

ST. JOHNS COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL (HHSAC)
MEETING MINUTES
October 21, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT: Charles Daly, Chair; Tara Haley, Vice Chair; Chip Cover; Lorraine Keith

MEMBERS ABSENT: Shannon Nazworth; Kim Elmore;

STAFF PRESENT: Shawna Novak, Director, Health & Human Services; Tracy Dillon, Social Services Manager; Mary Garcia, Social Services Support Staff

BCC LIASON: Sarah Taylor, Assistant County Administrator
Jeb S. Smith, County Commissioner – sent regrets

VISITORS: In person - Megan Wall; Ana Fernandez
Via Zoom - Ellen Walden; Lindsey Rodea; Bridget Varnadoe; Sharon Gesek; Melissa Wittmeier; Judi Dembowski; Patti Greenough; Michelle Colee; Kelly Franklin; Dawn Bell; Marissa Vetter; Emma Hayes; Harry Rusham

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL: Chair called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. Quorum was present.

MINUTES – September, 2021: Tara Haley **motioned** to approve the September, 2021 general meeting minutes. Chip Cover seconded the motion; minutes were **approved unanimously** by the Council. Tara Haley **motioned** to approve the September, 2021 executive meeting minutes. Chip Cover seconded the motion; minutes were **approved unanimously** by the Council.

REPORT FROM COMMISSIONER JEB SMITH: Commissioner Smith was unable to attend this meeting and he sent regrets.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Ellen Walden reported that Home Again St. Johns is in the process of moving to South Holmes Boulevard and she said they hope to resume operations in early November. Ms. Walden expressed concern over the gap in services this presents for the homeless and she stated she would inform community partners of Home Again St. Johns reopen date.

OLD BUSINESS:

- a) **Continuum of Care (CoC) Update – Point in Time Count:** Linsey Rodea reported that Brittany Coronado resigned her position and she stated that Austin Burns will now be stepping into that role. Ms. Rodea said the CoC is currently planning the Point in Time Count, which will be performed in January, 2022, and she stated there will be further updates to come.

NEW BUSINESS:

- a) **St. Johns County Legal Aid – Megan Wall:** Ms. Wall explained the legal aid office has been located on San Marco Avenue in St. Augustine for the past 17 years and that while they are a part of the greater Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, their funding is separate and benefits only St. Johns County. Ms. Wall said their office personnel consists of two attorneys and two support staff members and she said those support staff members have been with the office since they

opened their doors. Ms. Wall talked about staffing issues that have occurred as a result of the pandemic and efforts to maintain stability. Ms. Wall said one of their attorneys handles evictions with assistance from volunteer lawyers and she said despite the moratorium, eviction rates increased throughout the pandemic. Ms. Wall said landlords used many reasons other than non-payment in order to file for eviction and this caused an enormous work load for the legal aid office. Ms. Wall said they applied for and were awarded a Community Development Block Grant to fund the hiring of another attorney to assist with evictions for at least one year, possibly two. Ms. Wall said they were able to hire an attorney that has worked for legal aid in the past and has invaluable experience. Ms. Wall expressed her appreciation for this grant and also for the additional funding the HHSAC recommended for St. Johns Housing Partnership's (SJHP) foreclosure prevention program. Ms. Wall said the legal aid office works very closely with SJHP and she talked about their foreclosure prevention success stories. Ms. Wall did lament the lack of affordable housing in St. Johns County and the difficulty businesses are having hiring staff. Ana Fernandez, SMA Behavioral Health, asked if she could refer Spanish speaking clients to Legal Aid and Ms. Wall said yes, and explained legal aid has access to a conference line certified to translate 150 languages.

- b) **Officer Elections:** Chair Daly explained the offices of Chair and Vice Chair are elected each year and he asked for nominations for Chair. Tara Haley **motioned** to nominate Charles Daly to serve as Chair; there were no other nominations. Chip Cover seconded the motion; nomination of Charles Daly to serve as Chair **approved unanimously** by the Council. Mr. Daly then called for nominations for Vice Chair. Charles Daly **motioned** to nominate Tara Haley to serve as Vice Chair; there were no other nominations. Chip Cover seconded the motion; nomination of Tara Haley to serve as Vice Chair **approved unanimously** by the Council.
- c) **Current Vacancy – Recommendation:** Mr. Daly said all applications for the vacancy created by the resignation of Dr. Nielson were distributed to Council members prior to this meeting. Mr. Cover shared the fact that over the next 4 or 5 months he may have issue with attending general meetings. Mr. Cover said that while he would like to remain on the Council, he felt it necessary to share this information as he does not want his absence to cause issue with achieving quorum. This matter has been tabled until Mr. Cover can further review his schedule and how it might impact future meetings. Ms. Novak mentioned the upcoming RFP that will take place in early to mid-2022 and she said this will require some meetings be cancelled due to required black-out period.

Ms. Haley said she considered both Howard Hitzell and Frederick Richards to be extremely qualified candidates and Mr. Daly concurred. Ms. Keith said she was very impressed with both candidates but she said Mr. Hitzell's application stood out to her and she cited his mental health experience, and strong community involvement. Discussion ensued. Mr. Cover said that in his opinion, Mr. Richards' leadership roles at not-for-profit agencies make him a stronger candidate. Ms. Haley also pointed out Mr. Richards' extensive background in grant writing and Mr. Cover agreed that this type of experience would also be beneficial to the Council. Chip Cover **motioned** to recommend that Fred Richards be appointed a member of the HHSAC. Lorraine Keith seconded the motion; the recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners that Fred Richards be appointed a member of the HHSAC **approved unanimously** by the Council.

