

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

MONDAY

9:00 A.M.

MARCH 6, 2023

PRESENT:

Alexis Hill, Chair*
Ed Lawson, Vice Chair
Mike Clark, Member
Kathleen Taylor, Member
Devon Reese, Member
Kristopher Dahir, Member

Janis Galassini, County Clerk
Mary Kandaras, Chief 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:

23-003C AGENDA ITEM 3 Public Comment.

On the call for public comment, Mr. Jeff Church indicated he retired from the Reno Police Department (RPD) where he had run the homeless program and had served as president of Reno's first homeless center. He noted he took a tour of the Cares Campus which, while a good idea, did not spend its money well. He provided a document that was placed on file by the Clerk which laid out the fundamentals he considered important but were missing from the facility, including bunks, tents, and car parking. He felt the large, heated dwellings were not needed as people could use the warming center if it got cold. He opined spending had spiraled out of control. He stated housing was not the issue, mental health and drug addiction were. He thought the State needed to change mental health laws much like California had, and he suggested building a facility in a rural area, away from the temptations of drugs and alcohol. Housing was not a human right, he opined, and it should only be given to those who earned it.

***9:03 a.m. Chair Hill arrived.**

23-004C AGENDA ITEM 4 Approval of minutes of the September 12, 2022 meeting.

There was no response to the call for public comment.

On motion by Member Reese, seconded by Member Dahir, which motion duly carried on a 5-1 vote with Member Taylor recusing herself, it was ordered that Agenda Item 4 be approved.

Chair Hill broached the topic of what the members of the Community Homelessness Advisory Board (CHAB) wanted to prioritize and how often it should meet. She pointed out that the CHAB wanted to ensure the Cities of Reno and Sparks were comfortable with what the County was doing.

Vice Chair Lawson recommended moving the discussion item to after the Nevada Cares Campus presentation.

23-005C **AGENDA ITEM 6** Board update and discussion on the Nevada Cares Campus. Dana Searcy, Washoe County.

Division Director of Housing and Homeless Services Dana Searcy conducted a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: Nevada Cares Campus; Housing First and Services; Cares Campus addresses common barriers; Nevada Cares Campus Operations & Results; Priorities; Jon DeCarmine Recommendations; Cleaning Schedule; Cares Campus (5 slides); Outcomes – Security; Outcomes – Medical Services; Outcomes – Housing Placements; Construction (2 slides); Capital Budget – Oct 2022 (2 slides); Construction Update; SafeCamp (3 slides); Phase II; Sprung Updates; Phase II; Showers/Restrooms/Laundry (3 slides); Phase III; Welcome Center/Case Management & Therapy/Staff Offices/Dining Hall; Welcome Center – Diversion/Intake/Security; Case Management/Dining Hall; Phase III; Resource Center (2 slides); Phase IV; Supportive Housing (2 slides); Construction Timeline; Next Steps.

Ms. Searcy stated that, as the lowest-barrier shelter in the area, the Cares Campus was focused on permanent shelter options to get people out of the cycle of homelessness. Some services were provided at the campus and some by nonprofit partners. Along with commonly known barriers, she said, background checks and identification (ID) requirements often left the Cares Campus as the only option for the most vulnerable in the community. She mentioned consultant Jon DeCarmine ran one of the only safe camps attached to an emergency shelter in Gainesville, Florida. Mr. DeCarmine had visited the facility three times to assist with training. Each of the recommendations he had made 18 months prior had been implemented, though the two listed in yellow were only in the beginning stages.

Ms. Searcy indicated the cleaning schedule was included in the presentation in response to frequent questions. Everything was sanitized multiple times per day, and pest spray was administered every other month. She said the people listed on the slide depicting the unique clients served chart were people who spent a night in a bed; it did not include those who used emergency cots in the winter or those who came for a meal. Referring to the diversion goal mentioned earlier, Chair Hill emphasized the County provided many clients with rent support or connections to family services, reducing the need for them to stay at the campus for many nights.

One goal of the campus, Ms. Searcy remarked, was to ensure seniors had a safe place to live. She clarified half the clients had self-diagnosed cognitive or physical disabilities, for whom case managers worked to bring in resources. Staff also worked to sign up uninsured individuals for benefits. She pointed out how many of the once-vacated positions had been filled, also confirming Chair Hill's belief that Mr. DeCarmine's staffing recommendation was still considered a work in progress until all positions were filled. Chair Hill commented on the great improvement from 37 vacant positions to 9, to which Ms. Searcy replied it was possible with the funding they were able to secure.

Ms. Searcy observed many people were uncomfortable living in bunk beds or congregate housing, so the ModPods were a great option. She announced a women's dorm opened with eight semi-private living cubbies; 150 were ultimately planned for the Sprung building. The Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR) was the newest facility partner, and it would promote workforce development. While the need for emergency medical service (EMS) calls was decreasing in general, she noted, it spiked in the winter due to the increased number of people using cots and more prevalent illness. The facility had averaged finding permanent housing for about 10 people per month when they first met with Mr. DeCarmine, but that was now over 30; the goal was around 50 per month.

