

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, July - August 2018.

Project Updates

Community engagement: Once again, the past month has been largely focused on issues related to the Shelter, and the proposed Service Center for 2nd and Western. See more updates on that below. Despite the continued effort in that space, I've been able to continue involvement in several other areas.

The Homeless Vulnerable Patients Committee continues to meet regularly, and recently presented its proposal for a Homeless Resource Team, to be housed at Samaritan Hospital, to the Delivery Systems Transformation (DST) committee of the IHN-CCO. The proposal would create resources within the Hospital to better serve those who are experiencing homelessness, deliver training and support to doctors and staff within the Samaritan system to better understand housing as a key social determinant of health, and seek to address systems issues that prevent better integration and delivery of services between health-care and social services. The presentation was well received, and all remain hopeful it will be funded. A decision is expected in September.

On August 6, I accompanied ODOT and Corvallis Police staff as they cleared homeless camps on ODOT property. While the intent is partly to be there as a resource for those displaced, attending these also allows me to witness how these clearings take place, and explore with those involved what alternatives may look like. There is general agreement among those doing the clearing of camps that this is not an effective "solution," as those displaced are often left more desperate and frustrated than before, and they simply have to find another place to camp. But moving from this model to alternatives such as managed camping, faces political and community challenges, and we don't have adequate transitional/supported housing capacity to rapidly re-house this population.

On August 8, I participated in an interview with Mikayla Pivec, a junior at Oregon State University who is working on a project focused on resources for those experiencing homelessness. You may also recognize Mikayla as a player on the OSU Women's Basketball team. Less well known is that she was a volunteer for the both the Men's and Women's Shelter last season. Based on Mikayla's interview questions, I'd say she's on a great path for her project, and I look forward to seeing the final result.

On August 10, I joined Councilor Penny York (Ward 1), Biff Traber, Kari Whitacre, and Andrea Myhre in a discussion about long-term needs for services in the community. This was the second and last meeting of this group, but it was a useful discussion as all look forward to some of the broader community discussions to come.

Two different groups, chartered by the IHN-CCO DST, have started to look at intersections between themselves, and other groups such as the Care Coordination workgroup of HOAC. In the past week, I've attended meetings with both the IHN-CCO Universal Care Coordination workgroup, and the IHN-CCO Social Determinants of Health workgroup, and the discussions there are very focused on how to identify overlap, opportunities to align, and the imperative to move from "discussion to action." While challenging to align all these efforts, it's encouraging to see the discussions move in this direction, and I hope to see stronger alignment and collaboration across the groups going forward.

Cold Weather Shelter: Announcement on August 16 of a change in plans for the Corvallis Men's Shelter, which will return to the Hanson Tire Factory site this fall, has overshadowed several other related items. I

will outline a bit of the work that's been done here.

In early August, a permit was granted which will allow the Corvallis Daytime Drop-in Center (CDDC) to operate in space at 2nd and Western for up to 180 days. This arrangement was intended to allow time for necessary construction to take place, and the CDDC to then move into the space to be shared with Stone Soup, while kitchen construction continued. In light of that permit being granted, a meeting was held with Chief Sassaman and Lt. Wood, to apprise them of the move, and discuss any points where we may need to strengthen collaboration between CPD and the tenants at 2nd and Western. With the change in plans, some of that discussion is now moot, but the Chief did have suggestions about information sharing between the Shelter and CPD which will be taken up with the Shelter Management team, and the Steering Committee, as we approach November. The intent was to give Shelter Management a view into CPD's interactions with shelter clients, so that if there was a need to engage more directly with a client regarding their behavior outside shelter, it would be promptly brought to the attention of Shelter Management and staff. A variety of privacy concerns surround this suggestion, but overall, improved collaboration and communication with CPD would be helpful, and will continue to be pursued.

On August 7, a meeting was held with County Administrator Joe Kerby, and City Manager Mark Shepard, to discuss mitigation strategies for the 2nd Street site, and the intent of the County, in partnership with the City, to sponsor a facilitator to support conversations about mitigation of Shelter impacts in the short-term, long-term solutions and strategies for location and co-location of services, and long-term strategies for the structure and role of HOAC in the community. A follow-up discussion took place August 22, with the expectation that the facilitator will be contracted by the end of August.

