Maine Continuum of Care Board Meeting

May 2, 2024

Members: Cullen Ryan, Vickey Merrill, Awa Conteh, Erin Kelly, Dan Hodgkins, Kelly Watson, Chris Bicknell, Norm Maze, Mike Merrill, Jerry Botta, Ginny Dill, Beverly, Wes Phinney, Donna Kelley, Aaron Geyer, Cheryl Harkins, Sharon Jordan, Scott Tibbitts,
Guests: Rori Durham, Brittany Odom, Adrianne Leahey, Nicole Libare, Eric Gammons, Michael Shaughnessy, April Reed

1. Welcome, Adoption of Minutes & Moment of Silence
- A moment of silence was observed for all those who have passed away while unhoused.
- ***Wes introduced a motion to approve minutes from March (there was no meeting in April). Awa seconded. There was no discussion. No one abstained. No one against. Minutes were unanimously approved as written.***
- **Adjustments to the Agenda:** We have received a request for a Letter of Support from Community Care for their FYSB Application to develop a Maternity Group Home. **A Motion to provide the letter was made, seconded, and unanimously approved.**

2. Review of Board Retreat Discussion and Recommendations:
Purpose of the Board (Structure and Decision Making)
    - In light of recent meetings with HUD and HUD TA, which occurred after the Retreat, we need to incorporate their guidance and recommendations into any future planning.
    - The Board is supposed to guide but tends to micromanage the CoC.
    - Whenever it is not clear which body should vote on something – which happens a lot – the CoC usually defers to the Board. The long delays in decision making are part of the reason things get bogged down. But if the CoC makes all the decisions, does the Board just rubber stamp everything? If the CoC does something that is not in compliance the Board should do something. But if it's the same people leading both, where's the oversight?
    - Can the Board reshape the Board? Do we need others working on this?
    -The Board should help bring resources to the CoC. How? What resources?
    - The CoC used to do everything – make all the decisions – then HUD said we needed a Board, and over time, power and decision making has shifted in that direction.
    - We used to struggle to get people to CoC meetings. Now we have lots of people attending -maybe too many to be able to reach agreement and make decisions.
    - Committees should be empowered to make some decisions – they are smaller, they study the topic, they are in the best position to make informed decisions – but all they can do is make recommendations.
    -There is a Governance and Structure Work Group to address some of these issues now.
Setting Norms - It is OK to disagree
    - This is not just about listening to other views, then going back to the way we have always done things. It is about being willing to explore new ideas, try new things.
    -People don't feel comfortable speaking up if they know they will be the only one saying something different. We need to encourage and support new and different views – we may not always act on them, but we need to create an environment where people feel they can say what they think.
    -We do not always need to all agree 100% on everything before we act. A good rule of thumb is that if you can agree with something 80% - be ok with that.
Sense of Urgency
    -So many of our conversations seem to go around in circles – we need to move forward.

-The decisions we make can impact people's lives. It is frustrating to see so much time being spent on things that do not directly lead to helping people in need.

-If the roles of Committees are made clear, we can task them to do the work, make whatever decisions are needed to get that work done, and keep moving, without waiting for the full CoC or Board every time they have a question.

Empower People to Participate

-Agendas are usually packed full of items and timed to the minute – that doesn't leave any room for open ended discussion. When people do bring up other things, or the discussion goes off on a tangent, the meetings run out of time or run over. Some open space should be built in to allow for open discussion and actual debate – and this should be encouraged as a natural part of the process – not seen as disruptive.

-This is related to it being ok to disagree – it's also ok to speak up, ask questions, offer suggestions and new ideas.

-We need to be more inclusive in general, but especially with PWLE. Having remote meetings has eliminated the need for them to travel, but there may still be issues around connectivity – having the equipment and access to internet.

-We need a way to collect and analyze feedback from PWLE throughout our system on what is or is not working – what helps, what doesn't – where should we focus now?

System Mapping

-We need to know what housing resources are available. We don't even have all our CoC-Funded resources in CES yet, and that's only a tiny portion of all the units in our Housing Inventory. There are also thousands of non-dedicated units that should still be included as potential options because they take vouchers.

-Knowing what's available will help us monitor inflow and outflow.

-Our "System" is not just units – it is shelters, services, navigators, access to information. It is the way people move through the process of exiting homelessness and securing stable housing. It is the way we all communicate and interact and share information.

