampments from a health and safety standpoint. She noted there were increases in fires, waste, and drug paraphernalia, and encampments were clustered in a manner inconsistent with Centers for Disease Control's guidance. She wondered about the health risks

individuals in encampments were subjected to in those conditions. She speculated about possible solutions such as an alternate location or a larger tent. She stressed the urgency of reopening the downtown area and the need to resolve the homelessness situation.

Member Delgado expressed concern for community members who were on the brink of homelessness. He asked whether there were any suggestions from subject matter experts about how those individuals might be assessed and where they might go to request assistance and access resources. He suggested the geographic location of resources be considered rather than having only the Community Assistance Center (CAC) for assistance. He requested suggestions for preventing people from becoming homeless and recommendations about the geographic location of resources in the next presentation on this issue.

Chair Lucey agreed with Member Delgado's comments. He thought the response to homelessness had been primarily reactive and it would be beneficial to look for preventive measures such as helping people on the verge of homelessness. He suggested establishing satellite sites around the community where individuals might go to access resources.

In response to Vice Chair Jardon's comment, Chair Lucey said County Manager Eric Brown sent a letter to the delegation for the State of Nevada and the speakers of both houses regarding the next CARES Act funding package. The letter addressed funding for some recovery efforts in the community. He stated he and Mr. Brown would continue to seek out funding options by working with federal staff. He mentioned he worked with the Local Empowerment Advisory Panel the prior weekend to complete the County's checklist which was submitted to the Governor. He hoped to hear a response from the Governor soon about what recovery would involve.

Chair Lucey acknowledged Member Berkgigler's concern about how many people would return to work based on the Governor's directives and the many variables that were still unknown. He thought convening the Board mid-May might be a good idea to discuss prevention and recovery from C19 impacts. He noted the Built for Zero presentation was postponed because of C19, but it would be addressed as soon as possible. He said the challenges presented by the need for social distancing and the increase in homelessness due to C19 would affect Built for Zero's strategies. The relocation of women to the Our Place campus and the transition of the men at the CAC were additional components to consider.

Member Lawson mentioned the moratorium on rents would end when the Governor reopened the economy. He noted some people who sheltered in place for two to three months without income might be unable to recover financially, which could result in a surge of homelessness. He anticipated a surge in the homeless population approximately one month after the economy reopened. Chair Lucey agreed with Member Lawson and indicated the issue would be agendaized if the Board convened in mid-May.

Vice Chair Jardon said a possible surge of homelessness created more urgency for preparing additional emergency shelter opportunities and resources. She noted long-term and mid-term housing issues would not be resolved before a surge in emergency housing might be expected. She said location, staffing, and resources were always the primary challenges. She thought the community needed to begin looking for resources right away.

Member Dahir asserted all federal funding sources needed to be exhausted. He believed the three jurisdictions sought out funds to address this issue, but he thought individuals could seek out resources also. He suggested offering assistance to individuals who qualified for resources as an alternative solution.

Chair Lucey suggested an item discussing all potential emergency responses be placed on the mid-May agenda if a meeting was scheduled. The item would include grants, prevention, housing, reliance on the State, the identification of campgrounds, and alternative locations. He would work with staff on the agenda item so it addressed various concerns about the new state of operations moving into the summer.

There was no public comment or action taken on this item.

20-041C **AGENDA ITEM 8** Items for possible consideration on the June 1, 2020 agenda:

- Update, discussion, and possible direction on a presentation by the Reno Initiative for Shelter & Equality (RISE). Ben Castro, Executive Director.
- Update, discussion, and possible direction regarding the Martin vs. City of Boise case and how it pertains to the community discussion regarding an identified camping or sleeping location for individuals experiencing homelessness. David Watts-Vial, Deputy District Attorney, Washoe County.

There was no public comment or action taken on this item.

20-042C **AGENDA ITEM 9** Public Comment.

Mr. Jay Kolbet-Clausell, Secretary for The Reno Initiative for Shelter and Equality (RISE), quoted RISE's executive director in his request for housing, including the approval of zoning for mobile home parks, prefab construction, converted hotel rooms, and other low-cost solutions, so the private sector could help relieve the housing shortage. He said there was still a demand for safe camps. He noted police were still doing sweeps of parks and private land because there was no place for people to stay. Doing sweeps was costly, and it increased tensions and placed service providers at risk. He stated one tent would not be enough, and it would be costly and offer no opportunities to move people into long-term housing. He said RISE had a plan which they could present to the Board if desired.

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10:06 a.m. There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned without objection.

BOB LUCEY, Chair
Community Homelessness Advisory Board

ATTEST:

NANCY PARENT, County Clerk

*Minutes Prepared by:
Carolina Stickle, Deputy County Clerk*