

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING  
JANUARY 12, 2022**

**ATTENDANCE:** Jorge Cruz, Co-chair; Aikeem Boyd, Co-chair; Maria Pereira, Wanda Simmons, Michelle Small

**OTHERS:** Council Member(s): J. Herron, T. Mack, M. McCarthy, E. Newton & R. Roman-Christy; Thomas Gaudett, Mayor's Office; Constance Vickers, Legislative Affairs; Ms. Cheryl Bell, Ms. Carmen Colon, Dr. Herron Gaston, Chief Administrative Office; Ms. Alicia Feller, Ms. Alinette Monteiro, Eneida Martinez, Call in User 1; Call in User 2

**CALL TO ORDER**

Co-chair Cruz called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

Council Member Cruz said that he would like to recognize the extraordinary work that was done by those who were involved helping the woman underneath the bridge be moved to safety.

Council Member Cruz requested a moment of silence for someone who recently lost a family member due to COVID.

Council Member Cruz Said that he would like to include recognize the following individuals: Carmen Colon, Acting Police Chief Garcia, Deputy Police Chief Baraja, Lt. Grech, Dr. Gaston Atty. Myer, Atty. Toms, B.J. from the Homeless Outreach Team, Ellen from the Homeless Outreach Team, Debbie Barton, David Cabrerra, Acting Director Craig Nadrizny, Joe Tiago, Tammy Papa, Health Director Ebony Jackson-Shaheed and Cheryl Bell for their assistance with the removal of the individual from underneath the bridge.

He said that this was an informational session to provide the Council Members with information.

**APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES**

• **May 12, 2021 (Regular Meeting).**

Council Member Pereira said that the only two members of the current Committee had been present at the May meeting.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA MOVED THE MINUTES OF MAY 12, 2021**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MINUTES OF MAY 12, 2021 WERE APPROVED AS SUBMITTED WITH TWO (2) IN FAVOR (PEREIRA AND CRUZ) AND THREE (3) ABSTENTIONS (BOYD, SIMMONS AND SMALL).**

Ms. Colon said that the Homeless Outreach Team had worked with the individual that was living in the small house behind the Police Station. She said that they were able to provide that individual with an apartment at the location that he desired. She said that she was very excited about this.

Since November 15th, when they opened up the warming center, they have been able to serve 40 at the South End Community Center and there were nine clients in hotels. When an individual comes into a warming center, they start to work on relocating that client into permanent housing. The police will be bringing people to the warming center.

Ms. Colon mentioned that News 12 had mistakenly given some misinformation about when the warming center was open.

Council Member Pereira said that she had seen the News 12 news story and she was pleased that Ms. Colon had corrected the error about when the warming center was open.

Ms. Bell then spoke about the Prospect House and how they were connecting the clients to the services needed such as substance abuse or mental health services. They work closely with Southwest Health Center and the CT Department of Housing. They are able to provide testing and vaccination to the clients.

She then spoke about the HUD mandated point in time homeless count. They are using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for tracking purposes.

*Council Member Newton and Council Member Roman-Christy joined the meeting at 6:22 p.m.*

Council Member Pereira asked for the number of unsheltered individuals in the last count. Ms. Bell said that the latest count was done last year and would get that number for Council Member Pereira. She said that there were 123 unsheltered.

Council Member Pereira said that there was a stigma associated with homelessness. She related an incident where she had been at 999 Broad Street and came across a homeless individual who was sleeping on one of the plaza benches there. She asked how they should address that type of stigma.

Ms. Bell said that Council Member Cruz and Council Member Herron had come to the overflow location to work with the clients. Ms. Colon said that there is a stigma applied not only to the homeless, but to those who are just sitting on benches in urban communities.

Council Member Roman-Christy said that the warming center had been a long time in coming and now people have a place to stay overnight. Ms. Colon thanked Council Member Roman-Christy for all the help that she had provided.

Council Member Simmons asked if the homeless individuals had families and if there was a particular area that they were located in. Ms. Colon said that there was one shelter that was able to shelter families. The warming centers are open to anyone in Bridgeport and they do provide transportation. Discussion followed.

Council Member Herron thanked everyone for their contributions. She said that they have been listening to those who are in need. She said that they hoped to have other warming sites in other areas in the City. She reminded everyone that there are some homeless who will not go into a shelter and will not leave, but the homeless outreach teams do what they can.

Council Member Small asked how long it takes for the program to find permanent housing. Ms. Colon said that there were many factors, such as having identification or if there were a spouse, a couple or children involved. Park City Communities has been an amazing partner in terms of getting units inspected and the homeless into the units.

Council Member Newton thanked Council Member Cruz and Council Member Herron for being in the forefront of the homeless crisis. He said that 2-1-1 was not working out well for many individuals. The legislators need to improve the system or bring in more staff because it takes too long to respond to clients.

