

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

MONDAY

9:00 A.M.

JANUARY 3, 2022

PRESENT:

Alexis Hill, Chair
Ed Lawson, Vice Chair
Neoma Jardon, Member
Devon Reese, Member (via telephone)
Kristopher Dahir, Member

Janis Galassini, County Clerk
Herbert Kaplan, Deputy District Attorney

ABSENT:

Bob Lucey, Member

The Community Homelessness Advisory Board convened at 9:03 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:

22-003C AGENDA ITEM 3 Public Comment.

Ms. Elizabeth Pope requested people be mindful when providing public comment. She said the harsh criticism of front-line workers was discouraging to individuals who chose to perform these difficult jobs. She noted each organization had grievance procedures which could be used if a staff person failed to do their job in a fair and ethical manner. She thanked everyone for attending the meeting and showing their support.

Mr. Floyd "Reno" Ard, resident of the Safe Camp (SC), said he now considered himself as transitional instead of homeless because he was in the process of acquiring a stable home. He stated he now had a chance and direction had been provided by the SC providers. He mentioned resolving homelessness was a process, such as healing a broken bone. He said homeless individuals were lost and needed a purpose and direction, which was provided by SC staff. He stated Karma Box (KB) Executive Director Grant Denton saw each individual's needs and tried to address them. He offered them hope. He believed losing the SC would be bad for the community.

Mr. Robert Gillis said he had a drug problem and worked to get into SC when he decided to get clean. He stated he was treated like family at SC; Mr. Denton mentored him and gave him a job with which he could give back to the community. He said the SC was a much better place; his things were not stolen as much and he was treated

like a family member. He noted the SC staff was available to provide help and give homeless individuals a better chance to be good members of society.

Ms. Tina Thalman, Mr. Gillis' mother, expressed gratitude for SC, Mr. Denton, and KB staff. She said she worried about her son when he lived on the streets because his things were often stolen. She believed Mr. Gillis would not be alive if not for SC and KB. She read a compassionate story about Mr. Gillis written by his nine-year-old son when he lived on the streets and a story written after he moved into SC.

Ms. Bridget Tevnan said hearing stories of success and hope at the SC was encouraging, noting the close attention model was productive. She observed the larger Cares Campus (CC) did not provide the same sense of safety despite the efforts of staff. She recalled the recommendations of Jon DeCarminie of JD Consultancy, LLC from the November 2021 meeting and requested a progress report. She said more staff was needed at the CC. She called for several seats on the Board to be reserved for someone who had lived through the experience or someone going through the process of trying to find housing in the community. She challenged Boardmembers to work directly with someone trying to go through the transitional process. She mentioned the Reno Housing Portal had several major issues.

Ms. Nicole Anagapesis said the organization Family Soup Mutual Aid distributed goods to unsheltered individuals downtown. She questioned why working-class individuals such as herself needed to donate cold weather gear to prevent the loss of human lives in the community. She noted there were no viable options for unhoused individuals when the shelters were operating at capacity. She pointed out the Record Street shelter could be used for women and families during the winter. She asked for an audit of spending allocated to the homeless in the community.

Mr. Jeff Peterson said he volunteered with a small mutual aid group trying to help the homeless individuals in the community. He asserted the city needed to take real action to help the unhoused because the community had a responsibility to help its most vulnerable citizens. He thought the community actively harmed the disenfranchised through violent police sweeps, by shutting down shelters, and selling off affordable housing. He believed the homeless were treated as an inconvenient eyesore. He asserted the housing first model was the most effective solution to homelessness.

Ms. Natalie Handler said she was a community advocate and requested the City of Reno, the County, and partners meet with community advocates for an open dialogue. She believed community advocates needed the opportunity to share some of the barriers and obstacles they observed. She said offering public comment at meetings was currently the only opportunity for advocates to speak to the Board and it was not an effective method of communicating. She spoke about a motel program funded by community fundraising. She mentioned difficulties faced by individuals trying to obtain housing assistance through the Reno Housing Portal.

