



Diane Nichols Tradd
Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

MEMORANDUM

Craig Thomas
Deputy Director

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

FROM: Mary Shannon Thomas, LICSW, Director Homelessness Initiatives

DATE: October 27, 2020

SUBJECT: **COUNCIL MOTION OF 9/22/20 BY COUNCILOR ELLIOTT**
REQUEST CITY MANAGER MEET WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE
TRANSITIONAL LIVING CENTER/ELIOT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
REGARDING HOMELESS CONDITIONS AND OPERATIONAL ISSUES IN THE
AREA AND REPORT BACK TO COUNCIL ON STATUS OF IMPROVEMENTS
COUNCIL MOTION OF 9/22/20 BY COUNCILOR ELLIOTT
REQUEST CITY MANAGER REPORT ON FREQUENCY OF MENTAL HEALTH
ADVOCATE CONTACT WITH PATIENTS IN CITY AND ALLOCATE
FEDERAL BLOCK GRANT FUNDING TO EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH
ASSISTANCE TO ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICES TO ALL RESIDENTS

The Director of Homelessness Initiatives has been made aware of the concerns and related issues in the area of Summer and Middlesex Streets and the surrounding areas, and has engaged with various providers to assess for potential resolutions. There has been a significant uptick in the number of individuals forced to be outside, both throughout the day, and overnight. Several steps have been taken to address needs related to this increase, as follows:

- Eliot Church established low barrier day programming and access to hygiene resources in their building. The program runs 8a-2p M-F with additional support from Community Teamwork Inc. (CTI) for housing, Eliot Community Human Services for mental health, and clinical case management support from the City (via Mary Shannon).
- Life Connection Center (LCC) has been approved for funding (through CARES dollars) for expansion of homeless specific services, such as outreach and case management, with a focus on providing services to individuals unable to access support through Lowell Transitional Living Center (LTLC).
- After drastic cuts to capacity due to Covid, LTLC finds itself with about half the number of beds they had available pre-Covid. They are working to increase capacity through utilization of hotel rooms in Chelmsford, and by increasing triage and diversion efforts.
- LCC will begin rollout of their Urban Agenda grant program, the Clean Streets Crew. The program brings individuals in homelessness together to engage in twice-weekly clean-up of the neighborhood, while providing an opportunity for engagement and skill-building. They will also have funds to help with barriers to employment (lack of ID, birth certificate, etc.) LTLC will be getting 12 guests certified through various certificate programs, and creating work training opportunities for guests in the shelter.

- Utilizing DHCD CARES Grant (funding pending as of 10/7/20) CTI has submitted a proposal for 20 units of Permanent Supported Housing focusing on Covid-vulnerable clients with an eye toward housing equity.
In the same grant, Life Connections has submitted for a temporary emergency response - the development of 20 low barrier beds in a temporary setting at LCC for vulnerable individuals with access to housing and case management supports.

The City of Lowell's Department of Planning Development has received Community Development Block Grant – COVID (CDBG-CV) funds and Emergency Solutions Grant – COVID (ESG-CV) funds in three phases for the use in preventing, preparing for, and responding to the Coronavirus (COVID-19). These allocation have been awarded in three phases:

Phase 1: CDBG award \$1,305,645.00
ESG award \$ 632,876.00

The intent of the phase 1 funding was to provide COVID-19 related assistance and critical support to the vulnerable and at-risk Lowell families and individuals served by Lowell nonprofit organizations. Priorities for funded activities included Economic Development Assistance, Food Assistance Programs and Homelessness Prevention Activities.

Phase 2 and 3: CDBG award \$1,251,394.00
ESG award \$2,610,376.00

Phase 2 and 3 funding priorities will continue to support Economic Development activities, Food Assistance Programs and homelessness preventions activities with the goal of developing both permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing opportunities in the City.

Concerns around mental health and substance use have increased across all walks of life, but the visibility of individuals in homelessness makes it a more conspicuous issue. While many providers were able to transition to telehealth platforms, that option is less available to our unhoused residents, particularly those dealing with untreated mental illness and substance use challenges. The City (through the Director of Homelessness Initiatives) has coordinated with area service providers who are contracted through the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and Mass Health. Providers like Vinfen and Eliot Community Human Services, who run the Adult Community Clinical Services (ACCS) and Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) teams in the area have coordinated with the Director to work on specific case management plans for certain high-need clients in the area. Additionally, collaboration with the Lahey Emergency Services Program (ESP) has increased access and understanding about the use of mobile crisis teams. The Director has also established a line of communication with the Mental Health Court clinicians, the guardians for certain clients, as well as with other area providers. It is helpful to know that the vast majority of treatment options available are voluntary, and that mandating services is an infrequent and complicated process that rarely results in creating significant change for individuals. Many of the most vulnerable individuals in homelessness are under some sort of guardianship, but the state limits what steps can be taken if a client refuses the services on offer.

Opportunities in the area include a discussion of potential repurposing of the mostly-vacant Solomon Mental Health Center on Varnum Avenue. The Lowell Connector program will also allow for clinical case management consults for clients that are on the list and have signed releases. These consults can help connect existing supports with new resources, and ensure a more robust community approach for particularly vulnerable individuals.

MS/ns

cc: Diane N. Tradd, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director
Craig Thomas, Deputy Director