

**COMMUNITY HOMELESSNESS ADVISORY BOARD
WASHOE COUNTY, NEVADA**

MONDAY

9:00 A.M.

NOVEMBER 1, 2021

PRESENT:

Alexis Hill, Chair
Ed Lawson, Vice Chair
Bob Lucey, Member *
Neoma Jardon, Member
Devon Reese, Member (via Zoom)
Charlene Bybee, Alternate Member (via Zoom)

Janis Galassini, County Clerk
Herb Kaplan, Deputy District Attorney

The Community Homelessness Advisory Board convened at 9:00 a.m. in the Washoe County Commission Chambers of the Washoe County Administration Complex, 1001 East Ninth Street, Reno, Nevada. Following the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our Country, County Clerk Jan Galassini called roll and the Board conducted the following business:

21-084C AGENDA ITEM 3 Public Comment.

Ms. Meagan O'Farrell expressed concerns about the Cares Campus and the Safe Camp, saying the ModPods had not arrived yet and tents were not adequate for severe weather nor did they provide a safe place for individuals. She suggested placing people in motels until the ModPods arrived. She believed a process was not in place for people within these facilities to express grievances, and they needed advocates.

Ms. Monica DuPea, founder of the Nevada Youth Empowerment Project, which served women 18 to 24 years old who would otherwise be homeless, said she helped conduct 9 of the past 10 annual time counts for the City of Reno. She spoke about working with Built for Zero to implement their program locally. She mentioned inadequacies in programs throughout the County and wanted more to be done to solve homelessness.

Ms. Lily Baran from the American Civil Liberties Union brought attention to safe tents not being appropriate. She expressed concern about unhoused individuals not being provided with weather appropriate gear, the lack of an anonymous grievance program, and shelters consistently being at capacity. She concluded the Cares Campus was not safe for women. She thought these meetings should not be canceled, opining more meetings should occur to help assist with the crisis.

Mr. Jake Maynard expressed concern about the treatment of unhoused people in the community. He believed the same negligence was happening since the County took over the homelessness issues, and the lack of preparedness for the recent

atmospheric river left people's lives in danger and should have been addressed before the storm hit. He expressed disappointment about ModPods not being in place and inadequate housing for individuals ready for transition. He was frustrated these meetings had been canceled and he thought the County needed to take these concerns more seriously.

Ms. Katie Colling, co-founder of the Reno Initiative for Shelter and Equality (RISE), spoke about a community garden they ran to provide food to unhoused individuals. She asked the Board to fund a women's shelter at Record Street and provide warming centers for people living outside. She expressed concern that hundreds of affordable rooms were torn down in Reno, tripling the local homeless population.

Mr. Bill Sims expressed frustration about the City of Reno and the County blaming each other. He wanted the County to take responsibility for homelessness as they had requested. He stated women were not safe at the Cares Campus and were being sexually assaulted. He alleged overhearing people talking about how they were not able to express opinions about the Safe Camp out of fear of retaliation from Mr. Grant Denton. He asserted the members of the Board needed to ensure meetings were held or they should step down to allow people who cared about the community a place on the Board.

Ms. Bridget Tevnan spoke about the urgency to provide women with a safe and separate place to stay, adding these issues needed to be taken seriously. She mentioned the need for a grievance process without the fear of retaliation, so people could bring their concerns forward. She asserted recommendations from Mr. Jon DeCarmine needed to be considered, specifically more training for County staff who provided services to the homeless population.

***9:21 a.m.** **Member Lucey joined the meeting.**

Ms. Ilya Arbatman stated the people experiencing homelessness were the people who needed help. She believed a committee should be formed that would include individuals who currently or had lived in a homeless situation. She mentioned the Safe Camp had a resident advisory board, but those members were not included in meetings with the County. She thought speaking during public comment was different than being invited to discuss issues with the people who could make a difference.

21-085C **AGENDA ITEM 4** Board update and discussion on Nevada Cares Campus Service Plan Recommendations. Jon DeCarmine, JD Consultancy, LLC.

