

## Draft Meeting Minutes

### MID-WILLAMETTE HOMELESS INITIATIVE TASK FORCE

May 2, 2016

#### ATTENDANCE

**Task Force Members** – Kathleen Ashley, Bruce Bailey, Councilor Warren Bednarz, Gladys Blum, Steve Bobb, Sr., Commissioner Janet Carlson, Mayor Cathy Clark, Councilor Kim Freeman, Ron Hays, David Leith, Heidi Mackay, Chief Jerry Moore, Irma Oliveros, Mayor Anna Peterson, Jon Reeves, Shaney Starr, Verena Wessel, and Commissioner Jennifer Wheeler.

**Guest Presenters** - Wayne Crowder, Serving Our Veterans At Home; Robert Hall, veteran; Gerald Pygott, Home of the Brave; Cameron Smith, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs; Mitch Sparks, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs; and Linda Strike, Community Action Agency.

**Task Force Staff** - Hitesh Parekh, Marion County and Laura Walker, City of Salem.

**Meeting was called to order at 4:07 PM by Commissioner Jennifer Wheeler.**

#### 1. WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

##### **Chair Comments**

Co-Chair Wheeler gave a brief overview of what took place at the March 29 task force meeting.

##### **Task Force Member Comments**

Commissioner Carlson distributed an article on homelessness from the Statesman Journal (**attachment A**).

##### **Approval of March 29 Meeting Minutes (Action)**

**MOTION:** Councilor Warren Bednarz moved approval of the March 29 task force meeting minutes. Seconded by Mayor Cathy Clark. A voice vote was unanimous.

#### 2. THE CHALLENGE TO BETTER SERVE HOMELESS VETERANS (INFORMATION)

Linda Strike, ARCHES Program Coordinator, Community Action Agency and Gerald Pygott, Deputy Director, Home of the Brave presented this item (**attachment B**).

- Nationally, 41% of veterans are aged between 31-50 and nearly 50% are Vietnam era veterans over 50 years of age.
- Veterans have served in World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Iraq, Afghanistan, and various minor conflicts.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reports 47,725 veterans experiencing homelessness across the nation on any given night.
  - Of these approximately 50% have serious mental illnesses and 70% struggle with substance abuse.
    - The 2014 census showed 7,521 veterans in Polk County and 25,086 in Marion County.
    - Extrapolating national average data would mean Polk County has 827 veterans experiencing homelessness and Marion County 2,759.
- Veterans distrust government agencies, prefer to camp rather than staying in emergency shelters, and many Vietnam Era Veterans do not know that they qualify for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits.
- Primary reasons for veteran homelessness are that they have poor access to healthcare, suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), lack affordable housing, lack living wage incomes/transferable job skills, and engage in substance abuse as a means to self-medicate.

- Veterans need a coordinated community effort to secure and sustain safe, affordable housing, easy access to basic physical health care, accessible substance abuse care, job training, and employment retention skills coaching.
  - Community Action Agency manages Emergency Housing Assistance Document Recording Fee for Veterans (state funds), and Support Services for Veterans Families federal funds.
    - Both funds are used to assist veterans in Marion and Polk counties experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of becoming homeless.
  - 2015 National Coalition for Veterans' Affairs Programs Report said the most effective programs for homeless veterans are community based, nonprofit, and veterans helping veterans in a substance-free environment.
- There are no local emergency shelters exclusively for veterans in Marion or Polk Counties.

#### Home of the Brave:

- The only transitional housing facility for veterans in Salem that is American Disability Act (ADA) compliant.
- Opened in 2013 to help veterans experiencing homelessness stay off the street, change their lives, and become successful community members.
- Program provides intensive case management for five veterans at any given time.
  - Could increase to ten if building is modified.
- To date, 33 veterans have gone through the program and returned to the community:
  - Of these, 27 will receive pensions from the VA
  - Collectively contributing \$50,000-\$70,000 annually back into community.
- After a veteran graduates, staff conducts periodic "check-up" visits.
- 98.3% of veterans who graduate go on to lead successful lives in the community.

### **3. TASK FORCE MEMBER Q&A WITH MR. PYGOTT AND MS. STRIKE (DISCUSSION)**

- Veterans do not like emergency shelters because of rules, regulations, and prohibition of intoxicating substances. Veterans feel safer out in the woods.
- Since 2013, there were 73 veterans deemed not ready to receive Home of the Brave services due to substance abuse issues.
  - Staff did a "bio-psych-social" assessment of these veterans and referred them to the appropriate assistance program.
- Union Gospel Mission of Salem sees approximately 80 veterans per year at the men's shelter and could offer additional transitional shelter beds for veterans.
- Locally, veterans can get medical care at the Salem Community-Based Outreach Center.
- Veterans migrate from Salem to larger cities due to more housing vouchers being available in larger cities.
- Currently, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH) provides rental assistance for homeless veterans in partnership with the Salem Housing Authority. Vouchers are awarded on geographic need. (Salem was issued 63 vouchers and Portland 115.)
- Need to explore if we can change these ratios.
- HUD-VASH and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs determine which jurisdictions receive housing vouchers.
- Possible that a HUD-VASH program could be established here in Salem with the assistance of the Salem Housing Authority.

