**SHC Ad HoC Committee on Encampments, Warming Centers, and Overflow – Recommendations 11/7/22**

**We all agree this is a crisis and our goal is to keep people alive for the winter**

**Top Priorities to keep people from freezing to death at top of each section.**

1. **Make use of spaces that might be available for the winter**

\*\*Make staffing available to support these spaces – particularly to get people on board with agreeing to provide space [11/21 Different local approaches can produce agreements to provide services. Difficulty is sourcing funding for this. Implementation strategy: Look for resources to pay for this. **High priority** though difficult to see how or where funds will come from. Staffing is always the most expensive component of any of these projects, but it is also the most critical. **Critical need.**

\*\*Entire dorms of University of Maine or other colleges, universities, etc. are sitting empty due to lower enrollment; explore partnerships to take advantage of spaces like this. [11/21 – sounded unlikely per an Orono professor; Greg Payne has pursued this with the entire U of Maine system and may have a different outcome; could be a good match for Asylum Seekers which would open capacity in shelters immediately] Implementation strategy: Have Greg Payne continue to pursue for at least Asylum Seekers. This may be a win/win for the University. **High priority**.

\*\*Assisted living facility with 40 beds is available north of Augusta sitting vacant (or any others) – look to use this and other spaces. That assisted living facility is willing to lease this (would be much less expensive than motels). [11/21 – Explored this concept with a nursing home in Belfast. Concerns over limited parking spaces and code requirements. The option north of Augusta remains open. A number of these type of facilities have closed during the pandemic and are suitable for reuse. These sit completely ready for use. Key creative and quick solution to pursue. Homeless populations may not require as much parking.] Implementation strategy: Contact town offices to track down ownership and availability of these facilities as resources. Consult with the state for their list of formerly licensed facilities. See if Greg Payne can explore options in this category. **High priority**.

Create list of churches willing to help and supplement with a list of things they will need to have in place for success. [11/21 – Group of churches in Southern Maine has become engaged and is pressuring Governor Mills. They are taking an active role. Aaron has a letter to share from this group. Churches are stepping up to be warming centers. South Parish in Augusta opened a warming center and could be a partner.] **High priority**.

Overflow – add onto a shelter for extra space. [Has been used successfully although this can be a challenge as well. There are space limitations.] Implementation Strategy: **High priority**. Shelters have control over their own spaces (unlike Airbnbs). Issues can be overcome. Pursue in Maine Shelter Network.

Ensure there is de-escalation training, common courtesy training, and Narcan available at warming centers [11/21 – This is likely already happening. Should be doable. **High priority**.

Emergency use of police and fire stations, or similar municipal or county buildings (emergency of loss of life and loss of property now with encampments) [11/21 – They may never agree unless state of emergency. Could be agreed to locally according to political will. Implementation Strategy: **High priority if pursued locally municipality by municipality.**

Rent warehouse space for use temporarily [11/21 – Concerns with equipment still in place left behind – can create safety issues. Zoning issues with housing people in these areas. Declaration of state of emergency could override zoning barriers temporarily.] Implementation strategy: **High Priority of need but may be difficult to implement quickly prior to winter**.

Work with Airbnbs for winter use of sites, particularly in spaces that might be prone to shutting down for the winter. [11/21 has been tried with some success meaning it may be replicable.] Implementation strategy: This may be difficult. **High priority and somewhat doable**. Fees are also an issue and unable to be funded with federal charges. Getting the company on board with removing fees could be a challenge. Could be successful if Airbnb contract is bypassed, which has been done in Maine successfully.

Look for money to provide sprinkler systems so that buildings can become options for warming centers or overflow shelters [11/21 – This can be a big roadblock. Life safety is important. City has helped in some instances but contractors installing systems can be hard to find. Removing this roadblock is important. **High priority but low likelihood of success quickly**.

Look to foreclosed housing for use [11/21 – REO properties can be slow to take over and require a purchase and sale to go through. Contacting previous owners can be a difficult issue as well. Can also be an estate with complications. Implementation strategy: Difficult to pursue; a low priority.

Look to using available spaces in existing buildings that we are currently unable to take more people (some municipalities are limiting the number of people who can share a house (law says 8 = Single family home). Implementation strategy: Low priority. Has some difficulties. But could be good with city owned property.

Using trailer campgrounds as extended short-term solution [11/21 – In central Maine these tend to be out of the way requiring transportation. Few may be close to town. Cost/expense of putting trailers on the properties. Low priority.

Utilize seasonal hotels in partnership with the owners – at least through the winter. [11/21 - After October and November, many shut down, which can result in difficulty accessing. Low priority.

1. **Change policies to increase access or options**

\*\*Work to prevent eviction and rapidly house people with circumstantial issues underlying their homelessness. **High priority and doable**.

\*\*Ensure General Assistance is implemented consistently across municipalities – issue new regulations. **High priority**.

Examine local ordinances for warming centers. **High priority.**

Create zoning changes or revise existing zoning to expedite solutions. Low priority.

Reduce barriers to temporary solutions. **High priority**.

Back other well-aligned policy efforts made by other entities that may help with this crisis (sign on to letters, endorse other efforts, etc.) **High priority**.

Double up on voucher usage to create shared housing. **High priority**. Is in the works but not widely happening.