Ms. Ilya Arbatman spoke about prejudice against poor people, which he asserted was not unusual for wealthy people. She observed the Boardmembers were on the Board because they made a commitment to do something about homelessness. She noted that doing the right thing could be uncomfortable and could result in receiving difficult feedback. She asked the Board to add a lived experience advisory component. She approved of hearing success stories from SC participants, but she thought it was not enough because many people were not being served. She noted the importance of reopening the Record Street shelter although business owners would not like it.

Mr. Bill Sims said hearing success stories from SC was heartening. He expressed disapproval of statements made by Reno Mayor Hillary Schieve regarding her approval of the demolition of older motels downtown. He thought having shelter was preferable to being on the streets or at SC, even if it meant dealing with a slum lord. He believed nobody should be forced out of a dwelling. He believed the Record Street shelter needed to be reopened.

Ms. Yolanda Esparza said she was the first resident to enter and graduate from the Hope Springs (HS) bridge-housing community. She credited HS and Northern Nevada HOPES for providing the help she needed and reuniting her with her family. She stated HS helped her overcome addiction and alcoholism; they provided her with therapy, medical services, and re-education. She looked forward to becoming a peer support specialist at HS to give back to the community. She expressed gratitude for the HS program and everyone who provided her with support and assistance.

Ms. Meagan O'Farrell thanked everyone who shared their stories and experiences about transitioning into the place they wanted to be. She said criticism was offered by public commenters because more work was still needed. She previously requested the homeless resource dashboard be updated on weekends and holidays, but it had not been updated over the holiday weekend. She expressed concern because the overflow shelter had not been opened. She thought a meeting between the Board and community advocates was crucial. She believed the system created barriers that made it difficult for people to access services.

Ms. Lilith Baran said she had been participating in the motel program; volunteers spent \$15,000 to provide shelter for homeless individuals. She thanked Boardmembers for their service on the Board and opined that accepting criticism was important. She said she tried to help a hearing-impaired individual and found that no staff person was fluent in American Sign Language at the CC. She mentioned some issues she faced when helping a mother of two navigate the Reno Housing Portal. She asked for transparency for any spending of federal dollars.

Ms. Jessica Castro congratulated individuals who shared their SC success stories. She stated there was no safe space for individuals who did not have access to KB. She said she received a call from the president of KB asking her to refrain from speaking about issues in a negative manner. She expressed concern about the lack of recourse for

individuals whose belongings were stolen. She enumerated the donated items she assisted in distributing.

22-004C **AGENDA ITEM 4** Approval of minutes of the December 6, 2021 meeting.

There was no public comment or action taken on this item.

On motion by Member Jardon, seconded by Member Dahir, which motion duly carried on a 6-0 vote, it was ordered that Agenda Item 4 be approved.

22-005C **AGENDA ITEM 5** Board update and discussion on the Nevada Cares Campus including the Washoe County Safe Camp. Grant Denton, Karma Box Project; Dana Searcy, Washoe County.

Ms. Searcy conducted a PowerPoint presentation, a copy of which was placed on file with the Clerk. She reviewed slides with the following titles: Homeless Services Update; Cares Campus – Emergency Shelter (2 slides); Facility Update; Emergency Shelter; Holiday Donors; Safe Camp; ModPods; The Move to “The Bays” (2 slides); “The Bays”; Christmas at “The Bays”; and Homeless Services Update.

Ms. Searcy said staffing was the number one priority for the Cares Campus (CC) because proper staffing ratios would help address many issues. She said County staff and the Volunteers of America (VOA) were doing everything possible to increase staff. She contacted the Nevada National Guard to request staff but was told they would be unable to provide support due to capacity limitations. She mentioned the difficulty of training new staff due to limited staff and high turnover ratios. She noted the large campus involved safety and security considerations, capacity concerns, and partnership development, so many people were coming onto the campus including law enforcement officers and volunteers.

Ms. Searcy reported on some of the wear and tear the CC facilities were experiencing. She said the bathrooms and showers were in need of repair; staff spent the past several weeks evaluating the cost of repairs. She noted the plan was to have new bathrooms built, so they did not want to invest too much on repairs. The new bathrooms and showers would be ready in approximately eight months. She mentioned most doors of the sprung building either did not open or close; obtaining new doors would take three months but construction would begin in three months as well, so staff was working on an interim solution. She said the facility was settling in and staff was monitoring the supplies and needs of 600 people.

