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MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager 

FROM: Lisa Golden, Director of Health and Human Services

DATE: 9/5/23

SUBJECT: MOTION RESPONSE – HHS-14 9/13/2022 C. Jenness/C. Nuon Req. City Mgr. Provide An Update Around Lowell’s Housing First Strategy And Hiring Of A Director Of Homelessness Initiatives To Address The Needs Of The Unhoused Population Within Our Community

In response to Councilor Jenness’ and Councilor Nuon’s motion regarding an “update around Lowell’s Housing First strategy, Housing First, is a model that provides permanent housing to homeless individuals and families without preconditions and barriers to entry. The model provides wraparound case management services to the tenants to help them achieve stability and success. Although Housing First is evidence-based methodology, Housing First is on hold in Lowell.

Supportive housing is being pursued by both South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) and Community Teamwork (CTI) with the support of the City. SMOC has recently opened a building on Westford Street housing 21 individuals and will open another on Andover Street that will house another 9 individuals. CTI is in the process of renovating a building on Summer Street that will house 19 individuals, estimated to open in November. Each of these projects has taken over three years to complete. The estimated number of units still needed is over 300.

We are currently gridlocked into a process that is no longer working due to the barriers listed below:

- Lack of land to build within the infrastructure of the city.
- Lack of reasonable buildings that could be renovated.
- Lack of workforce to provide staffing and case management.
- Cost of renovation has become unaffordable for any one agency.
- Time to renovate typically exceeds 3 years.
- Weak incentives for developers and investors.

Solutions are now beyond the scope of the city alone. Success will require the following interventions. These are also the next steps that resulted from the Regional Homelessness Summit:

- State or Federal government must intervene to require surrounding towns to provide buildings that can be converted to supportive housing.

- State or Federal government must intervene to require surrounding towns to provide land where permanent supportive housing or temporary structures can be built.
- State or Federal government must provide incentives to developers.
- State or Federal government must provide incentives to create a supportive workforce.
- State or Federal government must provide incentives to construction companies that demand quick turn-around times.