-Some expressed concerns about MaineHousing being both the Collaborative Applicant and the HMIS Lead. This is actually a very common arrangement for CoCs, and is not a conflict, in and of itself. What is it that people think is problematic? Are there specific things that can be addressed or is it just a matter of perception?

Resource Inventory

- [some of this was also covered above]

-We lack resources – housing, services, funding – HUD limits the amount we get. True, the amount of CoC funding we get from HUD is limited, but individual agencies and projects also have to secure Match funding from other sources, and even that is usually not enough to fully support their work, so they apply for other grants, seek out donations, do fundraising – as a CoC we have never coordinated any efforts to apply for funding other than what HUD provides to us. SHC and other groups advocate for policy changes that might make more state or federal funds available, but that is not the same. Right now, it's every agency for themselves.

-We have not conducted a meaningful Gaps and Needs analysis in years – the last time MaineHousing brought in a consultant for one, after months of research and interviews and combing over data, they told us we needed more housing. What do other CoCs do?

-HUD is promoting 'Move-on Strategies" – if people in PSH no longer need the service component, work with Public Housing Authorities to shift them to another permanent rental subsidy. That sounds good in theory, but PHA have to agree, and set aside vouchers for this, which means telling people who have been on their waitlist for years

that they will need to wait longer. How can we help projects help their clients move on in other positive ways?

-We need to really look at our CoC funded Projects – are they performing? Are they still meeting the highest needs? Are they still the best possible use of the limited funding we get from HUD? Should we re-allocate? Could they secure other funding?

-We need to map resources by Hub for better coordination. We also need to be sure all the projects on the HIC are categorized correctly and get them all into CES.

-We need to be more transparent – silos can create inconsistencies that appear as gaps.

-We need to get a better sense of what is coming – what is being developed and when it will become available and open to receive referrals – and we need to get new units/projects into CES right from the start.

-We need to track turnover at existing projects to know when there is an opening.

[We got about halfway through the Retreat Review – we will continue with this next month.]

3. BRAP Discussion

-Ginny shared slides outlining the concerns and the decision tree that DHHS used to arrive at their conclusion.

- BRAP is defined by the State as Transitional Housing – it is important that this not change - but the Department recognizes that BRAP does not meet the HUD definition of TH, as it does not have a 24-month limit.

-While BRAP does serve clients who were homeless at entry, that is not a requirement of the program, nor is it their primary target population.

-In part because of these conflicting definitions, having BRAP in HMIS is negatively impacting some System Performance Measures and other HUD reports.

-The Department considered three possible options: 1) Keep BRAP in HMIS as TH but try to sort out which clients to count and which not to. 2) Change it to PSH in HMIS, but again, have sort which client to include. 3) Remove BRAP from HMIS entirely, since it is not dedicated to homeless, does not fit the HUD definitions, and is negatively impacting reports.

-DHHS recommended the third option and the work group agreed that this seemed best.

-**A MOTION was made by Dan H., Seconded by Donna K., to remove BRAP from HMIS, and subsequently, from the PIT, HIC, Sys PMs, and other related reports. APPROVED without objection.**

4. System Performance Measures

Mike S. provided an update on the Inflow &Outflow of Maine's Homeless Response System.

Housing Problem Solving

- Served 37 households in March
- 54% were at risk of experiencing homelessness
- 43% were already experiencing homelessness
- 31 clients reported as having their issue resolved
- 84% resolution rate

Emergency Shelter Data

- March 2024
- 1321 persons served in HMIS shelters
- Emergency Shelters at 91% overall capacity
- 100.1% in Adult Shelters

- 80.8% in Family Shelters
- 68.5% in Youth Shelters
- 96 Exits to Permanent from ES
- Plus 7 exits to Transitional Housing
- 47.78% exit rate

Length of Time Homeless
- Still looking at the month of March
- 7 days or less = 600 people
- 8 to 14 days = 67 people
- 15 to 21 days = 47 people
- 22 to 30 days = 63 people
- 31 or more = everyone else (stays extending back beyond March 1st)

5. HMIS Updates

-MaineHousing's Procurement Policies recommend issuing RFP's for new vendors at least every 5 years. HMIS is way overdue. If there were only one real option, we could go with a "Sole Source" process to simply continue with the existing contract, but it is no secret that people are unhappy with WellSky, so it makes sense to explore other options. MaineHousing's IT Director could come to a meeting to explain what would be involved in the switch to a new HMIS vendor.