Mr. DeCarmine conducted a PowerPoint presentation via the Zoom app and reviewed slides with the following titles: Background; Process; Key Recommendations; Phased Implementation of Cares Campus; Phase I: Core Components; Phase II: Develop Campus Amenities; Phase III: Incorporate Housing Options; Focus: Staffing, Safety, Security; Focus: Housing Engagement and Placement; Implement Project Performance Measures; Discussion Points; Shelter Capacity; Use of Additional Funds; and Next Steps.

Member Jardon wondered whether the funds allocated by the City of Reno for additional staff were helping. She understood people were experiencing difficulties hiring staff. Assistant County Manager Kate Thomas explained she was not certain but she thought the funds were going to staff as an incentive bonus to stay; she would get an update from Volunteers of America (VOA).

Member Lucey said some of the information in the presentation was the same that had been provided three years before when a local firm was hired. He asserted the project was less than a year old and issues were just starting to be acknowledged. He spoke about agenda item 6, which would address objectives and how to properly manage the facility. He thought the team in place was trying to grasp and collect pertinent information from people such as Mr. DeCarmine to evaluate and help the program evolve. He believed staff still needed time to work out issues but understood immediate needs were important. He wanted discussions to occur related to long-term needs and best practices for operations. He asserted it was difficult to get the campus built and operating, along with being very costly. He wanted to ensure processes were moving in the right direction and paths for individuals were being established.

Member Reese wondered about a reasonable timeframe for a community this size to act on these types of items. Immediate needs needed to be identified along with long-term housing needs, but he felt an exit strategy for individuals was needed. He expressed concern about the recent weather events and opined winter was upon the community, which brought additional challenges. He thought this facility was the result of the pandemic and the federal dollars received to help the community. As an elected official, he learned that government did not work fast.

Mr. DeCarmine explained this community was not the only area experiencing affordable housing shortages, and the disconnect between wages and housing costs was present, although it could be more severe in this county. He spoke about a 47 percent decrease in homelessness in Gainesville, Florida since 2014 after their facility was created, and that the unsheltered homelessness population decreased by 68 percent after services were provided to individuals. He admitted they had not been proficient during the first year, and he underscored the difficulty of an under-resourced provider trying to meet the needs of the unsheltered population. Staff had not had the opportunity to deliver higher level services because so many people were in crisis. He urged that the case management services provided to individuals be significantly improved within the next six months if the staffing was in place and fully trained. He stated homeless shelters across the country were trying to catch up to the need for those services, and Washoe County was no exception.

In response to Member Reese's question, Mr. DeCarmine explained Florida and Nevada were similar in their allocations of limited tax dollars to social services. He stated there was not an abundance of affordable housing in Florida, noting that the transient student population and people needing affordable housing made 30 percent of the median income or less. Counties building relationships with landlords, he said, helped house people, pay double security deposits, and prepay apartment rents for people who would not normally qualify. He pointed out people with mental health and substance abuse issues

moved into apartments every day. In situations where individuals moved from shelters to apartments, landlords could contact the shelters to help resolve issues with tenants instead of dealing directly with the tenants. He thought the largest resources for affordable housing funds were the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act and the American Rescue Plan Act, where priority had been placed on affordable housing projects.

Member Reese stated restrictions were significant when using funding for the Cares Campus, and timing was critical. Citing speculation that affordable housing could have been purchased with the funds used to create the Cares Campus, he said it was not an option at that time. He looked forward to working collaboratively with the City of Sparks and Washoe County to consider housing as infrastructure, believing the City of Reno would be able to focus more on long-term housing with this change. He wanted to follow the examples of what he thought Florida was doing right.

Mr. DeCarmine said the city and county in Gainesville, Florida had initially shared financial responsibility for the development and operation of low-barrier shelters, a \$1.5 million commitment split equally between the entities. Currently, the city committed \$1.5 million to the shelter annually and the county provided \$1.5 million towards permanent supportive housing. He stated the risks of not putting this program into action quickly meant people stayed on the streets longer, their needs increased, and more money needed to be spent on inappropriate public health costs, public service, and public safety. He asserted getting people housed allowed shelters to be utilized in emergencies by chronic homeless individuals.

