



MINUTES
Ad Hoc on Homelessness & Solutions
Tuesday, April 25, 2023 @ 3:30 p.m.
City Council Conference Room, 10th Floor City Hall

CALL TO ORDER

Council Member Brown called the meeting to order at 3:30pm

PRESENT

Council Member Jeffrey Brown, Chair
Council Member Adam Hussain, Vice Chair
Council Member Patricia Spitzley, Member - excused

OTHERS PRESENT

Renee Richmond, Council Staff
Matt Staples, OCA
Erika Brown-Binion, Executive Director Refugee Development Center
Mark Pierce, Executive Director Disability Network Center
Ulices Rosa, 54A District Court
Judge Ward, District Court
Jazmine Anderson
Belinda Fitzpatrick

MINUTES

MOTION BY COUNCIL MEMBER HUSSAIN TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF APRIL 11, 2023 AND TABLE MARCH 28, 2023, AS PRESENTED. MOTION CARRIED 2-0.

PRESENTATIONS

Refugee Development Center; Erika Brown-Binion, Executive Director

Ms. Brown-Binion gave an overview of the RDC, they have been around for 21 years, they exist because Lansing is a welcome space for refugees, they are the largest program with about 400. When they first arrive, they have the support of case management, most come in speaking different languages so they teach them English, tutoring from k-12, all this is within the first 90 days. They help find employment and to be self-sufficient, in finding apartments or housing. They have a home visiting program for new families with an interpreter and help navigate housing and help with health education along with housing education. Most refugees come from Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, and more.

Councilmember Brown asked what she is seeing in Lansing and how it's effecting the RDC from the past 10 years, does she have any solutions. Ms. Brown-Binion acknowledged they don't see much homelessness compared to the general population. For the most part culturally refugees live in larger family units than typical, and they emphasize the prevention stages that is one reason they added the housing navigation so they engage in home ownership and not land contract to get taken advantage of.

Councilmember Hussain asked in terms of regional partners who else is opening up or is it just mainly Lansing. Ms. Brown-Binion noted resettlement happens all over like, Grand Rapids, Greater Detroit, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, and Traverse City. Once they first resettle most end up staying and building roots, only a few may move.

Disability Network Capital Area; Mark Pierce, Executive Director

Mr. Pierce stated he has been with DNC for nine years, they have been around for 47 years and service Ingham, Clinton, Eaton, and Shiawassee Counties. Their Mission Statement is – Transforming thinking to improve the environment and quality of life for people with disabilities. The agency serviced 516 consumers (people), closed out 112, and 30% were minority. One of the biggest concerns is they served 47 consumers that came through direct services and they couldn't speak for themselves. Councilmember Brown asked of those were they homeless and families or individuals, Mr. Pierce responded yes and they only serve individuals, the biggest services is social security benefits, it's a huge piece, whether it's just that or Medicaid.

Mr. Pierce shared a quick story of a person that came from the hospital that had their toes amputated and lived on the street and ended up back in the hospital after being robbed. Social Worker called a transition specialist and they were able to connect with him and get an ID card and into adult protective services. The person is now in the process of getting a checking account at MSUFCU and bringing some normality.

Mr. Pierce added that homelessness means no name on a lease or mortgage, no address for mail. They partnership with other agencies like the Rescue Mission, Haven House, VOA, and more, he then handed out a list for the record that his staff uses to help with hotels or center, etc.

Councilmember Brown asked would he say they've helped about 10% of the people with homelessness, Mr. Pierce noted the big issue landlords, apartments or house that are red tagged, the person with disabilities have no where to go and may access a red tag just to have somewhere to go, they've seen a huge increase because you have interest rates that increase, constraints on Section 8 and the amount of money that is made. Councilmember Brown asked if he was saying people with disabilities are living in red tag houses then having to leave, his response was yes and if they could know ahead of time maybe they could work with them. With the Rescue Mission there is a process they get categorized and some don't understand what is happening. Councilmember Brown asked if he could categorize the people, he services what type of disability stands out that are experiencing homelessness the most, Mr. Pierce said no specific disability stands out but if they have a guardian, they are better off rather than speaking for themselves. In most cases the disability could be emotional, developmental, or intellectual and they don't know what resources they have. Councilmember Brown asked if he would agree there is a gap of support for those with moderate disabilities who aren't able to advocate for themselves, Mr. Pierce agreed adding that during COVID people got assistance with rent and those with disabilities could fill out the paperwork.

Councilmember Hussain asked what he thought the City could do better with the housing navigation, red tags, gaps for service, sounds like these are leading to the increase in homelessness. Mr. Pierce stated trying to find/create enough places ahead of time but it's difficult, there is a 400% increase and if you have 100 homeless how do you find that many. He included just brainstorming but if your unemployed and you get unemployment the employer pays insurance, what if there was red tag insurance, like some people are required to have fire insurance or car insurance.

Councilmember Hussain asked him how other municipality partners doing since you serve four counties. Mr. Pierce said he didn't have a definite answer, rural areas are closed mouth and don't want to talk about it like the inner city is willing. He concluded Lansing, Kalamazoo, places with universities are different they have options not like smaller cities.

DISCUSSION/ACTION

DISCUSSION – Committee Intention for next meeting

The Committee concurred for the next meeting no presenters and to start discussing strategy and how to tackle the issues.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Judge Ward spoke on information she received regarding the special meeting on red tags and questions for Court Administration and what's been filed. She added that numbers were run over the last three years and types of filing for rentals and housing, they are looking over everything and she needs to speak to someone and digest everything before reporting back, she just wanted to give an update.

Belinda Fitzpatrick noted she likes the idea of oca looking into the insurance portion to see if that is possible for landlords to get to avoid eviction. Also, that the term "hoarder" is a protective class and that it's something DNC may run into.

Ulices Rosa requested to ask the presenters a question, Councilmember Brown agreed. Mr. Rosa stated to Ms. Brown-Binion that the refugee's getting work within 30-60 days is amazing and that 90% are experiencing income loss and those are getting hired. Ms. Brown-Binion explained that at the federal level they must find work immediately, whether it's at McDonald's or elsewhere, and most are minimum level wage positions. She added that Peckham helps, some refugee's have PTSD and it may not be their first choice position but it's something, including that self sufficiency is the ultimate goal within 90 days.

Mr. Rosa asked Mr. Pierce who he thinks he handles more of for their evicted people when it comes to disabilities. Mr. Pierce stated there is a stigma around people they don't want to identify as disabled, they do awareness assessments and we would gladly welcome those evicted and please reach out to us, Mr. Rosa confirmed.

OTHER

ADJOURN

Adjourned at 4:24pm

Submitted by

Renee Richmond, Recording Secretary

Lansing City Council

Approved by the Committee as Amended on May 9, 2023