



TOWN COUNCIL
Committee to Assess Homelessness in the Town of Barnstable

Selectmen's Conference Room

February 20, 2018

6:00pm

MEETING MINUTES

I. BUSINESS

A. Roll Call:

Members present: Chair of Committee Councilor Jennifer Cullum; Councilor John G. Flores; Member at Large, Deb Krau; Councilor Britt Beedenbender; Vice President of the Council, James H. Crocker Jr.; **Others in attendance:** SGT. Jennifer Ellis; LT Jeanie Challies, Barnstable Police; Mark Ells, Town Manager; Jack Yunits, County Commissioner **ABSENT:** Councilor Debra Dagwan;

Chair of the Committee opened up the meeting at 6:05, welcoming Mr. Yunits from the County. Chair of the Committee asked for Public Comment;

Elizabeth Wurfbain, Hyannis Main Street Business Improvement District commented that a few property owners are still concerned about the homeless, and they have been pressuring her to do something about the ones that are still on Main street, so she has talked to several individuals in the Town as well as the Police and has asked if there was anything else we should be doing to take this one step further, what else should we be doing, so the idea or the thought of having the officers that were patrolling the street in the summer time, if there was a way to have a couple of them year round doing the same patrol, or the second thought was to move some of the facilities or organizations that serve the population of the homeless, i.e.: the shelter, and that is a piece that people would like to see brought up for discussion again, we have also discussed what a great job this committee has done handling the issues so far.

Councilor Britt Beedenbender asked for clarification on the officer's portion of the plan she mentioned, and wanted to ask if she meant the foot patrol officers. Ms. Wurfbain answered yes and also moving one of the institutions itself that is currently on Main Street and also moving the shelter, those were the three top suggestions made at the meeting Ms. Wurfbain attended, and was asked to bring those suggestions forward to the Committee.

Lt. Jean Challies mentioned that the CSO program is great, however there are some logistic issues with people working year round, and that is going to cause an increase in the cost, it creates full time jobs with benefits, and we have been receiving a lot of pressure regarding the bathrooms that are public and the use of the bathroom year round that has caused issues before in the winter months and the same is happening now.

Councilor Jennifer Cullum mentioned that the problem the business owners are seeing are the fact that once all the tourist go away and the population returns to the normal population we are used to seeing which is very little foot traffic on Main Street, so the ones that are doing the walking up and down in the dark days of winter here on the Cape is the Homeless population, and that is what the business owners are seeing because they are going to the places that service them.

Chair of the Committee asked when the CSO officers start for the season since they are seasonal employees, LT. Challies answered they start the first week in June.

Chair of the Committee wanted to ask Ms. Wurfbain which building she referred to on Main Street earlier that has been an issue with loitering, Ms. Wurfbain stated Bay Bridge at the very beginning of Main Street, there is a huge problem with individuals hanging out there. SGT. Ellis agreed, however

there is very little they can do as the local police besides show a presence every now and then and try and police it the best they can, the State has made it very clear on what we can and cannot do there with the individuals, because most are homeless. Ms. Wurfbain stated it was a shame that they could not use the back area out there to put tables or fences, or try a community garden and contribute back to the community somehow, that was another thought that was raised as well.

Ms. Krau asked a question or would like to ask the business owners a question; what is the risk reward for the business owner on Main Street of the money this time of year spent on having 6 full time equivalent (FTE) street officers on Main Street, there is not a lot of business happening on Main Street, so if you put 6 FTE of CSO officers in the winter to police Main Street, there isn't a whole lot of business, so what are they expecting to get for the money that they spend or want the Town to spend in the winter time, Ms. Krau said there are probably a lot other things we could spend the 6 FTE salaries on for the winter months, this is just her opinion. SGT Ellis stated that she wonders if the business owners are aware of the risk factor on having these individuals on the street for the winter months, these VSO officers are the eyes and ears of the police, they have no protection, they do not carry anything that protects them from harm in anyway, they have no weapons, just radios and Narcan to radio an officer if they are in trouble, so there is a lot of risk for these individuals that others may not be aware of. It's not the same as the summer police program we run, it is all based on their communication skills. Ms. Krau stated they are also out there in the summer when there are larger crowds and more people around to protect them in the event they are in a situation that is dangerous to them. LT. Challies also mentioned that if there was a homeless individual that is trying to seek shelter in a doorway to get out of the elements of the winter there is very little a CSO officer can do at that point other than ask if they want to go to the shelter, if they refuse, then they can't move them.

John Flores asked if there was any quantifiable information that says because we spent this amount of money on this issue, we received this in return. Or is it all qualitative data? In the summer it really improved, you could see the results, but Ms. Wurfbain stated there isn't any data that was gathered to prove it on paper, this was a visual observation Councilor Beedenbender stated it would not be hard to gather such information because you could start with when the CSO officers came to work and when the business owners noticed a difference or started to notice when there was a difference. Councilor John Flores asked if there has ever been a survey done to the business owners on Main Street to gather such data, if not maybe it should be done when you meet to say this is a survey we would like you all to take regarding, and then state whatever it is you're looking for in the data. SGT. Ellis stated that the loitering is the hardest issue to tackle because they have civil rights and those rights outweigh anything we do, our hands are basically tied. Attorney Ruth Weil stated SGT Ellis is correct, these individuals are protected by the Civil rights aspects, there was a case in Worcester that had to do with a homeless individual, and the Judge ruled in the favor of the homeless individual, so we have to be real careful when we are dealing with homeless individuals and this also pertains to panhandling, they can panhandle if this is their means of earning income, there is not a whole lot the police can do in this instance as either unless they are causing harm to themselves or obstructing traffic in anyway, then the police can do something.