Member Bybee thought the information Mr. DeCarmine provided was extremely helpful. She wondered whether permanent supportive housing was a form of supplementing income to assist people getting into housing, and whether it made landlords more comfortable working with shelters if issues arose with tenants. She opined there were housing shortages everywhere and this would assist getting people into apartments faster. Mr. DeCarmine stated that was correct. He said the entities in Florida did not own any property; his organization signed a lease to commit to pay rent for a 12-month period, which allowed people to move in more quickly. After moving in, the tenant would pay 30 percent of their income for rent. He commented there were 19,000 vacant apartments in his community, but they were not affordable for most people. Investing in permanent supportive housing allow shelter staff, outreach workers, and others in the community to immediately access apartments, saving the community money by lessening the amount public health services needed by individuals.

In response to Member Lucey's question, Mr. DeCarmine indicated he visited Our Place and there were important design distinctions between Our Place and the Cares Campus; the former met the needs of women, children, and families and the latter addressed the needs of single adults. It was easier at a low-barrier facility to provide services to people who were actively using alcohol or drugs and those with sexual offense or criminal history because all individuals at the facility were adults and could not be exposed to a shelter containing children and families. He believed Our Place was running well and he placed more focus on the Cares Campus.

Member Lucey agreed and asked whether Mr. DeCarmine's area in Gainesville had put together a housing trust fund and whether he had seen effectiveness with these programs. Mr. DeCarmine said a housing trust fund was established at the state level through a documentary stamp tax, but it had targeted the wrong level of affordable housing. He spoke about other funds the community was using to work with affordable housing and the preservation of natural areas. Statistics showed levels of growth in support of affordable housing, but it was critically important to know who was benefitting from it; he thought it could be assisting more middle-class people instead of people with lower incomes. The program thresholds needed to start with people at the bottom of the wage scale for it to succeed.

Member Jardon wanted the County and VOA to speak about the issues at the campus and address solutions. When this advisory board was established, she said, the municipalities knew many pieces were missing; community shelters were considerably over capacity with tents and buildings used as overflow shelters. A one-time opportunity was available to help the community develop an emergency shelter, but it needed to be completed in 120 days. She wanted a more in-depth conversation related to long-term solutions to occur soon.

Washoe County Special Projects Manager Dana Searcy indicated staff was prepared to provide examples, but she agreed the overall safety at the campus was a huge concern to all staff working there. The staffing issues at the campus were due to the size of the shelter and the number of staff needed to fill open positions. She noted they were doing everything they could to fill positions, though she expressed concern about processes to keep employees safe while the campus was growing. She indicated more information would be shared in the next presentation. She stated most of the feedback received was related to safety concerns, which resulted in an unnecessary increase 911 calls, but it would be impossible to control without the proper staff. They were working on establishing better policies and procedures.

20-086C **AGENDA ITEM 5** Board update and discussion on the Nevada Cares Campus homeless service campus operations and capital project. Dana Searcy, Washoe County.

Washoe County Special Projects Manager Dana Searcy conducted a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: Cares Campus-Safe Camp; Winter Plans; ModPods; Construction; Emergency Shelter; and Construction Update.

Chair Hill expressed concern related to staffing and safety issues. Ms. Searcy indicated the target was to staff four different areas, noting the staffing needs for case management were double what they had been. She spoke about planning based on the ratios of case managers as they did not plan for 600 people staying in the shelter continuously; staffing would be determined by the capacity of the shelter. She stated the areas in need of staffing were case management, diversion, nursing, and mental health. The campus was significantly short-staffed, and they were not able to provide services to all

individuals. She explained the number of issues and 911 calls would be significantly reduced when staffing was at a manageable level. She mentioned Our Place had two mental health counselors onsite and they experienced noticeably good outcomes. She indicated decisions needed to be made about which staff should be at each facility, adding said she would be happy to discuss timing with Chair Hill, Commissioner Lucey, and County Manager Eric Brown.

