

Meeting Minutes: Public Input Session – General Public/Service Providers

Topic: Draft Recommendations of the Augusta Task Force on Homelessness

Date: 02/25/2025 Time: 4-6pm Location: Lithgow Public Library

Moderator: Nancy Fritz, Task Force Member along with Wick Johnson, Task Force Chair

1. Welcome and Introductions:

- Nancy Fritz welcomed attendees and explained the purpose of the meeting: to gather community feedback on the Task Force's recommendations regarding homelessness.
- Nancy introduced herself and shared her background in working with the homeless community.
- Nancy outlined the guidelines for the meeting:
 - Two to three minutes speaking time per person.
 - Wait until everyone has spoken before speaking again.
 - Limit comments to the plan or other related issues.

2. Individual Community Member Comments:

- Highlighting the contrast between the urgency of need and the complexity of connecting individuals to services.
- Emphasized the need for streamlining the process for obtaining necessary documentation and connecting individuals to the appropriate resources.
- Discussed the importance of client buy-in and the need for individuals to actively participate in their own recovery and service engagement.
- Expressed concerns about safety and security for the downtown community as services for the homeless expand.
- Advocated for a third space during the day with providers who are experienced in serving the low-barrier population to provide access to resources and services.
- Raised concerns about the potential impact of needle exchange programs on community safety.

- Emphasized the importance of addressing the concerns of residents alongside providing services to the homeless population.
- Shared experiences of serving individuals with severe mental illness who are experiencing homelessness.
- Highlighted the fragmented nature of services and lack of interdisciplinary collaboration between providers.
- Expressed concern about the lack of safety for unhoused individuals, including instances of death due to exposure.
- Shared a personal experience feeling unsafe in downtown Augusta due to the lack of resources and police presence.
- Acknowledged the shortage of rental vouchers and the difficulty finding housing that accepts vouchers due to mismatch between subsidy amount and market rents.
- Commended the City of Augusta for its openness and flexibility in affordable housing development.
- Supported the concept of a one-stop service center and shelter for homeless individuals, similar to the Portland model.
- Advocated for a comprehensive review of zoning regulations to identify areas suitable for shelter and affordable housing development.
- Shared experiences employing and supporting individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Criticized the often-unrealistic promises made by service organizations and the negative impacts of policies that can be traumatizing to those already facing trauma.
- Suggested focusing on making housing easier to access and affordable for the homeless population.
- Highlighting the need for accountability for both government organizations and private businesses that exploit the vulnerable.
- Encouraged the Task Force to consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs in their work.

- Proposed a job fair or resource fair to connect service providers, employers and community members.
- Expressed concern about potential barriers to accessing services if staff at new daytime centers are unfamiliar with the processes.
- Shared the experiences of the Augusta Recovery Reentry Center and the challenges of working with individuals who may not be willing or able to engage with services.
- Expressed support for the concept of multiple service locations within Augusta.
- Asked another attendee to elaborate on the "firewalls" preventing interorganizational communication.
- Attendee explained the challenges of HIPPA regulations and the need for client releases of information prevent challenges to sharing information between providers.
- Also discussed other barriers, such as billing concerns and competition between providers.
- Acknowledged the challenges of balancing ethical obligations and program regulations with providing client-centered care.
- Emphasized the need for education within the community to understand how service systems work and their impact on individuals.
- Shared optimism about the progress made by the Task Force and the potential for collaboration.
- Emphasized the importance of moving beyond talk and taking concrete action to address homelessness.
- Highlighted the value of touring facilities and building relationships with service providers to improve communication and understanding.

3. Potential Action Items:

- Update Housing Study: The Task Force will recommend an update to the City's housing study to include a comprehensive assessment of needs for supportive housing and other housing types.

- **Develop Housing Production Goals:** Based on the updated housing study, the City will set specific housing production goals to address identified needs.
- **Create a Provider Working Group:** The Task Force will facilitate the formation of a working group of service providers to improve communication and coordination.
- **Institutionalize Task Force Work:** The Task Force will identify a successor group to continue the work of addressing homelessness in Augusta.
- **Clarify Short-Term Goals:** The Task Force will clearly define short-term goals, deliverables, and timelines for implementing recommendations.
- **Consider Job Fair/Resource Fair:** The Task Force will consider a recommendation for the city to host or sponsor a job fair or resource fair to connect providers, employers and community members with those in need.
- **Educate Community:** The Task Force will consider strategies to educate the community about service systems and their impact on individuals.
- **Address Safety Concerns:** The Task Force will continue to consider the concerns of residents regarding safety and security, particularly in downtown Augusta.

4. Next Steps:

- The Task Force will continue to work on developing and refining recommendations based on feedback from the community.
- The Task Force will present the final report and recommendations to the City Council for consideration and action in March.