



## Meeting Minutes

### Monthly Commission Meeting via Zoom Tuesday, August 13, 2024, at 6:00 P.M.

**Present:** Commissioners Karin Lin, Felipe Lobo Koerich, Shubhan Nagendra, Vanessa Sarmiento, Tsamchoe Dolma, Karim Razzaz

City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Director of Operations Sarah Binney, Housing Liaison Maura Pensak

**Absent:** Chair Abhishek Raman, Commissioners Debbie Klein, Ana Mejia, Vanessa Ruget

1. **Call to order**

- ED Almonte called the meeting to order at 6:07pm.

2. **Public comment**

- No members of the public were present.

3. **Review and approval of May 2024 minutes**

- Commissioner Lobo Koerich moved to approve the May 2024 minutes. Commissioner Lin seconded.

6. **Discussion about changes to the EA shelter system**

- HL Pensak shared information about the existing Safety Net shelters and how their function will change. There are currently 4 Safety Net shelters in MA with over 300 families in Cambridge, Chelsea, Norfolk, and Lexington. Safety Net shelters are meant to be temporary sites for families to use until families can access permanent housing or move into an EA shelter and were opened because EA shelters were at capacity. The Office of the Housing Liaison has become the bridge between the Cambridge Safety Net site at the Registry of Deeds building (ROD) and the City. The City supported ROD families in getting registered for school, getting vaccinated, and accessing services. The ROD required residents to leave during the day, and the library provided space for the residents to use during the day. In Spring of 2024, the state began a case management program for residents and day spaces were added where residents could access case management and use during the day. Commissioner Nagendra asked if families are still being housed in hotels. HL Pensak shared that the hotels were an overflow solution before Safety Net sites were opened, and some families are still living in hotels.
- On July 23, 2024, [the Healey-Driscoll administration announced changes to its Emergency Assistance \(EA\) prioritization and safety-net sites for families experiencing homelessness](#). The Healey administration announced that beginning August 1, 2024, families will be prioritized for placement in EA shelters if they are homeless because of a no-fault eviction or because of sudden or unusual circumstances in Massachusetts beyond their control, such as a flood or fire, or if they have at least one member who is a veteran. Families

who are not prioritized for placement in EA shelters will be eligible to stay at a “temporary respite center” (formerly Safety Net sites) for up to five days. Families who choose to stay at a temporary respite center will be required to wait six months to rejoin the waitlist in the state’s emergency family shelter system. There are still a lot of questions about how this will affect families currently living in the ROD building.

- HL Pensak shared about the state’s HomeBASE program, which helps families who have been found eligible for Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter by providing up to \$30,000 over a 2-year period. ED Almonte asked what the turnaround time is for receiving HomeBASE funds. HL Pensak explained that the funds can be approved quickly but often it is difficult for families to find a unit. The HomeBASE funds are directly sent to a housing provider. Commissioner Lin asked about programs to host families directly in peoples’ homes. HL Pensak explained that the City is not coordinating that program, but that those who wish to host people in their homes can reach out to the Brazilian Worker’s Center.
- Commissioner Lobo Koerich asked about the state’s position on criminalizing homelessness due to the recent supreme court decision. HL Pensak did not think state policy would be affected by this decision.
- Commissioner Lin asked about ways to advocate for policy change. ED Almonte explained that Commissioners can vote for an action but have to act as a body. Individuals on the Commission can participate in any advocacy as long as it isn’t as a Commissioner.
- Commissioner Sarmiento asked if families have been able to move in with other family members and if there was any efforts to facilitate relocation of the residents at ROD, including to relatives or family outside of the state. HL Pensak shared that a big piece of what the state is offering is called reticketing, where travel tickets are purchased for residents to facilitate travelling to stay with family members. If families go to Terminal E in Logan Airport from 4pm-11pm, there are staff there that will facilitate reticketing. Some people have agreed to be reticketed but most people do not have anywhere else to go. Another challenge is that a lot of families are doubled up in housing units. ISL Wabeto asked if whole families tend to double up or just children. HL Pensak shared that it is often whole families.
- HL Pensak suggested that CIRC work on a newcomers guide to housing, school, employment, and benefits. ED Almonte shared that a New Resident Guide already exists, but that the Commission could make a version that is more condensed or more tailored for specific resident needs. ED Almonte shared that there are funds that can be used for a panel or workshop, if desired. ED Almonte suggested a potential workshop about immigration status and fair housing. HL Pensak and ED Almonte are going to train case workers serving Safety Net families about Fair Housing Laws. Housing providers discriminating based on the use of HomeBASE funds (source of income discrimination) or immigration legal status (national origin discrimination) can be investigated by the Human Rights Commission.
- HL Pensak shared that if individuals know of units in their buildings that are for rent, they could share them with OHL so that OHL can refer people.

- ED Almonte met with Office of Immigrant Affairs of the City of Somerville to discuss potential partnership in supporting newly arrived families.
- ISL Wabeto shared that the Cambridge Community Center is accepting donations on August 25, 2024, from 12pm – 2pm for household goods, linens, and clothing.

**6. New Business**

- ED Almonte shared that there is one Commissioner Vacancy. Commissioners should send the vacancy announcement to their networks. Applications are due September 9, 2024. Commissioner Razzaz volunteered to help interview applicants with staff.

**7. Adjournment**

- Commissioner Sarmiento moved for the meeting to adjourn. Commissioner Lin seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:02pm.