Council Member Newton said that he had gone to NJ with Council Member Cruz and Ms. Bell to see those projects. He said that they should be able to find a building for housing the homeless. It is time to think outside the box.

Ms. Colon said that she would like to address that and it would be good to have a separate meeting for this. She asked what would happen if she went to the Council to ask for a tax abatement for homeless units.

Council Member Newton said that if they brought something that made sense, he would support it. He also reminded her that the Council had cut taxes recently and the City was no longer the highest taxed City in the State.

Ms. Colon said that the 2-1-1 system has improved tremendously. She said that it would be important to make sure that there was accurate information. The HMIS is only as accurate as the information entered into it.

Council Member Cruz pointed out that the Bridgeport Rescue Mission was not linked into the HMIS network. He said that they should not be working as a single entity. He wanted the City officials to understand the homeless outreach.

Council Member Simmons said that she would support the tax abatements for homeless shelters proposals that were well thought out.

Council Member Pereira said that in order to obtain permanent housing, the individual needs a birth certificate and other identification. She asked how they would pay for those documents. Ms. Colon said that the outreach teams pay for the documents.

Council Member Pereira said that she believes that New Haven has the right idea in that they only give tax abatements to affordable housing, housing for people with disabilities and veteran housing. No tax abatements are given for market rate units or above that, like the luxury apartments.

In addition, the Connecticut General Statutes only allows new developments to apply for abatements and the process must be complete before the first unit is occupied. The Jackson Avenue project received an abatement three years after the ribbon cutting. She spoke to Mr. Coleman about this being against the law. Mr. Coleman said that the Council approved it. This is also true about the Reade's Art Space, which expired in 2017 and they reapplied for another 15 years. These are violations of the Connecticut General Statutes abatement program.

Council Member Pereira asked how affordable the units would be. Ms. Colon said that they were talking about 30%. Discussion followed.

Ms. Colon said that it would be important to maintain the units. She said that they pay taxes on all their properties. She offered to meet with Council Member Pereira to talk about the issue.

Council Member Cruz said that if they had any materials, they should send it to either Co-chair Boyd or to him to send to the other Committee members.

Council Member Newton said that this was a serious issue and that they should prepare a serious proposal to help with the homeless problem.

Council Member Cruz said that he and Council Member Herron had written a resolution to declare homelessness a Public Health Crisis. Copies will be available soon.

Ms. Alinette Monteiro said that she was working with Greater Bridgeport Mental Health who have been working on outreach, along with four case managers. They work to connect individuals with substance abuse treatment, obtaining benefits or documentation. There is not one agency or entity that could tackle this problem alone, so it is good to see collaboration between the agencies.

It can be hard to keep the focus on the clients when there are pressures to deal with paperwork or other issues. However, there are a great number of people who have their hearts in the right place. The idea of stigma is very real. It is important to meet people where they are because there is often a lack of trust. The goal is often to just meet people's need that day and build trust. Sometimes it can be a long process to get a client into permanent housing.

Ms. Feller said that she was proud of the outreach teams because they meet people where they are at. There are two Emergency Departments at St. Vincent's and Bridgeport Hospital. The CCT hospital teams will call them when they see clients come through that need services.

Council Member Cruz said that Debbie Barton had worked very hard to help the client under the bridge. Ms. Barton had worked with the court to resolve the situation. Ms. Feller said that Ms. Barton works with police when the individual may need mental health intervention rather than police intervention. The Mobile Crisis team works Monday through Friday 8:00 – 4:30, but they hope to expand the teams to provide 24/7 services.

Ms. Bell said that before COVID, they had been working on reaching out. She has been working in this field for 30 years and this meeting was a breath of fresh air. She proposed that they have a tour of the programs in Bridgeport so Council Members can connect with the clients.

Council Member Newton said that they were working on a project model like they saw in New Jersey for the Bridgeport residents.

Dr. Gaston then spoke about the ministries that his church was involved in which were based on Matthew 25. He said that churches should not be a museum for the saints, but a safe place for the homeless.

Dr. Gaston said that he has assisted the residents of Bridgeport via rental support to prevent homelessness. They provide rental security payments. There is a data base system and he gave a brief overview of the process. They also have connections with financial planners to assist the individuals. They also work on a housing stabilization plans.

The church is also opened as a warming and cooling center. They also work with the youth population and the Council of Churches who refer some of the youth to his church. There are youth who are staying on other people's couches because they have nowhere else to go. Another aspect is funneling the youth into trade schools to provide them with skills.

Council Member Cruz said that not everyone has received their funding from the City yet. Dr. Gaston said that the Methodist Church and Pastor Bennett's Church had been providing their facilities for outreach.

Council Member Cruz said that they would be holding another meeting about moving forward. It will be important to coordinate their efforts to prevent people from falling through the cracks.

Ms. Colon said that there were 89 males and 34 females that received services. She thanked Council Member Cruz and the Committee for bringing everyone together.

Council Member Boyd thanked everyone for the meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BOYD MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER SIMMONS SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services