### **4. VETERAN PANEL DISCUSSION (INFORMATION)**

Panel members: Steve Bobb, Sr., veteran, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde; Wayne Crowder, veteran, Serving Our Veterans At Home; Cameron Smith, director, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA); Mitch Sparks, director, Statewide Veteran Services, ODVA; Robert Hall, veteran, U.S. Army, Gulf War Era.

Summary of panel presentation:

Veterans end up experiencing homelessness because:

- Majority don't know who to talk to or where to go to access services.
- Only those who have been in combat understand what veterans are preoccupied with.
- Some veterans are dishonorably discharged and ineligible for benefits.
- The Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs:
  - Serves more than 337,000 Oregon veterans.
  - Manages a nursing home in Dallas and one in Lebanon for aging veterans.
  - Provides home loans with low interest rates.
  - Helps navigate veterans through U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which has a \$160 billion annual budget with more than 200,000 entities across the nation.

#### **5. TASK FORCE MEMBER DISCUSSION WITH PRESENTERS (DISCUSSION)**

- A \$160 billion dollar federal veterans system has not solved the challenging issues veterans face.
- Need to have a cross-community conversation to truly leverage federal veteran assistance resources to assist veterans experiencing homelessness.
- No one solution – will take a lot of nonprofits and an entire federal agency to help.
- Chronically homeless veterans have brain injuries which could have taken place during or after service.
- Intensive counseling and supportive services needed to help veterans earn a living and keep their housing.
- For Salem to receive HUD-VASH, HUD needs to be lobbied.
- Given the area's low vacancy rates, veterans have been unsuccessful in securing affordable housing or rentals in the Salem metro area.
- Oregon House Joint Resolution 202 will be on the November ballot. It requires 1.5% of lottery revenues be expended for benefit of veterans.
- House Bill 2417 passed in 2013 requires that 25% of monies deposited in Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) Department accounts be allocated to assist veterans with housing-related needs.

#### **6. STRATEGIC PLAN (INFORMATION/DISCUSSION/ACTION)**

Commissioner Carlson presented this item.

Summary of presentation:

- At the last task force meeting, task force members reviewed a draft strategic plan for the task force and suggested some of the work be done by subcommittees.
  - Co-chairs developed a list of topics and sub-committees to address these topics; task force members were contacted by staff about subcommittee assignments.
  - Draft strategic plan and subcommittee list was distributed (**attachment C**)
  - Subcommittee leads to provide meeting dates at least a week in advance. Marion County will take responsibility for public notices. Marion County can also provide meeting space and recorder. If meetings are held elsewhere, subcommittee leads are responsible for making sure meetings are recorded and a copy of the recording is provided to Marion County staff.
  - Subcommittees may invite technical advisors as needed.
- Commissioner Carlson will visit the Mid-Willamette Valley Housing Workgroup to see if they would like to serve as the Mental Health Housing Subcommittee.
- A draft matrix of future task force meeting topics was distributed. (**attachment D**).

**MOTION:** Commissioner Carlson moved that the task force ratify the co-chairs' appointments of subcommittee members, adding Irma Oliveros to the Transitional Housing /Shelters Subcommittee, and

editing the language describing the Finance Subcommittee as requested by Mayor Peterson. Seconded by Councilor Bednarz. Motion passed unanimously.

## **7. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Victor Reppeto

- Wants to see how task force deals with the issue of people experiencing homelessness and how the homeless work with law enforcement and veterans.
- Has experienced homelessness for five years.
- Has been arrested, beaten, and had a hard time finding a job.
- Appreciates all the efforts this group is making for homeless individuals.

Linda Bernardz

- Mental health counselor for 30 years.
- Excited to see task force discussing mental illness and disabilities.
- Wants people to be aware that there are those individuals that have tried or are trying to keep a job but have mental or physical disabilities.
- Takes one to three years to get onto Social Security-Disability usually because people get turned down the first time. In the meantime they are hanging on, trying to make enough to keep paying rent, but they usually fall between the cracks.
- Even if people are disabled, but not yet on disability, there is nothing available for them, especially single adults.
- These people are on the edge of homelessness. Please keep them in mind.

## **8. WRAP UP**

### **Additional Comments**

- Very encouraged by the MWHI Task Force. Proud to be part of a community that wants to make a difference.
- Between the veterans lottery bill (which will be on the November ballot) and House Bill 2417 veterans could see an additional \$25 million available for housing (assuming voters approve the veterans lottery bill).

**ADJOURNED 6:03 pm**