Chair Hill indicated a housing specialist was working on a rental assistance program, which would help with diversion issues. Ms. Searcy mentioned a block of funding was received from Emergency Housing Rental Assistance and most of it went to the Reno Housing Authority; a second block of money would fund two housing navigator positions and assist individuals with money to keep them housed.

Chair Hill asked about the recommendations for the redesign and wondered whether staff was considering having a smaller area for case managers and contracted employees, leaving Volunteers of America to manage the spacing. Ms. Searcy said the cubbies were similar to those at Our Place and worked well, and about 180 units would be converted. She spoke about floor to ceiling dividers they saw during a tour of a Sacramento facility, opining they would be an effective way to divide the spaces.

Member Jardon thought people understood the severity of these issues and were seeking communication and information; the dashboard would be a great tool for them. She wondered whether the website would ever be used for ticker updates and live real-time daily information. She asked about the positions they were trying to staff and wondered how many more people they anticipated needing. Ms. Searcy indicated she was unsure, but case manager levels needed to be at a 1 to 30 ratio, which equated to 11 additional case managers. She believed frontline staffing was sufficient at the current time. She explained diversion implementation required having staff there 24 hours per day to assist anyone needing a place to stay. Staff members would go through the options and attempt to keep people out of the campus, instead finding them a safe place to stay. Mental health support was an area that needed to be established, so they were trying to stagger shifts as to not have 24 hour a day coverage but making sure there would be a person to connect with and a trained therapist to train other staff. She noted they needed one or two nursing support staff to cover 24 hours a day.

Ms. Searcy explained the current plan did not include additional security. There were four security officers onsite, one at the Safe Camp and three at the Cares Campus. Case management staff ratios being at a sustainable level would help with security issues. She was working with the Reno Housing Authority to get details about the warming area, but the Wells Cargo building had a lease through December 11 so nothing could happen until then other than continuing to lease and having plans ready to go. The National Guard had reached out and were willing to help staff with the ModPods and the shower retrofit. She noted the shelters still had available beds and people would not be turned away from the Cares Campus if it filled; people could wait for a bed. She did not see an issue with being over capacity before December 11 but had a backup plan in case there was.

Member Lucey asked about the recidivism rate. Ms. Searcy stated they were tracking recidivism, but the data needed to be tracked for a year before it was viable. She indicated information could be gathered and provided to the Board, including data related to individuals who had left housing and came back to the campus. Member Lucey mentioned the cost of the ModPods and commented he would live in one of them. He expressed concern that Modpods looked more like permanent housing rather than housing for emergent needs, and he wondered about the direction the Safe Camp was working towards. He agreed security was essential to deal with issues that would otherwise be a detriment to law enforcement. Ms. Searcy noted 15 individuals who were in the Safe Camp when it opened were still housed there. She argued the Safe Camp was a critical piece to the structure for people staying a shorter amount of time; it was designed specifically for individuals who would not go to a shelter.

Member Reese asked about the motel voucher program and the Record Street facility. Ms. Searcy said placing an individual in a motel without knowing whether it was a safe option was a risk for them since case managers did not check in with individuals there. She did not work on that program the previous year but had heard from Director of Human Services Amber Howell that they did not want to use the program in the future due to lessons they learned. She mentioned the opportunity to utilize the Record Street facility had not been eliminated, but it would depend on staffing. She noted they worked hard to move people from the downtown area and wanted them to use the resources currently available.

Member Reese wondered what was being done to include people with lived experience in discussions. Ms. Searcy mentioned there were people from Karma Box and other providers with lived experience. It was important to incorporate this with Built for Zero, who required individuals with lived experience to be involved and provide feedback during meetings. She mentioned an anonymous tip box was located at the Safe Camp for people to air grievances. Weekly meetings took place at the Safe Camp, and a formal grievance process was in place as another way for people to be heard. The processes used at the Safe Camp for individual feedback would also be put in place at the Cares Campus.