Create additional housing. **High priority but low likelihood in a quick time**.

Examine the 180-day rule as it pertains to short term housing – for guests in hotels specifically. Low priority; requires hotels as well as policy changes. Do pursue where possible. **Mixed priority depending on locality**.

Have local governments be good stewards of public property/tax acquired property so it can be used to help with this crisis. Low priority.

Work with Airbnbs and summer rentals for winter use of sites, particularly in spaces that might be prone to shutting down for the winter (may involve policy changes due to voucher guidelines) Low priority. (bypass instead).

\* Entire dorms of University of Maine are sitting empty due to lower enrollment; explore partnerships to take advantage of spaces like this. (\*may require licensing or zoning change)

\* Assisted living facility with 40 beds is available north of Augusta sitting vacant – look to use this and other spaces. That assisted living facility is willing to lease this (would be much less expensive than motels). (\*may require licensing or zoning change)

\* Work with Airbnbs for winter use of sites, particularly in spaces that might be prone to shutting down for the winter (\*may require policy change)

\*Some shelter and warming center changes may require policy changes for funding or to put in place temporarily

1. **Make emergency shelter changes**

\*\*Fund warming shelter beds. **High priority**.

\*\*Provide extra funding for shelters to increase beds and services. Solve staffing issues that affect ability to create and manage indoor space. Solve for capacity limitations at shelters. Work to make shelters more accessible. **High priority**.

1. **Improve data and messaging**

\*\*Ask for change in messaging from DHHS about General Assistance to be explicit about GA being available and able to go over guidelines temporarily. GA can go over guidelines to keep people housed; LD 459 law that calls homelessness an emergency offers additional guidance that municipalities are required to go over guidelines for 30 days. Need message that they can go beyond 30 days as well – messaging is important. **High priority and doable**.

\*\*Prevention and diversion services are critical, effective, and efficient – ensure people know how to access these services. **High priority and feasible**. Maine needs diversion funds.

\*\*Provide information on eviction prevention. **High priority and feasible**. Landlord liaison pilot in Bangor may be an effective model worthy of replicating.

Make data driven decisions. Good data (not anecdotal data) is critical for solving homelessness and identifying gaps in the system. **High priority and feasible**.

Create or improve an interactive map of resources available across the state. **High priority and partially underway**.

Prioritize the expertise of people with lived experience (put it at the center). **High priority**.

Ensure people are safe and secure. Clearly important and a **high priority** goal. Implementation: Need messaging strategies.

More shelter space is needed (external message). **High priority**. Disaggregate the needs; people supported by ERA after circumstantial homelessness may be lower needs, whereas people staying outside with chronic homelessness are likely much higher needs.

Offer guidance to emergency shelters across the state – include that lowering barriers (i.e. allow pets, avoid sobriety restrictions, etc.), is important. **High priority.** Internal message to shelters. Likely requires resources for managing resulting lower barriers (people with pets, etc.).

Educate the public about the various reasons people experience homelessness. **High priority**. Storytelling can be very helpful to the public understanding the challenges people face. Education is important in lots of ways, including fighting NIMBY. Education overcomes anxiety on the part of the public.

Stand up warming centers where we need them to address this situation. Message that warming centers are critical and there is a need for one per county. **High priority.**

Have a ready list of warming centers or places to go in an emergency so it can be inclusive for people experiencing homelessness and distribute it through local media and announcements. **High priority**. Has been done and was received well by the media. Involve the media to broadcast emergency resources to the broader public.

Invest in more permanent housing – and solve the desperate situation we are in currently. **High priority and long term, but important to initiate**. We may be able to generate more housing by simpler approaches such as master leasing.

Advocate that some people may require creative shelter strategies to come inside. **High priority but may have feasibility issues**. This may involve non-congregate setting options for some individuals.

Ensure our strategies are realistic, ethical, and data driven. More of a value statement than a strategy. This should be incorporated in the design of the operating system. **Anything not realistic should come off the list.**

Invest in empirical research and program evaluation. Important but not urgent.

Examine successes of using volunteers (remove roadblocks to training). Fits under program evaluation. Should be a consideration.

1. **Other considerations or comments**

Solutions will ultimately involve one person at a time

Permanent housing is the solution, but it is unlikely to come into existence by January 1st.

Focus on the solutions proven to work

Broaden the group working to solve this

All we have are chairs for people to sit in overnight – we need to think of other solutions

Ensure our solutions are wholistic

Consider USICH principles for addressing encampments

Consider USICH statement of caution when considering sanctioned encampments

**Item we considered which didn’t achieve unanimity**

Create a pallet shelter arrangement

On pallet shelters: Logistics are important as pallet shelters don’t come with services, which can mean no movement to housing; greatest chance of success are when they are autonomous and self-governed – adding rules and conditions may affect people’s desire to stay; they have gained more traction in warmer climates; security, snow, movement between buildings – all create logistical issues – figure out other offerings; indoor locations like churches have advantages in that they are one warm space; drug use on campus can be a complicated issue with pallet villages; would require a carefully coordinated effort and there may be some faster/safer ways to get there; we don’t have a lot of great data on what the barriers are for individuals that keep people from accessing shelter; pallet shelters require that services be set up – they won’t set up a village unless services are set up; look to other communities that have used this as part of the solution