REPORT FROM SARAH TAYLOR, ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR: Sarah Taylor introduced herself and explained she has been employed by St. Johns County for 21 years and served most recently with the County's Human Resources department as Director. Ms. Taylor said that in her new capacity as Assistant County Administrator, she will serve as liaison to Parks and Recreation, Cultural Events, Library Services, and Health and Human Services.

FUNDED AGENCY UPDATES:

Alpha Omega Miracle Home: Bridget Varnedoe stated all of their mothers and their seniors are employed at this time and the children are doing well in school. Ms. Varnedoe said they currently have an abundance of diapers and only one infant at this time so she encouraged referrals for diapers and she said they can be picked up at their Collins Avenue office.

Council on Aging: Sharon Gesek said they are still experiencing staffing issues and she said they are recruiting for two coordinators – one for River House and one for Trout Creek. Ms. Gesek stated their adult day care census has doubled since the spring, going from six to twelve clients per day. Ms. Gesek said they are working with the United Way on the Empty Stocking fund and the Santa for a Senior program for the homebound elderly.

Epic Behavioral Healthcare: Melissa Witmeier said they expect their new residential wing to open next month. Ms. Witmeier also reported that the 25 anniversary of Ancient City Kids Day will be held on Saturday, October 23rd, at Francis Field and she encouraged people to come out and bring their children.

Good Samaritan/Wildflower Clinic: Ms. Colee said they are partnering with Council on Aging on some educational programs, and she said their partnership with Flagler Health + and the Plus Bus continues to be very successful. Ms. Colee said their dental bus will resume services in Hasting in November and she said they have received a donation of flu vaccinations and they are currently administering them in twenty locations around the community.

St. Augustine Youth Services (SAYS): Emma Hayes stated their Mobile Crisis Response Team, which is currently fully staffed, completed 55 assessments last month and maintained an 80% diversion rate. Ms. Hayes said they performed crisis intervention training for law enforcement officers recently, which provided information about their mobile response service and staff.

Betty Griffin Center (BGC): Kelly Franklin, new Chief Executive Officer, reported that Joyce Mahr has retired and Inez Peele has taken on the role of Chief Executive Officer. Ms. Franklin said their shelter is at capacity and they are still taking safety precautions due to Covid. Ms. Franklin also reminded everyone that October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and she provided the BGC crisis hotline phone number.

Early Learning Coalition: Dawn Bell said their centers are having a hard time finding child care providers but despite that, they are still serving an average of 4,000 children per month and they have not had to turn anyone away.

Emergency Services & Homeless Coalition (ESHG): No representative in attendance.

St. Francis House: Judi Dembowski thanked her staff and gave kudos to all of her fellow non-profits for their partnership through what was, and continues to be, such a challenging time.

St. Johns Housing Partnership (SJHP): Marissa Vetter thanked Megan Wall for her kind words and her hard work. Ms. Vetter shared a success story regarding a small business owner and SJHP's assistance with saving this individual's home through foreclosure prevention.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

Florida Department of Health St. Johns: No representative in attendance.

Homeless Advocacy Council: Ellen Walden said this group has not met over the last six months but she said they hope to reconvene soon.

SMA Healthcare: Ana Fernandez said they have hired two new therapists.

Flagler Health +: Lindsey Rodea had no further report.

Health & Human Services Department (HHS): Shawna Novak reported the one year lease for the new Home Again St. Johns site will be brought before the Board of County Commissioners for approval on November 2nd. Ms. Novak also reported the Victoria Crossing affordable housing project closed recently and ground breaking will follow soon. Ms. Novak stated that upon completion of construction, this will bring another 86 units of affordable rentals to the community. Ms. Novak announced that contracts were sent out to funded agencies on this date and they should be receiving them soon. Ms. Novak went on to say that legislation was recently passed that will require additional staffing for the Community Based Care division of Health & Human Services. Ms. Novak stated the building is currently at 100% occupancy, with no room for additional staffing, so the County was not able to renew the lease with SMA Behavioral Healthcare for the space they currently occupy there. Ms. Novak went on to say the Department of Health, also located in the County's Health & Human Services building, closed down their dental office, which has created a service gap for foster care youth. Finally, Ms. Novak said the Program Manager for the Community Based Care division of Health & Human Services resigned in September and she said the recruitment process has garnered many good candidates, though a hiring decision has not yet been made.

Faith Based Community: Harry Rusham introduced himself and explained he is pastor at Grace United Methodist Church. Mr. Rusham said he has been coordinating cold night sheltering for the past seven years and trying to enlist help from other houses of worship. Mr. Rusham said Covid has made this even more difficult and his church is still the sole cold weather shelter in the community.

Public Safety: No representative in attendance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Executive Meeting: Thursday, November 4, 2021 at 3:30 p.m. at the St. Johns County Health and Human Services Center, Mallard Conference Room, 200 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, FL 32084.

Regular Meeting: Thursday, November 18, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. at the St. Johns County Health & Human Services Center, Kingfisher Conference Room, 200 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, FL 32084.

ADJOURNMENT - Meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.