Member Reese wanted to ensure requests for items or needs were being addressed. Executive Director of the Karma Box Project Grant Denton stated the staff was ideal for getting information related to those needs. He spoke about the floods that occurred at the Safe Camp and said wet items were bagged up and dried by staff. Dry items were provided to individuals, as were tarps to prevent more water from getting in. He stressed that all requested items were provided to individuals staying at the camp.

Member Reese wondered about the role of the municipalities in providing items to people staying at the Safe Camp. He thought many people in the community were fundraising to help provide items or funds for them, but the need was greater than what the budget covered. Ms. Searcy commented staff was working through evaluating a program for volunteers and donations at the campus. She indicated it was new to the County, but multiple people had reached out. The Safe Camp provided for individuals' basic needs at the cost of the program, and they were not currently able to accept donations.

Regional Director of Volunteers of America Pat Cashell indicated they had ongoing fundraising campaigns, one of which was currently collecting blankets, gloves, and hats. Not having enough blankets was an issue, and they were working to establish the proper number of blankets to have on hand to ensure that anyone who needed one could get one.

Member Reese showed interest in nutrition programs that provided nutrient rich foods to people in need, and he wanted to ensure the food provided was quality and something people would want to eat. He opined food was healthcare.

Member Jardon asserted there were many giving people in the community who wanted to help develop and contribute to the campus. She noted some people could write checks while others could knit or provide socks, and she wanted the most efficient way for items to be distributed.

20-087C **AGENDA ITEM 6** Update, discussion, and possible direction regarding the Community Homeless Advisory Board (CHAB) goals and objectives to include but not be limited to, permanent housing for the Nevada Cares Campus and Our Place residents, community-wide housing resources and shared data, and engagement of appropriate community stakeholders.

Chair Hill said she had met with Vice Chair Lawson recently to discuss goals for the CHAB, and she indicated the three key areas of concern were the affordable housing crisis, transitional housing, and shared data.

Vice Chair Lawson thought the coordination of volunteer groups was an important issue; many people wanted to volunteer and donate items but there was no way for that to happen currently. He mentioned the apartment occupancy rate was 98 percent, so this community did not have the advantage that Gainesville, Florida did in that developers did not want to build low-income housing here. He asserted this Board had no authority to accomplish anything, but it was a gathering place to discuss issues and find community solutions. This campus would not have happened without the advisory board. He thought opening the campus was a huge undertaking, but they were not at the point where they could solve all issues yet.

Member Jardon thought it would take time to develop and augment permanent supportive housing. This Board had been successful in implementing the Village on Sage Street and the Tiny Homes project, and she wondered how to duplicate those projects in other areas and coordinate with other entities to identify properties that could be used for tiny houses. She believed this Board and its collective staffs could be the ones to accomplish that.

Member Lucey agreed with Vice Chair Lawson about the amount of work this Board had done. He wanted CHAB meetings to be a place for people to discuss what they were seeing in the community. He stressed the CHAB should be able to make policy decisions for funding. He believed things were moving in the right direction but there were

many issues still to be dealt with. He could not talk about what it was like to be homeless since he had never been.

Member Reese wanted focus placed on warming centers and cold weather-related responses, along with housing infrastructure concerns. He wanted to ensure the unhoused were provided for during the winter and said Board members needed to do everything possible to prevent people from suffering from the elements. He thought the CHAB needed to agree to take back information to their perspective entities about housing being both a fundamental human right and considered as infrastructure so each entity could start allocating resources towards that goal. He hoped this would increase the housing stock in the region. He agreed this Board should focus on policy.

Member Bybee stated the ultimate goal for the Board was to establish permanent housing, which changed the way things such as the length of stay before entering permanent housing was considered. She thought that needed to drive the Board to seek innovative solutions to find rentals or leases. She believed working with the Reno Housing Authority should be part of the plan, but housing should be the priority. She was supportive of the recommendations made for diversion, mental health, and nursing, and thought they should also be priorities.

