



TOWN COUNCIL
Committee to Assess Homelessness in Hyannis
Selectmen's Conference Room
Wednesday January 20, 2016
MEETING MINUTES

I. BUSINESS

A. Roll Call:

Members present: Chair of Committee Councilor Jennifer Cullum, Councilor James Tinsley; Councilor James Crocker Jr., Councilor Debra Dagwan, Councilor Frederick Chirigotis, Deb Krau, Paul Niedzwiecki **ABSENT:** Alison O'Toole

The President of the Town Council, Jessica Rapp Grasseti read the charge of the Committee to the members present:

Charge: To evaluate and better understand the complicated problem of homelessness and its overall impact on our community. To enlist the help of our legislative assembly, locally elected officials, county officials, service providers, police, emergency medical service providers and community advocates and work toward a future where Hyannis is an active participant in finding workable solutions for the homeless population it shoulders.

President Rapp Grasseti said this committee was initiated by Councilor Jennifer Cullum and this is what she would like this committee to focus on, the charge is quite broad, and she would like to see the committee focus on some objectives so there is some things that come out of the Committee.

Administrator to the Town Council Cynthia A. Lovell asked the committee for nominations from the floor regarding the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee:

Councilor Frederick Chirigotis and Councilor James Tinsley both nominated Councilor Jennifer Cullum, this was seconded by Councilor James Crocker Jr.; All members present voted unanimously in favor of Councilor Jen Cullum as Chair of the Committee.

Councilor Jennifer Cullum nominated Councilor Debra Dagwan, seconded by Councilor James Tinsley, all members voted unanimously in favor of Councilor Debra Dagwan as Co- Chair of the committee.

Chair of Committee moved onto the second Item on the agenda by explaining the broadness of the charge. Objectives to accomplish, there has been thousands of these committees formed and created and nothing has ever come out of them, however she would like this committee to take a different approach by community preservation , and the cost of what it is costing the residents of Barnstable but especially the residents of Hyannis; with the EMS calls, it is a Cape wide problem and there are a bunch of ways to approach this she would like to set tangible goals that can be reached, an example of that would be getting the homeless individuals out of the woods, redefining the growth incentive zone, so that we are encouraging growth in the right direction, and increasing the property values in Hyannis, rather than decreasing the values of homes and bargain basement businesses; if we could encourage the Hyannis Civic Association to get more involved in the committees that are involved in zoning and planning and put the advocacy out there for Hyannis, we need to think how we are going to protect our growth and ourselves. These are just some of the thoughts the Chair of the Committee had and opened the floor to other committee members to speak about any of the thoughts they may have regarding how

this committee can approach the issues. Councilor James Crocker Jr. stated that he was astonished when he took the tour of the homeless camps in Hyannis with the Chief and others, it seems we are way past the point of getting the Civic Associations involved and others to the table to talk about this, what we need to do is get the tools the police need to be able to get this problem under control. We have to decide what is the best legal strategy to clean up what we have, in my mind it goes beyond the idea what we would ever consider if unless we had this amount of overburdens on our door front, I am looking at an idea of a “summer camp”; Councilor Crocker explained that he has looked at the legislation concerning some and the legal actions of the courts, and the courts are looking at these homeless situations in the woods as their homes, and with that type of ruling the homeless individuals now have rights, the police can’t go in and take their things; they can’t touch or sometimes even remove them from the site, so we need to look at a vehicle that is going to give the police the tools they need to clear these people out of these conditions and into a place that is safe with social services attached. So if we identify an area that we can designate an area that we can call the summer camp that would allow us to put these individuals there with cleaner conditions and a path of social services and follow up. Then with that you have given these individuals a place to stay and a purpose. When the police go into our woods now to clear these individuals out there is no place to put their personal belongings; if there was a place set up like this, then the police could get them out of the woods and into this area and move their personal belongings as well into the “summer camp”. Right now we have many areas now, but if we have one area then you can offer services.

Chair of the Committee explained she has Deb Krau here tonight because she has done a lot of work trying to move or relocate the NOAH Shelter. The new plan for the NOAH Shelter is a concept just like that, no one wants this in their backyard who wants to be a neighbor to that, and the answer is no one. They have done a lot of work on the “campus” idea. They are working on a solution that becomes a ladder out of that type of living, the people in the woods are people that have a different set of issues, some have medical issues, addiction issues, mental health issues, etc. The individuals need an outreach program to be able to go into the woods to help these individuals, because they do not want to leave the woods, so there is another set of problems that need addressing; with the Chiefs expertise and Sergeant Challies who have already done this type of outreach with these individuals we may be able to make some movement; however the Chair of the Committee said she is not going to make the problem we already worse or create another one, she would like to be able to either clean up what we have or create a better solution to the existing model and make it better and stronger and we are helping people.