Chair of the Committee introduced Jack Yunits to give us an update on the 24-7 phone number for the homeless or the Social Service Agencies to call or the police to call if they have an individual in crisis, from the last meeting he attended with the Homeless Committee what I did find out is we have such a service, but it is just not working right now because it wasn't functioning correctly when it was implemented. Mr. Yunits gave a little background of himself when he was the Mayor of Brockton, your Police Chief welcomed me by saying welcome to Little Brockton by the sea, Mr. Yunits said, I wish it looked like this, Mr. Yunits said he had over 400 vacant buildings in Brockton, the city was really, really bad, and he was yelling at Governor Weld at the time to give him more money to help get rid of this problem; the Governor replied that there are millions of dollars being given to Brockton to help with this problem, the problem is Brockton does not know what is happening to the dollars coming in because there was no accountability department that said this facility received this amount and did this with it, so he developed a department of people or panel of individuals that started to hold these agencies that were receiving monies from the State accountable for the funding, they had to right reports and do just what Councilor Flores stated, and if they did not have a plan or submit a plan with hard data after using the

funds, then their funding went elsewhere to those programs that were doing good things, and then eventually the weeding out of those program that do nothing and those programs that are successful receive more funding. This included everything from food stamps to free school; Microsoft developed a program called Mass Cares and this is what they used. He has started to ask his staff this year at the County to put a program together just like that to start track these individuals, and to track the agencies that are receiving County monies and start holding these agencies accountable. Coordinating Entry System would be easier to obtain information if the other was in place. Mr. Yunits stated that Ms. Beth Alberts will be able to have a report ready to give to this Committee by the middle of March if you desire, Ms. Alberts has worked very hard to get this data, but we need to hold these agencies accountable and also be able with this data to track the individuals, and be able to provide the services they need and to make sure that they are receiving the correct services, and those that should be hospitalized are, and those that need regular care will receive it, so it becomes a County issue rather than the police issue it currently has become.

Ms. Krau made a suggestion that if the County is searching for a program that works for others in the country regarding this, that they should try to reach out to those towns, or counties that are gathering the same data for their state that he would find a program that has been used already that gathers the information the County wants; and at the same time get a program that has worked for others already. A lot of the data that has been gathered here has been gathered by Housing Assistance Corp. (HAC) and she is not sure how they gathered the data, because she is not aware of any professional individuals that have that ability there, but knows that that is where most of the data came from in the past. Ms. Krau stated that one of the interesting things when they comprised the list for the Main Street Initiative, at the time the list contained 95 individuals that they documented, the interesting part was that when the Main Street Initiative Committee met with the Social Service Agencies and shared the information with them, most of the Agencies discovered they are servicing the same people and they did not know it, so she feels a lot can be done once you start looking at the individuals themselves, because some know how to manipulate the services, so that was another area to look at, you could have 6 people in the same family claiming the benefits, when they claim individual, rather than applying for a family benefit, so there was a lot of that type of information that came out as well.

Mr. Yunits stated that the program he is looking at is going to track the individuals as well as the Social Service dollars to the treatment plans of the individuals receiving the services, so it is going to have a much more detailed report of an individual and the services following that individual than just knowing you have X number of homeless.

Chair of Committee also asked if this program was going to be able to track the individual as to where they may have traveled from, or if they have family outside of Cape Cod that possibly may be looking for them, or even if these individuals come from down Cape, and maybe the services need to be spread out to those ancillary areas so they are not coming to just Hyannis to receive those services, that would be valuable data as well. Mr. Yunits stated he can only account for the County money that is given out, but he can assure that the County dollars will be tracked if we are giving out money and not driving the train in our Town, then shame on us. The County step up for all of us because at one of those meeting an individual that was a Department Head from the State Agency stood up and said that they wanted the Cape exempt from those laws, there were laws put in place to receive benefits Ms. Krau stated one being you had to work a minimum of 15 hours a week, and another statement that was made was regarding where to put people by saying you all know what zip code to put on 02601. Ms. Krau said this just should not happen, but there is no one from Barnstable to say no on this panel. The program of transitional assistance is the agency that used to have this program, it was a State Law, but the Regional Network for the Homeless somehow got the Cape exempt from those rules. Mr. Yunits said if there is such exemption then he will get rid of it, he will look into it and report back to the Committee. Chair of the Committee said we are not helping the individual by just handing them benefits in a cash supply and not making them do anything for it, there is no self-pride or esteem given to them or sense of purpose. We all work for what we have and we are all proud of what we have, these individuals should be doing the same as the rest of us. Chair of the Committee asked Mr. Yunits to be the eyes and ears to this Committee on the Regional Network of Homeless ness to be there to hear and to advocate for

Barnstable, because it is not just a Hyannis issue, this is a Cape wide issue, Chair of the Committee thanked Mr. Yunits for his efforts he has made and the leadership he has brought to the County, because that is what we need from the county is leadership, and you have brought that, so we thank you.

Chair of the Committee asked Mr. Yunits to join us on April 3, 2017 with an update, the March 20, 2018 meeting will not take place due to the Chair having another Commitment that night.

Chair of the Committee asked for a motion to accept the meeting minutes of January 2, 2018 as written.

Councilor John G. Flores made the motion to accept the meeting minutes of January 2, 2018

Councilor Beedenbender seconded the motion, all members present voted in favor of accepting the meeting minutes as written.

Chair of the Committee asked for a motion to adjourn

The Committee will meet on March 6 for an update on the HB3881

ADJOURN: 7:00pm

NEXT MEETING: March 6, 2018 at 6pm Selectmen's Conference Room