Ms. Searcy said construction had been concentrated on the north half of the property, but all temporary buildings would be moved to the north half while construction began on the south half. This would result in the main entrance moving from 4th Street and Threlkel Street to the end of Line Drive. She stressed the \$78 million in the budget was not being spent solely on an emergency shelter but also on services and housing programs. The \$21.9 million in Home Means Nevada funding would help develop 2.5 acres of the campus.

Ms. Searcy reviewed the features of the Safe Camp, such as 50 ModPods and a building where clients could receive training and food. The plan was to move ModPods there in two weeks, after which grass and trees would be planted. Among the benefits of walls going up in the Sprung building were improvement in behavior, noise reduction, and a better connection between staff and clients. Weekly case conferences with individual clients had also begun, with the ultimate goal of finding housing solutions. It was anticipated that the welcome center would include case management, training, behavioral health staff, the dining hall, and office space. She said the large blue building, which had been used for a variety of things over the prior 18 months, would be transformed into a resource center, a maintenance area, and storage, along with an 82-bed overflow facility. The communication center would be a space for legal services, financial services, and case managers. It would be the place to go for anyone who found themselves newly homeless. One goal was to spread out the different areas of the campus to provide calmness.

Ms. Searcy said housing was the purpose of the facility, and the supportive housing building would feature 50 permanent housing units and supportive services. Those rooms would include single and double-occupancy rooms. The plan was for the bid for the Phase 4 supportive housing project to take place in July, with the groundbreaking to happen in the fall. She anticipated bringing information regarding the future supportive housing

area, which would be funded by the Home Means Nevada funding, to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) shortly. That area would include 40 permanent supportive units and around 80 low-income units. Approval for the welcome center and the resource center was expected to come before the BCC on March 28.

Member Dahir praised the progress that had been made, saying he hoped to tour the facility soon. He felt staff was working to create smooth transitions by having the community all together in one place. He asked Ms. Searcy to speak on the topic of program barriers. Ms. Searcy responded that the first two options given to individuals who had been referred by regional partners were the Safe Camp or bunk beds. From there, those clients graduated and went into different programs like CrossRoads or the Eddy House. Those staying at the Cares Campus then moved on to case management and were placed in a cubby where they prepared to live independently. Member Dahir expressed concern about people with disabilities who might not be able to gain employment, and he asked how that would be addressed. Ms. Searcy replied the community did not have all those resources, and those in the area were full. The vision of the Cares Campus was to adjust as the population adjusted. As such, the campus held many people who needed a higher level of care, but there was nowhere for them to go. Chair Hill pointed out the campus was working on building out those services.

Member Clark inquired about a newspaper article detailing Karma Box's filings with the government. Ms. Searcy said the County requested a corrected action plan from Karma Box with dates that needed to be adhered to. Member Clark said the article, which had come out a month prior, stated the filings lapsed as much as a year before that. He wanted to know when it would be corrected. Ms. Searcy said everything was anticipated to be in order by March 15, and staff would keep this Board updated if that did not occur. Member Clark thanked Mr. Jeff Church for his public comment.

Member Clark indicated spraying alone did not work on bedbugs, since eggs remained viable for up to one year. He asked about the status of bedbug hot boxes. Ms. Searcy said that was part of Phase III, explaining the hot box would heat people's belongings up to 140 degrees and kill any bugs before belongings were placed into long-term storage. The hot boxes would be large enough to work on beds. She noted there had not been any substantial outbreaks of bedbugs or lice, and there was a medical provider on site to treat anyone who needed it.

In response to Member Dahir's earlier point, Member Clark said there would be a certain percentage of people who could work in some type of employment. Ann Silver, Chief Executive Officer of the Reno-Sparks Chamber of Commerce, had told him that she had more than 200 employers who would hire people immediately. Member Clark asked that someone reach out to the Chamber to determine who could be trained to work, allowing those wishing to be productive to do so. Chair Hill stated many who lived on the campus also worked, which she felt was devastating. Member Clark thought the Chamber could possibly offer jobs that paid more.

Vice Chair Lawson pointed out that no program had existed three years prior and now issues were being solved. He applauded staff for their work. Chair Hill thanked the Vice Chair for his leadership in pulling the region together.

Member Taylor said that, during a recent tour, she observed a safe and clean facility with supportive services, and local leaders needed to promote the facility as a place where people could get their needs met. There was a misconception about it being unclean and unsafe, so they needed to get the message out that it was a special and hopeful resource.