On August 17, a letter was delivered on behalf of the HOAC Leadership Committee to George Heilig, of Heilig, Misfeldt & Armstrong, LLP, outlining HOAC's response to a letter sent on behalf of "Concerned Citizens for Corvallis Downtown Safety and Livability." While the announcement on August 16 will likely end the threat of further immediate legal action, challenges may still arise which necessitate engaging with Heilig, and addressing questions that his letter raised. The letter was also sent to the Benton County Board of Commissioners, and the Corvallis Mayor and City Council.

It is important to note here that the move of the Shelter back to Chapman Place is not itself without controversy – residents of South Corvallis have expressed concerns about the move, and in particular, comments have been made in various forums (including City Council) that the Shelter has been "dumped" on Southtown. It should also be noted that this move puts both Stone Soup, and the Corvallis Daytime Drop-in Center in a precarious position – with Stone Soup remaining in locations it had planned to exit, and the Drop-in Center in a temporary location, without a clear path forward. I believe it is important that HOAC take a strong role in future community conversations that will impact the ability of these two agencies to secure a long-term, permanent home – which is a goal identified in the recent update to the Ten Year Plan. It is especially important that HOAC not be on the sidelines, if the battle continues against the Shelter, Stone Soup, and the Corvallis Daytime Drop-in Center – and there's evidence that efforts are continuing to discredit Stone Soup and the Drop-in Center even after plans for 2nd Street were abandoned. These two organizations provide critical services which are not replicated by any other organization, and I believe they deserve HOAC's full-throated support.

Perspective

It has been challenging to watch our community debate over services devolve, to personally be on the receiving end of a variety of false allegations and disparaging remarks, and to see others similarly attacked. It has been particularly challenging to learn how difficult it can be to counter misrepresentations, without becoming consumed in an endless effort with little chance of reward. Some of my personal frustration has come from the way in which, by opening the door for additional proposals to come forward, the City and County allowed a level of complexity and misinformation to be introduced into the community conversation that did very little to enrich it, and in many ways derailed well-planned efforts which had followed established frameworks for public decision making. This is not a slam on the City and County – I believe they acted to support community involvement in a challenging topic – but it is hard to see how it truly helped. I have often felt like taking this role has been like going back to graduate school. As someone who studied politics as a major in college, and has a great respect for democratic institutions and processes, seeing this all unfold

has been educational, to say the least. Welcome to your post-grad work in the sausage factory of local politics, Mr. Collins – don't forget your armor-plate.

Part of the challenge for me has been to understand how what's happening locally fits into some of the larger trends we can see, both in politics generally, and in the housing arena specifically. I don't believe that our community is unique in its experiences – communities across the nation are struggling to comprehend the scope of the housing crisis (however it plays out locally), and what efforts might enable positive change. While I can't claim to understand all that's unfolded, I do believe that efforts to find common ground, and rebuild our civic discourse, are critical to our future.

Reading recommendations:

- "The Bipartisan Cry of 'Not in My Backyard'," August 21, 2018, New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/upshot/home-ownership-nimby-bipartisan.html>). This article looks at some HUD initiatives, and explores some of the challenges to developing affordable housing that seem to be rooted in attitudes toward the rights of property owners, and don't seem impacted by traditional "conservative/liberal" political perspectives. Some of the research cited in the article suggests that "homeownership can also prompt people to oppose what's good for their communities in a larger sense — at least if you believe ... that many communities need more housing." Worth taking a look to get some perspective on what has been described by many as a nationwide challenge of "pervasive Nimby syndrome."
- *Practicing Peace*, Pema Chödrön, Shambala, 2018. A brief book, from an American Buddhist nun, it tackles the hopelessness many feel in the face of seemingly intractable problems, and an environment filled with conflict. If you want to understand some of the dynamics of conflict, and get some perspective on how you can personally begin to change that dynamic, I recommend this book.

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.