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MEMORANDUM

TO: Eileen M. Donoghue, City Manager *EMD*

FROM: Mary Shannon Thomas, LICSW, Dir. Homelessness Initiatives

DATE: July 14, 2020

SUBJECT: COUNCIL MOTION OF 6/23/20 BY COUNCILOR MERCIER  
REQUEST CITY MANAGER PROVIDE A REPORT UPDATING THE  
PROGRESS OF THE TASK FORCE TO END HOMELESSNESS AND WHAT  
HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED SO FAR

In 2019 a Task Force was convened by the City Manager which included insight from a variety of community providers and a nationally renowned consultant. The Task Force was made up of a variety of community leaders and experts on housing and homelessness, with representation from Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA), Lowell General Hospital, Lowell Community Health Center, Community Teamwork Incorporated (CTI), South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC), Greater Lowell Community Foundation, and many others. Leadership from within the City from the Health Department, Police and Fire were also included to bring their knowledge and experience to the group. The recommendations were to develop and recommend a plan engaging appropriate community infrastructure to support long-term system of permanent supportive housing, and improve the crisis response system. One recommendation was to hire a specific coordinator who could take on the role of executing the other elements of the plan. Other priorities, such as merging with the Balance of State, and the development of interagency collaborations are described in brief below.

Emerging from the Task Force was the Coordinating Council, which exists to support and inform the City's overall strategy for reducing individual homelessness and increasing capacity for housing, with specific focus on plans created by the Director of Homelessness Initiatives. Starting from the evidenced-based "Housing First" strategy, the Council will advocate for engagement with appropriate community infrastructure, and work to develop and sustain the creation of a long-term system of permanent supportive housing within the City of Lowell. Adopted by the City Council, the task force report serves as a guiding document for the Coordinating Council, who will then in turn use the strength of its members to improve the crisis response system (street outreach, emergency shelter, and rapid connection to resources to prevent homelessness) and support the creation of opportunities to address the root causes of homelessness as a social determinant of health.

## Task Force Progress

1. Partnered with Balance of State CoC, completing merger with the Department of Neighborhood Development (DHCD)
2. Increased coordination across the City
  - a. Fostering collaborative opportunities (CTI/Life Connections; Eliot Church/CTI, SMOC/LHCH)
  - b. Standing Homelessness Coordinating Council (started pre-pandemic) and regular provider meetings throughout the pandemic
  - c. Creation of Stoklosa site for COVID-19 quarantine – unique and difficult undertaking that partnered SMOC and LCHC to staff and screen guests
  - d. Regular meetings of Coordinating Council Subcommittee to address issues related to Covid crisis, in partnership with the Greater Lowell Community Foundation.
3. Hired full-time Director of Homelessness Initiatives (Mary Shannon Thomas, LICSW)
  - a. City-wide working group to find housing solutions for homeless individuals, the “Lowell Connector” will be a by name list that identifies a service provider, and route to housing pathway, along with necessary supports for long term housing success
  - b. Organized disparate outreach efforts into a single outreach process (Coordinated Outreach and Engagement Team, or COET)
  - c. New focus on expansion of homeless services provision, with more robust outreach and diversion efforts, including front door triage and rapid exit strategies
  - d. Increased coordination with City departments, as well as with existing providers
4. Working with SMOC on update to shelter operations and training.
  - a. Diversion training for all staff
  - b. Coordination with DHCD and LTLC around access to Coordinated Entry, the statewide system of housing opportunities
  - c. Partnership grant for 24/7 use of the facility and site to deliver services
5. Worked on compliance with recipients of HUD funds from City of Lowell
  - a. Eliot Church and St. Paul’s Soup Kitchen – engaged and productive members of ongoing conversations, including creation of day programming at Eliot in response to Covid.
6. Focus on permanent supportive housing
  - a. SMOC’s purchase of 2 buildings from LHA
  - b. Renewed efforts with housing developers to incorporate units into projects
  - c. Private landlord conversations.
7. Allocation of CARES Act monies in response to Covid crisis
  - a. Creating opportunities for increased service provision from area providers, including CTI, SMOC, and Life Connections
  - b. Short and Long Term Housing Creation to reduce population at LTLC to reduce potential spread
  - c. Prevention efforts to address potential evictions and prevent individuals from entering homelessness.

The Task Force, and its resulting Coordinating Council, remain focused on improving the quality of life for those vulnerable Lowellians experiencing homelessness. As the quality of life for those individuals improves, so it does for the City as a whole.