Ms. Searcy displayed images of the emergency overflow bays which were set up during the week of December 13. She explained that obtaining staff for the overflow shelter had been problematic. She said using volunteers was an option, but they would require background checks and training. She noted the volunteers would be put in situations where they would not have extra security. She checked with the VOA, Reno Initiative for Shelter & Equality (RISE), and the National Guard, but none of those organizations had

the capacity to provide staff. She stated Karma Box (KB) agreed to provide staff for the overflow shelter and she hoped the shelter would be opened during the upcoming week. She stated the overflow shelter had plenty of capacity and additional bays could be opened up if needed. She acknowledged the public comments about the CC being closed and she confirmed the warming center had not run out of capacity, so she would investigate the source of the misinformation. She said the CC had 11 open beds that morning and asserted beds were open every day. The warming center had capacity for 112 people, approximately 70 people were there during the snowstorm, and during the past three days they had approximately 45 to 50 individuals. She displayed a list of donors who contributed holiday donations and supplies, such as much needed socks and gloves.

Ms. Searcy reported the first truckload of ModPods for the Safe Camp (SC) had arrived. She expected another truckload on January 10, at which point the ModPod staff would begin assembling the first 20 pods, weather permitting. Two additional truckloads would follow and she expected SC participants would move into the ModPods in late January or early February. She noted SC participants were currently residing in the garage bays. She praised the efforts of staff and volunteers who managed to move the 45 SC participants and all of their belongings into the garage bays in about eight hours before the storm hit. She mentioned the Reno Housing Authority held a special meeting which allowed the County to obtain the lease in time for the move into those garage bays.

KB Executive Director Grant Denton said moving in one day always created stress and trauma. He noted County and KB staff helped to collect and move everyone's belongings, but most of the help came from the participants. Staff tried to be mindful about how they instilled a sense of urgency to accomplish the move. He said the move provided an opportunity for SC participants to sort their belongings, noting the ModPods would offer a limited amount of space when they moved back from the garage bays. He stated the bays were kept at 65 degrees for comfort and people were not allowed in bays they were not assigned to, which helped to limit theft.

Mr. Denton said Christmas plans were started belatedly because the move to the garage bays took precedence. Staff compiled a list of what people wanted and he planned to have KB purchase everything and seek funding subsequently, but Forever14 donated enough money to cover all of the gifts. He said Ames Construction donated over 100 burritos and hired Tacos Los Campesinos to provide food, hot chocolate, coffee, and cookies; Ms. Tina Thalman and her grandson baked 18 dozen cookies; Note-Able Music Therapy Services played Christmas music; Battle Born Painting donated a projector to play movies; Mr. Jack Riggi served tri-tip and ribs on Christmas Day; and they were able to have Santa Claus distribute gifts on Christmas Day.

Mr. Denton mentioned KB staff was working with County staff to develop a staff training program because staff retention and proper training was just as important as hiring. He noted sometimes individuals accepted a job without properly understanding the complexities and challenges of it. The planned training would consist of tactical empathy, which would include understanding the mission, trauma-informed care, and boundaries.

Chair Hill asked whether staff could provide a progress report to demonstrate how the County was addressing the staffing recommendations made by Jon DeCarmine of JD Consultancy, LLC. Ms. Searcy said she could include that information in her future presentations and she would post it online. Commissioner Hill requested a summary of the staffing commitment made by the County. Ms. Searcy replied the commitment included 14 additional front-line VOA staff; it included a medical contract of approximately \$500,000 to have a nurse and a medical aid on site 24 hours a day. She noted Northern Nevada HOPES' clinic had been wonderful and the County was exploring a partnership with them to see how they could help the campus. She said other staffing commitments included six mental health counselors and 21 case managers, which would be in the form of three levels: a lead and three supervisors, each would have a team of six. She noted the two case managers who were approved in the prior year's budget to ride along with the Sheriff's Office would be part of the team as well. She stated the County would hire two administrative support personnel for the team. One position would focus on the volunteers, partnerships, and training at the campus and the other would be a medical billing specialist who would implement a Medicaid reimbursement program.

