LAOB Shelter for All Committee

1-7-24 12:00-1:00

Present: Mary Gerisch, Brian Cina, Jean Myung Hamilton, Ornella Matta-Figueroa

Public Guests: Sarah Russell (City of Burlington), Cameron Ishee, Laura Ullman, Rune, Maggie, Brian Clifford, Lilli, Bo, Giselle, Jane Congleton, Primrose, Grey Berreda, Lisa, Bruce K

Agenda

Arriving and temperature check

- Anxious, feeling sick, sick.

Brian's Plan

Brian - The housing crisis is clearly a public health emergency. There is a poly-substance crisis. Floods that displaced people. Impacts of covid. The best thing we can do is get people housing and shelter immediately. This committee has been hearing from unhoused community members, mutual aid providers, and service providers. The LAOB has issued $15k to support community led solutions in the Burlington area as a pilot.

Proposal is to use the $15k to buy a list of things that community members have asked for like tents, supplies, socks, etc. And a place for people to congregate and store their items. There is a land owner in the old north end who has already allowed unhoused people to congregate and find shelter. CAN LAOB PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THIS LANDOWNER with Technical Support, pay for some of the infrastructure, etc. He got a fire pit donated from Hotel VT.

Create a sanctuary that we wrap in a circle of love. There is a literal fire burning 24/7 and people who go there know that there is always a place where there will be someone to help them. There will be circles of love radiating out from this circle and into this circle.

Layer 1: warmth (fire circle), garage that could be heated for survival pruposes.

Layer 2: sanitation, there is a bathroom, there could be porta potties, and there is a shower.

Layer 3: infirmary.

How does this meet the needs?

What is missing?

Who runs it? Volunteers? Peer based? Strength based and harm reduction.

We talked about this before going back to sears lane, we need to create norms, and culture to manage the sense of love. We take the $15k and develop the sanctuary tonight.

Grey – Speaking on behalf of myself and what I have heard from the houseless union of Burlington. People are appreciative that these meetings are helpful even as it is challenging to come and participate. Seeing a need to add the word "dignified" to calls for shelter first or housing first. We

seem to be losing the goal of dignity in terms of housing first. There is still an us and them dialogue that we are trying to address.

In terms of Brian's proposal, I have heard of ideas like this before, and we have some people in jail right now who saw that it was more important to get people safe from freezing to death over the risk of B&E. The way that Office Henry Goldman was behaving, indicated that they did not understand that we were looking for alcoves. They were threatening us with trespass, they towed someones cars. The tow companies are making money off of us and towing away peoples homes. I love the idea of fire, having fire as part of the circle is a wonderful message. Warm not just physically but also spiritually.

Sarah – City has a pilot program in the works to provide secure storage. Working to make sure storage is central and accessible, using funding from community safety funding.

Shelter operated an emergency extreme cold weather shelter after deciding that the state criteria and the conditions that the community is currently facing necessitated an extreme cold weather shelter – for the state, the temps need to be -20 degrees.

Sarah will have more information in the next 24 hours about the criteria for Emergency Extreme Cold Weather Shelter.

COTS is opening a warming shelter on Jan 15. CVOEO will open 30 bed by Feb 1.

Burlington is in conversation with other municipalities to advocate for changing the state's emergency extreme cold weather standards. Sarah is in conversation with VT League of Cities and Towns.

Brian – interested in working with community members to provide volunteer labor to host the space. Would like the LAOB to support the supplies costs. Some examples are:

- Ice fishing shelter: $70-$99
- Small group shelters $129
- Winter sleeping bags in bulk
- Large group temporary shelter - $750, really large one $1,500

Question – is there public land near the proposed lockers that people could be tolerated if they packed up everything in the morning?

Public Comment

Brian Clifford – mutual aid volunteer – love this idea and believe that the community will rise up around this community center hearth. The political machine of Burlington will likely try to push back on this, how do we continue to cultivate support and resiliency. There will always be a need, state sponsored warming shelters often do not work well.

Giselle – been thinking about going door to door in Burlington, building relationships and cultivating care. Give blankets, money, etc.