Member Reese asked County Clerk Jan Galassini to display some pictures he took during a recent tour. He noted the campus took much regional leadership, especially as it came about early in the pandemic. The original shelter site was not large enough to fulfill the need. Now, he continued, the facility was an active construction site, but he stressed the importance of having a larger vision. He highlighted to the new members some of the work of partner agencies: Northern Nevada HOPES (HOPES) was designing a new clinic at the campus and Volunteers of America (VOA) operated the Village at Sage Street expansions. He felt all partners should be thanked. Nothing happened in a vacuum, and he pointed out that the variety of different funding sources pointed to the region's broader vision of how to conserve the population.

Member Reese stated housing was a human right, and those experiencing homelessness were entitled to the same privileges and rights as those who were not. He referenced Senate Bill (SB) 142 which, with modifications, could make for a great opportunity to identify a legal reality for people experiencing homelessness. He tried to dispel the notion that people needed to earn the right to be on the campus; some were not in a position to be part of the earning system, but they were no less deserving. He pledged his support, saying this work was meaningful in creating generational change. He spoke about people under 55 years old who were working but were still one paycheck away from needing the campus. He expected to see more transformational changes over the following three years.

Ms. Searcy thanked staff who had to work through construction to serve many ill people. She thanked the VOA, Karma Box, Washoe County staff, and all regional partners for their work. She announced that, earlier that day, someone who had been in a shelter since 2018 received housing and was currently being moved.

Chair Hill wanted to continue to receive feedback from Ms. Searcy about how the Board could be a better partner.

23-006C **AGENDA ITEM 5** Overview of the Community Homelessness Advisory Board. Chair Alexis Hill. Washoe County.

Chair Hill indicated some of the members had been on the Community Homelessness Advisory Board (CHAB) much longer than she had, and she wanted to hear what others wanted to see in terms of how it could stay informed.

Vice Chair Lawson indicated this was a collaboration which came about because it was not permitted to tell people to leave public places without having options for housing. Though there had been available beds, there were many barriers preventing people from utilizing them. He said the jurisdictions came together during the pandemic; before that, it was very siloed. Things were better now than they were, he opined, even though everything was still in the beginning stages. Whether it took three months or five years, the goal was to move people from homelessness to being permanently housed, fully functional members of society.

Vice Chair Lawson said the best thing the CHAB did was adopt the Built for Zero (BFZ) program, which had worked for more than 100 communities across the Country. Though homelessness would never be eradicated, the goal was to keep it to a manageable number, though the specific number for this region was still unknown. He lauded the County for stepping up. He described the Northern Nevada HOPES (HOPES) clinic as the best investment that could be made because the organization was self-funded. People successfully went through that program to address mental health and addiction. Vice Chair Lawson pointed out that Southern Nevada did not know about the BFZ program and, as such, wanted to take away the ability of cities and counties to create ordinances. Northern Nevada was trying to educate them on what was being done. He felt that, since the Board did what it was supposed to do and the County was moving forward in the right way, the CHAB could either be disbanded or, if not, meetings could be limited to once or twice per year.

Member Dahir said he was part of the original transitional housing board, which did not have the power to act. He agreed the goal of restructuring had been accomplished, but they were still at the beginning. He believed one meeting every six months would be fine, and while each jurisdiction could receive updates independently, this Board showed unity to the community. He suggested holding quarterly or semi-annual community conversations in lieu of meetings, which might include regional partners. He expressed concern about slowing progress right when change was happening, but it did not have to take the form of the CHAB's current structure.

Member Reese thought the CHAB had become power-irrelevant because the County took over the homelessness initiative. He did not oppose dissolution of the CHAB, but each jurisdiction still needed to understand what was being done, whether that was done annually or by specific request from a jurisdiction. He noted the jurisdictions' managers did a good job of regional coordination. Many of the original goals had been met or were occurring, and he thanked each jurisdiction and partner agency for their work.

Member Taylor expressed interest in determining the functional homeless number in the area, as mentioned by Vice Chair Lawson, though she did not necessarily think the CHAB was necessary to reach that goal. She supported the will of the body.

Chair Hill suggested having a meeting in August or September to get an update on Phase III, the intake and resource center. It would be a chance to update the community on construction, which was important because this had been an investment made by the entire region.

23-007C **AGENDA ITEM 7** Board members announcements, reports and updates to include requests for future board agenda items.

Chair Hill reiterated Member Taylor's prior request to determine the functional homeless number for the area.

Member Dahir wanted to explore the idea of community conversation, even if it did not interest the other members. Chair Hill felt Northern Nevada should be in charge of the 2nd Annual Homelessness Conference, which could provide an opportunity to hold a community conversation.

Member Reese added that could be an opportunity for community partners to set up booths to share resources and information. Many times, agencies were not aware of other organizations or projects. This would also allow for the involvement of advocacy groups and people with lived experience since CHAB meetings were more rigid. He spoke about attending a Western States Housing Consortium workshop which made resourcing more possible.

23-008C **AGENDA ITEM 8** Public Comment.

There was no response to the call for public comment.

* * * * *

10:02 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:
Derek Sonderfan, Independent Contractor*