Chair Hill mentioned the request to the National Guard was to help with security at the CC as well as volunteer management. She understood that another request would be made to the Governor's Office to help bridge the gap until new staff was hired. She asked for clarification about why people were not allowed to lay down in the warming center. Ms. Searcy explained that when the campus was built the capacity was set to 604 inside the building with an additional 100 cots which could be deployed inside the cafeteria area. However, the Health District said the cots could not be placed in the cafeteria because people were being fed in that space. The space was opened up as a warming center instead, so people could at least come in out of the elements. An additional 112 people were allowed in that building. They could sit at a table and put their head down and if they fell asleep nobody disturbed them. People in the warming center could let staff know if they needed a bed and they would be assigned one as beds became available. She said staff checked beds every two hours, noting that individuals were able to retain a bed if they were there during a 24-hour period. She indicated the overflow shelter would be located in the garage bays and would be open from 9:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. Staff would take anyone in the warming center who wanted to lay down and walk them over to the overflow shelter. She hoped the overflow shelter would be opened within a week.

Ms. Searcy mentioned the County had increased KB staff pay through the SC request for proposal. The goal was to increase the pay scale for VOA staff to maintain consistency. The base pay for front line staff was increased to \$17 per hour and \$19 per hour for the graveyard shift. She said Mr. Denton had already received calls about those positions because word of the increased pay rate had spread.

Vice Chair Lawson commended staff for their work and expressed approval of the County's commitment to additional hiring. He was glad to hear about the volunteer coordinator position. He asked whether staff had contacted any of the local construction companies to see whether they would dedicate staff to perform the necessary repairs at the CC. Ms. Searcy said the construction companies already on contract had been contacted,

agreeing that contacting other construction companies was a good suggestion. Vice Chair Lawson offered to contact construction companies.

In reference to the request for weekend updates of the dashboard, Member Jardon asked whether any of the new staff would be responsible for those updates. She inquired about the conflicting messages about the number of beds available versus the number reported on the dashboard. Ms. Searcy said staff currently did not work during the weekend or holidays, noting the website had to be manually updated once a day. She mentioned some of the new case managers and mental health counselors would be spreading out to provide coverage during the weekend, saying staff might develop some ideas based on that. She noted the dashboard was updated manually once a day and did not provide real time data. She asserted the shelter should not turn anyone away so she would investigate the source of miscommunication.

Member Jardon noted the dashboard had become the central daily check-in resource for a number of individuals and entities. She wanted to establish some reliability such as assuring the dashboard would be updated by 9:00 a.m. every day of the year. She requested an update about the community housing portal on a future agenda.

Member Dahir asked for an update of the exiting process for shelters. He noted the exiting component was key to the whole processes. He wanted to know how people were getting into homes and how the County was working with other groups. Ms. Searcy said it was not possible to pull the data in time for the meeting. She said the data for December would be presented at the next meeting and that information would be included in each month's report.

Member Reese asked about the possibility of having more informal discussions with advocates, noting the formal setting of the Board meetings limited interactions. Chair Hill indicated she would like to work with County staff to address that concern. She acknowledged homeless individuals faced difficult barriers such as obtaining an identification card. She agreed that less informal conversations with advocates would be beneficial. Ms. Searcy thought there was merit to having the right people in the room at the right time, noting that putting too many people in one room could sometimes be counterproductive. She suggested having topic-based workshops with advocates and service providers to discuss specific issues. Chair Hill hesitated to commit to a timeline for the request because staff was limited. She suggested the Cities of Reno and Sparks could possibly host workshops to help people understand resources, such as the housing portal and Catholic Charities.

Member Reese agreed the focus should be on the day-to-day concerns. He acknowledged some aspects of the system could not be fixed, such as the allocation of resources by the federal government. He was cognizant of the difficulties of accessing resources. He said streamlining technology and programming would be investigated as well as the lack of an American Sign Language interpreter.

Member Reese asked for clarification on the ModPod schedule. Ms. Searcy summarized the first ModPod truck arrived the prior Thursday morning with four additional trucks, one arriving each week. She said, weather permitting, the ModPod staff would be on site January 10 to show staff how to assemble the ModPods. The first 20 pods would be assembled the following week and 25 more pods would be assembled two weeks later at which time everyone would be moved out of the bays. She mentioned construction would start on the Governor's Bowl on February 1 and would include 50 ModPods. Two additional ModPods were ordered to help with isolation at the CC if needed.