Councilor Crocker said he wanted to clarify what he was trying to say in that he does not want to create another problem by creating an area with camps, collectively getting these folks out of acres and acres of land, we do not allow any camping in Barnstable, but once these individuals establish a camp the courts have ruled that these are their homes and they have a right to their personal property and the police can’t touch it now. Councilor Crocker said you can go to this “summer camp” with all your personal belongings. If these people do not want to get out of the woods and in this safer area for them with social services attached to them and a clear path to follow, then we need to tell these individuals to move on, we do not want them here, we can’t have them here, we are busting at the seams.

Councilor Dagwan mentioned she thought we keep dealing with the people in the woods, it is a legal issue now, and what do we do when these individuals say to us they do not want to get out of the woods, we need a legal way to deal with this if they do decline the help. Councilor Dagwan also wanted to mention the fact that we have heard from business owners that own business in Hyannis that are also frustrated because they find needles out in front of their stores, individuals sleeping in doorways or in alleys. The business owners are very frustrated as well, and we need to help them as well.

Mr. Bornstein of a business developer in Hyannis said he has as a tenant the United Way which is a social service agency, and a homeless person came in to the property and approached the girl at the desk and was really harsh, using sexual innuendo’s and threatening her. She came into my office the other day and said they did not know how much longer they were going to stay here in Hyannis because they did not feel safe anymore and they could not put employees at risk. So businesses are leaving and it

is very hard to get them to come and if we do get them they do not stay long because of this problem here in Hyannis, most of the people that would like to come here to do business say can you possibly offer me a piece of property in another village, Centerville, anywhere but Hyannis. He said we have a real problem here, there are acres and acres of land over by the college that the town owns, you could do something over there, and he has heard that if this town did this, that the state would help us fund whatever we decided to build, they would help us with the monies if we did it. Let all the service agencies build a building within the same complex to serve these individuals in the area, right now the homeless are all over town and not in one area, you will never be able to service these individuals if they are all over the place. He wanted to mention he is losing business every day, once they find out its in Hyannis; they back out of the deal.

Councilor Debra Dagwan mentioned that the town and the civic associations have been working on this for a very long time. This has been a problem for a very long time, and we need real solutions to this problem. She wanted to mention that the homeless are not the only ones leaving needles everywhere, it's not just the homeless using the drugs, there are individuals that have homes that are doing the drugs and leaving needles everywhere.

Councilor Fred Chirigotis mentioned that there are a lot of different definitions of the types of homeless we have. We have legitimate families that are not a problem, but are homeless that we need brought into these conversations, he said we have homeless kids in our schools right now, he would like to see if the Barnstable School Committee have any idea of how many of our school children are homeless, we should be looking at those individuals as well and try and help them, and this is only dealing with one small fractions of the types of homeless we have. He mentioned also the Aids group on South Street might allow us to identify the ones using the drugs. Personally he would like to identify the types of the homeless out there and then be able to identify the services needed to help the individuals.

Chair of Committee would like to hear from the Chief and his officers that are the boots on the ground and where the holes are so to speak about the cost that the village of Hyannis incurs. The Fire Chief in Hyannis said it costs his department 320 thousand a year, and the Chiefs cost is about 500 thousand a year, and we need to watch the taxpayer dime, and it is only getting worse.

Chief Paul MacDonald said he would like to caution this committee to reach tangible goals; you do not want to make the problem worse, right now both NOAH and the Barnstable Police have identified approximately 400 homeless individuals in and around Hyannis that is a manageable number. We can get that many people housing and services, the problem is deterring the rest of the individuals who keep coming to the Cape to receive services. We need to stop the flow from other areas onto the Cape. The Chief mentioned the idea of building something for the homeless and the state would help, he is sure they would, but as soon as they do that, they will designate Hyannis as the hub for the homeless because you just built this big facility to handle them and then they all come to the Cape, and the 400 homeless we have now will turn into thousands; we do not want to do that. He said he is on another Committee with Deb Krau with regards to moving the NOAH shelter, and the concept right now is going to be a much smaller model, there will not be a 16 bed facility. The model is going to make people accountable and make sure they receive the services if they are willing to participate, there will be goals they individuals will have to meet, and there is accountability in place for the agencies if they want to help. It is going to take some time to cure this problem, it started in 1986 when the NOAH Shelter opened, and it was for the Barnstable residents or Cape Cod residents, if you were to ask any of the 400 homeless we have now here in town, none are Cape Codders. They are all from off Cape. Chief MacDonald said we have to stop them from coming over the bridge.

