

Homelessness Task Force Minutes April 3, 2024

ZOOM ONLY

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Erica Reil, Chip Castle, Jeremy Spiro-Winn, Stephen Finner and Philip Moros Miriam Ben-Dor,
Brooke Poulliot, Staff Liaison

ABSENT

Joseph Mueller

OTHER ATTENDEES

Tess Taylor (7 pm)

Guests

Nicolas Storellicastro

Rep. Jonathon Williams

1. Call to order.

Call to order
6:30PM

20 Adjustments to the agenda

Manager will talk about portalets

Motion to accept adjustment
moved by Stephen
seconded Jeremy

Passed

2) Public Comment

none

3) Approval of minutes

Motion to accept minutes
moved by Stephen
seconded by chip
Passed

4) Portalet Conversation

Ericka did a recap on the portalets. The installation of the portalets would be beneficial to the unhoused population and the citizens of Barre. There have been complaints about people relieving themselves out of doors. The complaints have come from the area churches and the people of Barre.

The focus of the Homelessness Task Force (HTF) has been to get the portalets out there. To this end the HTF submitted a request to the city council asking them to secure and fund 6 portalets for use in Barre.

Nicolas Storellicastro attended the meeting to respond to the proposal and offer some suggestions on the issue.

Money is very tight and the city is watching every penny.

Nicolas posed a series of questions.

- 1) Are there more reasonable rates for rentals.
- 2) Is 6 the right number
- 3) Do we look into other venues where bathrooms are available for public use.
- 4) Is year round necessary?

Nicolas found a company that had better rates than he originally quoted us. Perhaps it would be a good idea to start with two portalets as a test case. It is not wise to spend money on 6 portalets initially. Start with 2 and grow it from there. Monitor them for usage, danger and vandalism. He presented 3 public facilities that have accessible bathrooms. These were : 1) City Hall, 2) The Aldrich Public Library and 3) the Public Safety Building. Chip asked if the public and the homeless population know about them. Also, he pointed out that the hours and days of access were limited at two of the locations. The Library has limited hours and is not open Sundays and City Hall is not open weekends. Ericka pointed there is no signage in City Hall. The Public Safety Building is on the far north end of Barre and people may not feel comfortable entering. It would be a lower cost option to improve signage so people know where things are. Even though the portalets can benefit everyone the focus should be on the homeless population..

Stephen said we approached the issue from the back and we should have had this conversation before the resolution.

Going forward we will start with two units. The HTF will check with Montpelier about the number of portalets they have and if there have been any issues with vandalism or abuse. (Ericka). Look into putting up better signage for existing bathrooms. There was discussion around this number (2 units). Jeremy feels 3 would be a better choice. Chip asked if better signage would actually benefit our target population or if other channels should be explored. For example, ask the people who work directly with those who are experiencing homelessness to pass the word about locations. The HTF will explore where to place the portapotties. Two suggestions were place them near the churches where those who are experiencing homelessness receive services. Enough Ministries food closet? Erica will talk to Barre Interfaith Group (BIG) and near the Granite Museum. The more reasonable quote Nicolas found was 205.00 month (4920.00 annually) for two including maintenance.

5) Rep. Jonathon Williams laid out legislative actions on the housing issue.

He talked about the Budget Adjustment Act. Of special interest to the HTF were capping the motel cost the state will pay and HOP. The HOP directly benefits shelters. H879 which deals with the emergent shelter program and H829. Also, he spoke about how these would be paid for.

It was pointed out that there were a lot of numbers but what we are interested in is getting people from the shelters into housing. Also, we need to remove barriers to renting. It was pointed out that the stand up shelters were underutilized. Location was a barrier as well as having them staffed by the National Guard. People may have found it frightening. It was not a well thought out plan. Although it was put in place by the governor the legislature shares the responsibility and so the blame. Also, pointed out was the fact there are empty houses. Rep. Williams responded there is an effort to building affordable housing, increase taxes on wealthy, and help renters to move to home ownership.

5) Survey of camping population data

The HTF began to evaluate the survey results. Jeremy presented a spread sheet of the results. Nineteen surveys were completed. One hundred surveys were distributed at the homeless shelters and to people camping. The 19 that were completed in Barre were out a cohort of 29. The survey shows that the police attitude toward Homeless Population is negative. Jeremy said a number of people feel uncomfortable contacting police. One respondent that the police were disrespectful because of skin color and the way he looks. Ericka and Miriam will write something up and present it at the next meeting. We should try to solicit more responses— maybe at meal sites.

Adjournment

8PM

Next meeting date
May 1,2024

Respectfully,
Philip Moros