



Social Services and Public Safety Committee

September 17, 2024

Summary and Motions

Chair Reynolds called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. Committee Members Ellinger, J. Brown, Fogle, Monarrez, Gray, F. Brown, Baxter, Sevigny, and Plomin were in attendance. Vice Mayor Wu, Council Members Lynch, and Sheehan were present as a non-voting members.

I. Approval of July 2, 2024 Committee Meeting Summary

Motion by Sevigny to approve the July 2, 2024 Committee Summary. Seconded by Gray. Motion passed without dissent.

II. Office of Homelessness Prevention and Intervention Annual Update

Jeff Herron, Homelessness Prevention Manager provided a background of the Office of Homelessness Prevention and Intervention (OHPI) which was established in 2014. He reviewed the coordination and planning responsibilities of the OHPI office and said they do not provide direct services. He spoke about the \$44 million investment in the homelessness program between FY20-FY25 to address homelessness. He reviewed updated data from the 2014-2024 LexCount results. This annual point in time count provides a snapshot of what homelessness looks like in our city on any given night. He provided an update on homeless encampments; they conducted 28 cleanups in FY24 at 18 unique locations and 15 cleanups were tied to 6 emphasis areas. The total cost for cleanup is \$51,805 at an average cost of \$1,850 per cleanup. He reviewed the 5-Year Strategic Plan (2021-2025) which was released in 2021 and includes 55 recommendations. Strategic Plan goals are comprised of community outreach and engagement, preventing homelessness, policy and advocacy, funding sources, and expanding permanent supportive housing. He continued with a review of the current projects including onboarding curriculum for case managers, Shelter and Transitional Housing Feasibility Study, Housing Flex Fund, Landlord Partnership Program, and FY24 Continuum of Care Program Competition.

Herron said the emphasis areas are listed on the web site and there is permanent signage at campsites. There was a suggestion for a voucher program similar to one in Boston where expeditors help people find housing quickly. Herron feels the landlord partnership program might be able to incorporate something like this. Herron said there are a few pieces of the Strategic Plan that will not be fully achieved because some of those recommendations will need millions of dollars to be fully executed and we have not been able to identify a sustainable funding source. Herron confirmed LexCount is Lexington's annual point-in-time count of all people experiencing homelessness (including emergency shelter, transitional housing, or unsheltered homelessness) in Lexington on a single night in January. When asked about the email regarding a temporary shelter across from the Hope Center, Herron said the YMCA is not willing to allow us to return to their property a second time. LFUCG is looking to work with hotels to get a block of rooms this year. There was a suggestion to look at a permanent solution for housing. When asked how Council can support this, Herron explained scaling up the efforts is important to consider. No action was taken on this item.

III. NAMI / Fayette Mental Health Diversion Court

Bill Buckman, Coordinator with Fayette Mental Health Diversion Court, reviewed the monetary savings for Lexington from July 1 – August 31, 2024 for 32 graduates. The city invested \$790,000 in the program and this resulted in a \$4,655,819 return on investment (589% ROI). Many people are referred to the program on low-level charges and living with mental illness. These people tend to self-medicate causing issues with substance abuse leading to violent episodes and charges of disturbing the peace. He explained the importance of this program as it helps with turning someone's life around.

Kelly Gunning, Director of Advocacy and Policy with National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), referenced the building where Participation Station is housed. Participation Station is a unique program that operates on the Boston model of psychiatric rehabilitation and provides mental health services in Lexington. She said they are at risk of losing the building as it will be for sale if NAMI cannot raise enough money to purchase it. Gunning emphasized Participation Station focuses on the seriously mentally ill population and is the hub of outreach, recovery, and rehabilitation.

When asked about EmPATH Center, Gunning explained the living room model which is a no barrier 23-hour bed or chair for people to come in or where police could bring people who are in crisis. Typically, when police pick up someone who is intoxicated, they must wait for the person to sober up before they can take them to the hospital. At the EmPATH Center, when you walk in you get help immediately. In the first month they have seen over 300 people and most of those people were diverted successfully by agreeing to go to a next day community appointment. No action was taken on this item.

IV. Items Referred to Committee

No action was taken on this item.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:19 p.m.