Chair of Committee asked how can we stop them from coming, who do we call? Is it the Salvation Army, is it another organization? Chief MacDonald said the people that are going to be in the new model of the shelter are those individuals that want the help, those that are in the woods and the camps are only going to be handled by us at the police level because they suffer from addiction and mental illness, and the only ones that deal with these individuals are the outreach team we have at the

police station. Some of these individuals are dangerous as well, so we do not want social services going into the woods without us, in fact we tell them they can't go in without us.

The police are in contact with the Salvation Army to streamline the meals they hand out. Councilor Crocker said we need to deal with the problem at hand to get these people out of the woods, we are getting into the winter months and we are going to have to face the reality that we are going to lose some of these individuals if we do not act soon. We should not be the town that loses individuals because we can't provide the services to help them; he mentioned his idea about the camps as not one to be a permanent idea or a facility, just a temporary program with a sunset ending and eventually not needed.

Councilor Chirigotis, said are you saying there is going to be a place to "camp" but it will not be in the woods. Councilor James Crocker said yes, we can have the officers that are on the ground now that deal with these people all the time, if you have the same officers at the designated area that tell these individuals if you stay here there are rules to follow and agencies that are going to help you, they either take the help and stay in the area that has been designated or they hit the road and go back over the bridge, they are told they can't stay here anymore in the woods, but you can go over here in this area and set up your tent or whatever you have, but no woods. The homeless we talked to in these camps said they did not want to go to the NOAH Shelter because of the rules they have to follow; they did not like to follow those rules.

Chair of the Committee said there was a decision that came from a court that said these individuals can camp there, so that's a problem. Councilor Crocker said with a designated area these individuals are contained in an area and services can be given to these individuals. We need to look at available real estate in the area to support this.

President of the Town Council mentioned that our legal team needs to be at the next meeting to let us know our legal strategies or rights to deal with them.

Councilor Tinsley said here is a homeless group that is looking for help and desires help, but we need to centralize our services for these folks; our agencies are spread out all over town and not easily accessible to everyone. Housing is our biggest problem, we do not have housing, or if we have it, it is out of reach for affordability. We can't demonize the homeless issue, because there are a lot of good people that are out there homeless, they are not always the individuals that are strung out on drugs and causing problems, there are real families that are homeless.

Chair of the Committee mentioned the streamlining the social service agencies. Paul Niedzwiecki said we need to look at Hyannis and its burden and how it differs from a regional burden and a state burden, and we can coordinate funding this way after the research has been done. If you were to get together concrete numbers of the financial burden and the other factors that play into this problem; Mr. Niedzwiecki said he and his office will do some research and get some solid concrete numbers

Deb Krau said that most of the agencies run off of grants in the town, and the bars on the deliverables on these grants are not very high and are not designed to move the folks forward, but there are some things that the town can do to get the state to measure these agencies. Coordinated outreach, and maybe the Town Council could get a list of the agencies and the services they provide and any follow up they can report. The other thing she cautions is removing the individuals from the woods and putting them in a house. Most of these folks do not even have life skills to survive, so you would need someone to teach these individuals how to live with just the basics. In the Churches when you have individuals that volunteer and feed the homeless, but we found that these individuals are not trained to deal with the people they are feeding, these folks are volunteers and most are elderly. So until you can even start a conversation with these individuals, you will not reach them or make them understand that they need services. Most of the social service agencies here in Hyannis are competing for the grants, but after the agencies get the grants there is not follow up or questions asked to these agencies after the monies are spent, they are not accountable to move the client forward.

Chair of the Committee asked about the outreach workers here in Hyannis, who are they? Ms. Krau answered; VinFin, Elliott, and Duffy; are there more than three? Chief MacDonald said the Council of Churches used to, but the funding is gone.

Councilor Crocker mentioned the President of the United States put money aside for the Veterans of our country and he has not even made a dent in this, and he had federal funding to accomplish this problem of homeless vets, and they are still on the streets, so this is a huge problem that is not going to go away any time quick.

ADJOURNED: 6:55PM

NEXT MEETING: FEBRUARY 25, 2016 5:30