

Tiffany Stuflick, Chair

Sharon Taylor Gray, Vice Chair

Susan Levy

John Foley

Gail Friedman

Alirio Estevez

Mary Gillogly

Melissa Lowell

Jason Smith

Andrea Wiley

Greg (no last name provided)

Tiffany Called the meeting to order. Two corrections to minutes, one about Jason's position prior to DSS and one about Susan being on attendance list twice.

Motion to approve the minutes as amended, and seconded. No objections.

Introductions around the table from all the members for the new guests.

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Tiffany opened the floor for public comments. None are entered.

Melissa Lowell, the Street Outreach Coordinator for Chatham County, introduced the street outreach program. It's fairly new to the county. The majority of the job is funded by an ESG grant from HUD, which then comes to the state level DSS, then CPRC gets reimbursed. The United Way also pairs funds that help make the program more flexible. The main duty is to be someone who can go out and connect people experiencing homelessness with resources. Whatever the client's needs are, so long as they fit HUD's definition of homelessness we can connect them to RRH, SSA, Disability benefits or assist in removing housing barriers like legal troubles, etc. The program is absolutely voluntary, no one has to answer questions, no one has to engage with resources or community partners if they don't want.

Visual aid: there's a number of figurines. Large ones represent clients, small ones represent their dependents. the baseball players represent service members.

Average day can vary a lot. For instance, monday was extremely paperwork dominant. Other days may include buying groceries for clients, or giving them rides to appointments to help them around their barriers.

HUD funds are quite restrictive. They can't buy tents, can't buy alcohol, tobacco, firearms. no fuel or car repairs. The inability to buy fuel is particularly troublesome because it isn't just for transportation. Fuel is also their means of keeping their car climate controlled, and their ability to get out of danger or move to a spot that is acceptable. Cell phones are extremely important to our clients, there have been some programs in the past that funded phones but ESG cannot. Can't reload minutes or anything either. ESG also cannot be used to rent spaces to create a shelter.

It can be used to buy food, water, etc. It can fund transportation passes, but the inflexibility of the passes means that the demand is relatively low. Many people don't want to leave the county for certain reasons, people are very attached to their pets or they need to be close to work, etc.

For spanish speaking clients, Melissa uses translation software where they pass a phone back and forth if necessary. Ingrid who works with the health dept clinic also offers services when we need to bridge communication gap. Large majority of people are in cars. Most people aren't in public places, or on private property. Chatham doesn't have a lot of concentrated businesses and services like a durham or raleigh, so living out in public isn't really appealing.

People vary in age, from mid to late twenties all the way up to their eighties. For clients that are children, schools are supposed to support them. As far as the street outreach program is aware, children are being supported. For the most part, Melissa does not see children unless it's briefly in the car. Usually they stay with family, friends. The parents don't want them in that situation, and some people can take a child in but not a whole family, so they have to pick and choose.

You can't force people to be helped. People have rights and preferences and we have to respect that. Sometimes people struggle with mental illness and substance use. Frequently people don't have a substance problem and then become homeless as a result, it's often the opposite.

Had two new referrals this week, two last week. Doesn't mean that they'll qualify for street outreach, but there to be the softest cushion possible.

The general consensus in the service provider community is that the most beneficial resource that could be provided next is a drop in center. Somewhere to recharge phones, meet people, have a social support, and where providers can come in and do paperwork. We have a growing situation, and we won't be able to shelter everyone. Melissa has done a good job of talking to clients about what they actually want, and it's universally a day center. If you think about it, a shelter gets you off the streets and that's a win, but you don't really break down the barriers that you have from housing. Leasing, you get a reduced rent rate because you're improving the space. So it is more demanded and more immediately feasible than shelter.

Melissa also mentioned that the most beneficial location for a drop in center would be in Siler City, as there is a greater concentration of clients there. A potential site would be Kingdom Culture Church, she has spoken briefly to one of the pastors there.

If a shelter were to be made, making it as low barrier as possible would be ideal. That means not screening people out because of substance use or mental health, not screening out because of a record. It's a place where people can go to not be judged, wash their face and get some hot food. Invariably though, clients say that they don't want to stay in a shelter. Some clients have a bad experience with them. Some don't want to be separated from their partners or their pets.

Sharon mentioned an older area near Greensboro with a resource center. Not sure if it's all year round. It's on an old track field, so they have foundation to set the structures on. The key is that the land and structures need to be workable already.

Mary asked if there is anything normal citizens can do to help without offending anyone.

Melissa said that the best thing to do would be to start a conversation in a normal manner. Knowing where the normal resources are, chuck wagon, the CORA food fridges, the cold weather shelters, etc. and providing that information without talking down.

Melissa's position is not permanently funded still, and it's part time. Even so, cannot leave clients without. It's not a boundary thing, it's because if the immediate need is ignored, there's no saying how the problem could grow tomorrow.

Melissa then gave her contact information to anyone who wanted to make referrals to the street outreach program.

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Talked about what we want AHAC members participation meeting there, what guidance we want from AHAC at the commissioner meetings? Decided that we all want more participation, want to make sure we're all more represented.

The first start would be to attend EVERY meeting. There is a place for open mic, that you sign up for. It's a space to give facetime, let the commissioners know what AHAC is up to.

When we come up with an idea, we come up with it right away. We could go to the county board and ask if they mind us doing an update every month. If we say something, on record, then it's on record. Let's be their guide.

Since most of the future developments will be in the cities, we may also need to develop a relationship with the cities' planning boards to be invited to pre-planning meetings. This is how it would be approached: the county has funds. Because we have something to offer, we can start a conversation. Jason has made a goal to get connected with pre-planning so that before ANYone has drafted ANY plans, there's affordable housing baked in.

Losing track of something important, which is that the county is redoing its UDO. there are members of the planning committee that are pro-Affordable Housing, but there has to be active advocacy to move the needle.

Had a position that was Jason's before, that is now in the budget. Jason is recommending that that position will be a development-side person. Step one will be meeting with HR, posting that, and working purely on the development side. There's too much for one person to do, it really is. The county IS being pretty aggressive in giving Jason agency. Once he requests something, the county has been very receptive.

There are some things that are quasi-related to AHAC that are wins. Leah was involved in the development of impact fees. 80k is going back to this developer, which is going directly back to housing. They have 72 total units that they're starting to fill this month. 18 are going to be devoted to 30 percent AMI or lower. The remaining units are 60 percent AMI or lower. That's a big boost for housing in Siler City. As this fills, there will be some domino effects that other people don't realize. There are some outcomes that are coming.

//// Matt Boward.

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//Mary mentioned Eden homes, a leader of their organization could make for a good AHAC guest. They worked with salvation army to build on county land. They had to balance numerous funding sources to make the project work. Mary has a connection with some of the key partners, and could get in touch. In any case, we need to pair a lot of funding sources together and diversify our sources of funding.