Member Jardon hoped the dashboard could be pushed out to the community by all entities so people could become comfortable with where to get information. She thought this was a great tool where daily emails would be sent with concerns about capacity, resolutions, timing, and staffing. These were very informative but not available to all people.

On the call for public comment, Ms. Elizabeth Pope said she was a social worker and served people for the past 20 years. She spoke about people at the shelter wanting to be housed but having no place to go. She expressed excitement at possible incentives being put forward to help provide housing to unhoused individuals. She thanked the Board for taking the information discussed in these meeting back to their entities and pushing to make progress.

Chair Hill provided a list of items of importance, including permanent housing, communitywide resources, shared data, engagement of appropriate stakeholders, safety at emergency shelters, communication to the community, and creative housing solutions. Vice Chair Lawson requested that the Board wait until the next meeting to decide. Chair Hill said they would create a document to include these ideas and have further discussions in December.

There was no action taken on this item.

20-088C AGENDA ITEM 7 Update, discussion, and possible direction regarding upcoming CHAB meetings in calendar year 2021 and 2022.

Vice Chair Lawson suggested staying with monthly meetings until the following year to assess the goals that would be set at the next meeting.

Member Lucey thought it was onerous for staff to have monthly meetings; and he suggested holding meetings every other month.

Member Jardon thought monthly meetings were valuable for sharing information, but making the dashboard more robust would allow the community to get updated information online and meeting frequency could then possibly be changed.

Member Lucey thought she was right that things needed to be discussed. If meetings were set to take place every other month, he suggested special meetings could be called to address certain items if needed.

Member Bybee thought meetings should be every month until issues were taken care of; every other month was a long time between meetings. Additionally, special meetings were difficult to get on many people's calendars. Member Reese supported monthly meetings, saying they would be valuable.

Member Lucey agreed to stick to a monthly schedule and revisit the meeting frequency in March but asked that meetings be limited to two hours. Chair Hill agreed and felt guilty about running past noon.

There was no response to the call for public comment.

On motion by Vice Chair Lawson, seconded by Member Jardon, which motion duly carried on a 6-0 vote, it was ordered that monthly meetings continue, the topic of meeting frequency be revisited in March 2022, and meetings be limited to two hours.

12:12 p.m. **Member Jardon left the meeting.**

20-089C AGENDA ITEM 8 Board members announcements, reports and updates to include requests for future board agenda items.

There were no Member comments.

20-090C AGENDA ITEM 9 Public Comment.

Ms. Lily Baran opined a three-hour meeting was not enough time to address the multitude of issues. She hoped the recommendations from Mr. Jon DeCarmine would be used because she had concerns about safety at the Cares Campus. She thought the timeframe for people to wait for emergency housing was being extended, and she wondered what to tell people who were waiting. She believed the motel program was easy and safe,

and she asserted the pay for case management workers at the shelter was not comparable to the work they performed.

Mr. Jake Maynard felt mixed messages were being conveyed by this Board, which he felt was created to receive information and take it back to their boards to make policy decisions. He asserted members should not be on the Board if they were not willing to attend monthly meetings and represent the Community Homelessness Advisory Board (CHAB) to their policy making boards. He thought permanent supportive housing and affordable housing should be given priority over limiting the lengths of stay at the Cares Campus. He opposed unhoused people being kept away from the Records Street area, adding people should be limited to one place.

Mr. Bill Sims expressed frustration about social workers being hired at a low rate of pay considering the important and lifesaving work they performed. He wanted people with lived experience to be on the CHAB as well as the continuation of monthly meetings. He pointed out none of the members of the CHAB were homeless and or had experience with homelessness.

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12:22 p.m. There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned without objection.

ALEXIS HILL, Chair
Community Homelessness Advisory Board

ATTEST:

JANIS GALASSINI, County Clerk

*Minutes Prepared by:
Doni Gassaway, Deputy County Clerk*