Laura Ullman – media receiving rumors that there have been two freezing deaths but Burlington does not release untimely deaths. If anyone has information about these rumors, please contact news@wcax.com

Laura Ullman – WCAX 9144066879 is my phone number - I'm always up to chat

Bruce – half the reason I used drugs on the street was to forget how cold it was. If you wear a backpack in this community, you are immediately stereotyped as a drug dealer.

Updates

- Sarah Russell: The Chittenden County Homeless Alliance (CCHA) hosts monthly meetings; first Thur of each month, 9am-11am at Contois (in-person only). ALL are welcome!

Adjourned: 1:50pm

Meeting schedule

Potential initiatives outlined by Shelter for All Committee for LAOB to pursue

1. **Center those who are most impacted**

- Shelter for All Committee public comment
- LAOB workshop @ housing conference 11.14.24
- Host unhoused community members for LAOB open statehouse days
- Note: Engaging the unhoused and unsheltered community is really challenging right now when peoples' material safety is in dire condition. How do we shape engagement to meet individual's present needs?
- Question: How do we follow the leadership of those most impacted? We have heard asks for:
    - Help with acute resource needs: rides, money for short term shelter, tents/sleeping bags.
    - Supportive services that are respectful and treat clients with dignity.
    - More attention and care for those who fall through the cracks.
    - Inclusion of people with direct experience of homelessness and lack of shelter in plans and policy making around shelter issues.

2. **Make grants and community investments to alleviate the trauma of the shelter crisis. fund initiatives that align with LAOB's strategic priorities of centering the leadership of**

impacted communities, mutual care, and seeding power to build community resilience.
Examples include

- Community leadership (stipends, administrative support, food, childcare, resources to address acute stressors for those on the frontlines)
- Mutual aid
- Community resilience toolkits
- Co-living and intersectional residences
- Emergency shelter - led by those most impacted
- Land banks
- Library based infrastructure and programming

3. Stay connected

- Stay connected to our hearts and bodies. Speak and act with love and care for one another.
- Communicate what we are seeing
    - LAOB Position Statement
        - Acknowledge: what are we hearing, what are we seeing, what is our community saying
        - People are dying and suffering. We cannot normalize to this.
        - All support systems need to be reshaped to meet people where they are.
        - Homelessness cannot be criminalized. This is backwards and unethical.
        - People want sanctuary shelter. We need to activate underutilized spaces.
        - We all need secure housing. Secure housing belongs to the whole community - it is not one person's job or failure.
        - Housing First
        - If the government is going to fail, we are going to step up and community is going to care for ourselves. It feels like SOV is not actually interested in supporting housing as a human right.
        - Network of Mutual Aid: Wrap these residents with love - with vetted volunteers. Mutual aid that is trustworthy.
    - Advisory Powers

- Act with care not to duplicate existing resources. Dont get stuck in analysis paralysis. Do the right next thing.

4. Advocate for policy and systems change to ensure all of our community members have dignified shelter

- Have a conversation with the committee in which we explore and analyze the current shelter systems in terms of where are the failures? Insufficient resources? Programs need slight reforms? Or do we need wholesale transformation?
- Investigate Coordinated Entry: Who is being served well by CE? Who falls through the cracks? What is the relationship between CE and VHIP?
- How much money do our communities spend on the impacts of homelessness? How does this compare with the costs of Housing First policy design?
- Support increased collaboration between the homelessness and housing systems.
- Encourage resource hoarders to seed power so that communities can effectively and resiliently ensure shelter for all neighbors.
- Investigate Section 8: Who is being served who is left out? Can Section 8 support home ownership? What is Vermont's relationship with HUD's Family Self Sufficiency program?
- Investigate VHCB's strategy for administering funds to support shelter for all. What did VHCB do with $30M of investments into shelter and ending homelessness?
- What are the conditions for people working to support unhoused and unsheltered people? How do we ensure this workforce is being supported and held accountable to values of dignified shelter and care for all.
- Sign the disability rights letter to advocate for people with disabilities under 50 being included as priority population
- How can eminent domain be utilized? How do we de-incentivize landlords sitting on vacant property? What about all the empty dorms? Vacant properties need to be activated. How can we activate Seasonal and other shared properties.

5. Other ideas

- Everyone Sleeps: a community campaign, Everyone deserves access to the dreamtime.