

Cambridge Human Services Commission
Minutes of Meeting 4/11/2013
5:30 – 7:30pm
Citywide Senior Center
806 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge

Commissioners present: Christine Elow, Christopher Hall, Lori Likis, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, Khari Milner

Regrets: Katharine Thomas, Ayse Atasoylu, Kati LaBraico,

DHSP staff: Ellen Semonoff, Janice Alger, Jolyon Cowan, Jose Soares (recorder)

Presenter: Elizabeth (Liz) Mengers from the Planning and Development Division, Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP).

Ellen introduced Liz Mengers, Fred Berman's replacement, who manages homeless services at Planning and Development, DHSP.

Liz Mengers started her presentation by saying the City has been conducting the annual homeless census for over 10 years as required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In coordination with most of the other Continuums of Care in Massachusetts, the census count occurred on the night of January 30 – 31st, 2013 and the street census was performed between the hours of 2am and 6am and included the count of persons in shelters, in transitional programs, and people who sleep in the street. This year's street census was coordinated by Liz and Rick Ralphson of CASPAR's FirstStep Street Outreach program. FirstStep is a team of street outreach workers who work 80 hours per week, providing essential outreach and transportation services for homeless individuals to both CASPAR's shelter and other shelters, hospitals, and other emergency programs as needed. Under Liz and Ralph's leadership, the street census was conducted by teams with staff from DHSP's Planning and Development, CASPAR, Professional Ambulance, the Cambridge Police, and 14 volunteers.

Teams followed pre-arranged routes including known areas where the homeless sleep and T stations to observe how many people were sleeping in places "unfit for human habitation." The total count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless was 537, which was up 10.7% from the 2012 count of 485. Liz said that the increase in the overall number of homeless person counted was largely due to the inclusion of Heading Home's Family Opportunity Subsidy, a transitional program. Though this program is three years old, it had been mistakenly omitted from previous censuses as it has the same name as another transitional program and is similarly funded with support from the Cambridge Housing Authority.

The unsheltered count of homeless persons rose 4.5% to 69 from 2012, and the number of individuals in shelter rose 5.7% to 203. While historical trends show that when it is warmer weather outside the number of street homeless goes up and the number of sheltered homeless goes down, the night of the census had some very unusual weather, which may have confounded the results. During this year's street count, it was 59 degrees at 4 AM, yet there were intense winds and rain at 3-4am.

This year, Cambridge's homeless census team counted 366 homeless individuals and 61 homeless families (comprised of 171 persons) in shelters and transitional housing programs. A total of 537

homeless people were reported to HUD. 69 individuals were counted on the street and 2 homeless individuals were hospitalized.

Liz said that homeless families from across the state are placed by the Commonwealth's Department of Transitional Assistance in shelters in Cambridge. But, as the state stopped placing families at the Gateway Inn in Cambridge in 2010, there has been a large drop in the City's capacity to shelter families, and a subsequently large decrease in the number of homeless families counted between 2009 and 2012. However, services available to families in shelter are much more extensive than for individuals.

The difference between the Cambridge and Somerville homeless street count is stark: 69 homeless were counted in Cambridge, and 9 in Somerville. Liz noted that Boston also had a 5% increase in the street count this year.

The Commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development reported a 30% drop in homeless families in motels throughout the state. Funds saved from the decrease in motels will be utilized to place families in temporary housing.

Liz also reported data on the subpopulations of homeless with the caveat that this data is far from accurate and often depends on the methods shelter staff use to gather this information. That said, the numbers of homeless veterans decreased from 31 in 2012 to 7 in 2013. The count of persons with chronic substance abuse also decreased significantly in 2013.

Please see the attached handout from the presentation.

Jolyon Cowan and Jose Soares from Planning and Development presented their annual overview of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funded programs based on their monitoring and evaluation. The review of Cambridge's CDBG programs is based on quarterly reports, site visits, and ongoing communication with program staff.

Please see the attached document for a review of the CDBG funded programs.

After their presentation, Commissioner Christine Elow stated she would be interested in hearing more about the emerging Ethiopian community in Cambridge from Binyam Tamene, Executive Director of the Ethiopian Community Mutual Assistance Association, a CDBG grantee.

Meeting adjourned

At the next Human Services Commission meeting, scheduled for May 9, 2013, Commissioners will review the applications for the FY 2014 CDBG public service funding.