

Housing Working Group Meeting Notes

Tuesday May 17th, 2022

Virtual WebEx Meeting

10:00AM – 12:00PM

Those in Attendance: Tom Manzuk, Jayne Cardno, Lance Dingman, James Kemp

Also in Attendance: Jessica Bowen, Lisa Nussey, Marcie McIlveen

Those absent: Robert Semkow

1. Welcome and introductions.
2. Approval of May 17th Agenda: Agenda was approved.
3. Approval of April 19th Meeting Notes: The meeting notes were not ready in time present at this meeting. Chair is having difficulties accurately transcribing the meeting's dense discussions.
4. Discussion with HAMSMaRT: Hamsmart began with a group of doctors struggling to properly treat patients that also suffered from drug addiction. The symptoms of withdrawal were too intense for the patients to stay

in hospital long enough to help them with their health issues. Standard practice was to ignore the drug issues, but when they began treating patients for both issues, they were better able to help them. Hamsmart began to get a reputation for working effectively with people also struggling with drug addiction and they grew their staff to encompass a wide variety of medical practitioners in a more holistic approach to the problem. They also recognized that Health Care is a largely political problem and that the current system produces unwell people at a rate faster than they could ever treat. It is unfortunate, but a large percentage of homeless people are addicted to drugs. There is some debate on which came first, the drug addiction or the homelessness. Most people that haven't experienced homelessness assume that people couldn't control their addiction and that is how they came to be there. The sad truth is that homelessness is a bleak and soul destroying experience. It is easy to understand from this perspective how so many of them turn to drugs to numb the pain and monotony of their daily struggle to survive.

Hamsmart has become a political organization as well as a health care provider especially since the pandemic and the encampment issue when they had to represent the homeless.

Stagnant social assistance rates are a significant contributing factor to the problem, coupled with skyrocketing property costs have created almost a perfect storm. The system is putting the onus of the problem on the individual, when the system is the root cause of the problem and it is important to note that. Before the pandemic, there was no attention paid to the deficiencies of the system. It was impossible to get anyone in the City to understand that there was even a problem in the first place. City Council has continued to lay the blame of homelessness and peoples inability to conform to the shelter programs on the individual instead of recognizing that the system itself is not serving those individuals. All levels of government need to recognize that blaming a person for their circumstances only makes themselves feel better about ignoring the problem. Lance asked: Would it be beneficial to have all the agencies and organizations that are trying to address homelessness sit down and discuss these issues? Marcie Answered: Unless the City and City staff are present and open to understanding what the problems actually are, I don't believe it will be effective. We know what the problems are. We need to see action at government levels. Marcie pointed out a number of issues with things like VISPDAT.

James asked: Given the continued miscommunication and misunderstanding between individuals and government, what would you recommend or suggest to get some of those issues addressed?

Lisa answered: We have the same problem that you are. We can't seem to get the people in power to understand or pay enough attention to the issues. We had a very brief success during the encampment negotiations with Council, and we were excited that we finally made some of them understand a few of the issues at hand. However, at the very next Council meeting, they went ahead and removed encampment protections and made it illegal again to be homeless. They did so without any real change to a system they understood to be flawed. It should be noted that the majority of Council is more focused on property development than social justice.

We discussed VISPDAT: Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Assistance Tool. It is the tool that social programs use to measure what place a person is on a list for services and what services they are eligible for. It has been deemed ineffective and is being pulled from use in several municipalities. There are many concerns that it puts people into boxes, prevents them from getting access to services if you score too high. People are now being coached to ensure that they don't score too high which negates or reduces its

effectiveness. There are concerns that it overestimates the impact of substance abuse and prevents users from being sheltered safely.

We discussed how the medical system needs to treat substance abuse as a symptom of other issues instead of the cause of them. How properly prescribing the correct medications early can prevent some people from turning to street drugs.

Lisa suggested we invite Jennie Vengris from CUPA (Community University Policy Alliance) to discuss RCFs and systemic homelessness.

We discussed what would be considered a success in housing or if we could in fact measure progress at all.

Lisa suggested inviting the DJNO (Disability Justice Network of Ontario) or Dr. Emile Joseph to further discuss some of these issues.

Hamsmart was invited to attend the Accessibility Fair and set up an information table.

5. Housing Guide Review: The Chair asked if everyone needed paper copies sent to them before we begin. Members agreed that it was necessary. Jayne pointed out that there should be a number of copies in inventory already.

Jayne also suggested adding a transitional housing portion of our guide and sending copies out to SAC and HAAC.

6. Other Business: Jayne mentioned the need for real time numbers on homelessness.

7. Adjournment