Member Reese asked whether the garage bays currently being used by SC participants would be left in place after the move back into the ModPods. Ms. Searcy said the County had a six-month lease with the Reno Housing Authority as they worked through a potential purchase of that property. She indicated the improvements made on the garage bays need not be removed as most of the work had been to ensure the electricity worked and to install a temporary door system.

Member Jardon thanked KB for their presentation and expressed approval of the additional staffing. She thought addressing staffing issues was critical, particularly with the anticipated COVID-19 Omicron wave which could further strain staffing. She asked whether the VOA or faith-based community volunteers could help overnight staffing. She asked whether a database of past volunteers was available, noting those volunteers had already been trained. She noted the CC held twice the number of individuals than the Record Street shelter and all of the overflow individuals were able to shelter. She observed that increasing the shelter capacity could be problematic when faced with staffing shortages. Ms. Searcy observed the background check process for volunteers was substantial and the County had been looking for a staff person to help bridge that gap and coordinate volunteers. She said she contacted several different pastors and groups that worked on this in the past who were willing to help, noting the background check costs would be paid through fundraising.

Member Jardon asked for confirmation that the VOA coordinated the faith-based volunteers. Member Dahir said faith-based volunteers were organized by a church volunteer and they worked alongside the VOA. He indicated staff dealt with issues, so volunteers were not required to do so. He noted the bureaucratic procedures were not in place in the past and opined that some volunteers could be discouraged by the lengthy process. He knew people were still interested in volunteering, but the key was organization so people did not become overtaxed. He offered his assistance with this issue.

Chair Hill thought staffing was an issue so having a staff person in the overflow shelter would help. She noted staffing was just established with KB. She thanked Mr. Denton and his team for surpassing the expectations of their contract.

Ms. Searcy said staff was aggressively pursuing options because staffing numbers were not increasing despite the efforts of the VOA and the County. Staff would pursue volunteer options, especially for the evening and overnight hours. She understood

there were legal concerns regarding background checks because staff and volunteers would be working with vulnerable populations. She would investigate the requirements.

Member Jardon asked staff to aggressively pursue volunteer staffing options. She noted the community relied on volunteers in the past and she believed no one wanted to see shelters close due to a lack of staff.

22-006C **AGENDA ITEM 6** Board members announcements, reports, and updates to include requests for future board agenda items.

Member Jardon requested an update on the housing dashboard during a future meeting; she wanted to ensure the dashboard was updated daily and on holidays. She requested an update on the overflow bays including future use and potential use for separate populations. She asked for an update on the volunteer program and the City of Reno housing portal. She requested information about holding subset meetings to discuss a variety of subjects. She suggested using Zoom for those meetings and opined it would not be a big time commitment.

Member Dahir noted the needs of youth and veteran populations were identified early on, so he wanted an update on the Eddie House, the Nevada Youth Empowerment Project, and the veteran population.

22-007C **AGENDA ITEM 7** Public Comment.

Ms. Lilith Baran asked for an explanation of how federal funds were spent and why the County was unable to offer a living wage to front line workers. She expressed concern about the minimum hourly wage required to afford housing in the community. She asked about the plans for a vaccine clinic at the Cares Campus. She mentioned that much of the food distributed by Catholic Charities required cooking on a stove, so it was inedible for homeless individuals.

Ms. Erika Minaberry echoed Ms. Baran's sentiments. She noted the Board meetings were inaccessible to people who had the most to say. She spoke about difficulties she faced when trying to find shelter for a hearing-impaired individual, including having all the person's belonging stolen from the warming center. She mentioned she formerly worked for the Reno Initiative for Shelter & Equality (RISE) and remembered staff spent an entire day cleaning and keeping people in psychosis out of sight whenever County or City staff performed a walkthrough of the facility. She encouraged the Boardmembers to shed their titles and visit the Cares Campus and RISE.

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10:54 a.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:
Carolina Stickley, Deputy County Clerk*

Pending Board Approval