

Housing Opportunities Action Council

Lead Administrator: Summary Report

Benton County and the City of Corvallis have contracted with United Way of Benton & Lincoln Counties to serve as the backbone organization, and host the position of Lead Administrator (aka, Program Manager) for HOAC from November 1, 2016 through June 30, 2019. Shawn Collins began serving in this role November 1, 2016.

Following is a summary report of the activities of the Program Manager, June 2018 – July 2018.

Project Updates

Community meetings: The past month has been dominated by activity related to the Shelter, but other work continues. On June 27, I was able to attend the Funder's Field Day, sponsored by Benton Community Foundation. This was held at Philomath High School, and included tours of the Career and Technical Education (CTE) class facilities. As noted in a Gazette-Times article ("Women of the woods") on June 4th, Benton County students who take at least one CTE course in high school, graduate on time at a rate 7% above those who do not, so it was encouraging to see the high-caliber facilities and hear from the committed instructors of those courses.

On July 2nd, I joined a meeting with 509J School Board Chair Vince Adams, Commissioner Anne Schuster, and Lili'a Neville (standing in for County Administrator Joe Kerby) to discuss youth homelessness in Benton County, related barriers to housing, and opportunities for County action. County code changes which may allow churches in the County to offer some transitional housing opportunities are on the list of priorities for County staff and the Commissioners to address, and there may be opportunities to partner with the School District as they retire modular buildings.

On July 9, I joined a meeting with City Councilor Penny York, COI Executive Director Kari Whitacre, Corvallis Housing First Executive Director Andrea Myhre, and Mayor Biff Traber to discuss the "big picture" of what's needed in Corvallis to better address housing and homelessness. The intent was not to specifically discuss the proposed Corvallis Service Center on 2nd and Western, but to look more broadly at what community investments may have the greatest impact, and how we might work together to explore those investment opportunities in the future. A second meeting is planned for August.

On July 20, I joined a meeting sponsored by the Housing Action Team of the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition, which was intended as a follow-up to their earlier workshop with SquareOne of Eugene. These meetings have been exploring how something like Opportunity or Emerald Village, successful transitional and affordable housing projects of SquareOne in Eugene, might be pursued locally. My thanks to the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition Housing Action Team, Cassandra Robertson, and all the participants for their thoughtful discussion, and passion to seek positive solutions to local housing challenges.

Cold Weather Shelter:

Proposals for the location of the Shelter and related services were shared at the July 2nd City Council meeting, and at a July 10 Board of Commissioners meeting. On July 11, I joined a meeting with representatives of the Boards of Corvallis Daytime Drop-in Center (CDDC), Stone Soup of Corvallis, Rich Carone and Commissioner Anne Schuster to discuss Rich Carone's proposed north site. This proposal was amended on July 13, to locate the Shelter at the Hanson Tire Factory. No location for the Drop-in Center or Stone Soup was outlined in the amended proposal. Council voted to approve funding for the 2nd Street location for the Shelter on July 16, and on July 17, the Benton County Board of Commissioners approved funding without restriction on location. With the approval of funding, plans are proceeding to get the 2nd Street location ready for Shelter operations by November 1, and complete renovations required for CDDC and Stone Soup.

Perspective

It's been some time since I made any reading recommendations. A couple of items are worth mention:

- "Fighting Back Against the War on Homeless Shelters," July 20, 2018, New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/20/nyregion/fighting-back-against-the-war-on-homeless-shelters.html>). This article is worth the quick read to see the parallels between struggles in New York, and our own challenges in Corvallis.
- *How Civility Works*, Keith J. Bybee, Stanford University Press, 2016. This brief work begins with a question notably posed by Rodney King, "Can we all get along?" and then explores some of the history of perceived breakdowns in civil society which have been called out since the beginnings of the country. I've just begun this one – it seems timely – but it seems well worth the time, as we look for ways to improve the community conversation around housing and homelessness which has recently taken such unfortunate turns. A willingness and commitment to share perspectives, respect others, and encourage an atmosphere where disagreement is possible without becoming destructive of our shared common aims of "a more perfect union" seems essential.

For anyone interested in discussing affordable housing and homelessness, and approaches we might take going forward, I can be reached at shawn@unitedwayblc.org, 541-757-7717, or through contact@bentonhoac.com.