-Cullen's notes from the Board Retreat include the quote "Dump WellSky", so it seems a full RFP is the way to go.

-The software is one component, who operates it is another. The CoC should look at both of those things and see what other operators could offer – a university, for example.

-In light of earlier discussions about decision making, this should go to the full MCOC as their next Big Thinking Topic – there is a lot to consider.

-The question of who will be the HMIS Lead needs to be addressed first. There is no point in MaineHousing issuing an RFP to contract with a new software vendor if some other entity is going to become the HMIS Lead.

6. MCOC Board Vacancies

-There are currently two seats on the Board that need to be filled. One seat has been vacant since Kate Easter of MCEDV stepped down some time ago. Hanna Gregory, also of MCEDV, expressed interest in serving on the Board. Chris B. made a **MOTION to nominate Hanna – this was seconded by Jerry B. (and several others) and unanimously APPROVED**. The other opening is due to Chris's original term expiring. Chris expressed his willingness to continue to serve. No other nominations were received. **Donna K. made a motion to nominate Chris, seconded by Wes, also APPROVED unanimously.**

-Cullen used this opportunity to point out that he has been the President of the Board since its creation in 2017. There has been a lot of discussion lately about the need for change and creating opportunities for new leadership to emerge. He is happy to help, whether that be by continuing in this role, or by stepping out of the way. He cautioned that we are in the middle of

a lot of work with HUD, so if people did not feel this was the right time for such a change, he could stay on, at least until that work was done. <mark>He offered to stay on for 6 months throughout this transition.</mark>

-A member pointed out that in the full MCOC, there is a policy of one vote per agency, but that rule does not apply at the Board level. With several agencies now having more than one Board member, perhaps it should?

-The Board and the full CoC need support. Can MaineHousing provide additional staff to do the work that we used to have a consultant for? It would be helpful if the CoC can detail exactly what it is they need, then MaineHousing can if determine current staff have the capacity to accommodate that.

-Just because someone had been around a long time doesn't mean they can't be innovative. While giving new people opportunities is good, we don't want to appear ageist either.

-This announcement is unexpected – and many members have already left this meeting, as it has run past the usual time. People will need time to think about this – to see who might be willing to take this on. Are other Officer positions also open? <mark>Is Cullen's current term as President up (as was originally believed to be the case and hence the agenda item and Cullen offering to continue on for 6 months vs. just announcing he is stepping down in 6 months) or does he have one more year left in his term (based on a quick review of the Bylaws during the meeting)?</mark> Officers serve 3-year terms – which may not exactly align with their term as Board Members. [It was subsequently determined that no other officer terms were ending, nor was Cullen's current term expiring, <mark>his intent is still to ultimately</mark> step aside <mark>prior to the expiration of his term</mark> to allow the Board to elect new Leadership.]

-It was asked if the full MCOC should vote on this? The full MCOC nominates people to be on the Board, but the Board Members elect Board Officers from among the Membership.

-That so many of the Board members present do not fully understand how this should work points to the need to clarify and document our processes – we should record all meetings, so information doesn't get lost. If we record, we need to be clear why – is it just to help with compiling the minutes, or will recordings be posted or otherwise made public?

-It was suggested we open nominations for the position of President of the Board; that we email Board Members seeking nominations between now and our next meeting; that nominations be sent to Scott; and that Cullen preside over the next meeting, where the vote will occur.

-Chris B. nominated Erin K. for the position. Wes P. Seconded. Erin said she would need time to consider this.

-Norm M. nominated Awa C. for the position. Wes P. Seconded this as well. Awa accepted the nomination.

7. Conflict of Interest Policy

-There are inconsistencies between our written COI policy and how we actually operate. Some members/agencies do abstain or recuse themselves from certain votes, but others do not. Even when they do not vote, they still participate in and potentially influence the discussions. Some funded agencies detail 'potential' conflicts on their COI statements, but others do not.

-There is no enforcement mechanism, and therefore, no consequence for not following policy.

-According to HUD Guidance, people who work for funded agencies should not even be involved in any discussions regarding funding decisions. Not just not vote. We need to dig into this and revise our policies accordingly.

8. PIT and HIC
Scott explained that the deadline for CoC to submit their Point-in-Time and Housing Inventory Data to HUD through the new HDX 2.0 system – though moved, twice – falls before the next full MCOC meeting. Technically, the CoC must approve the submission of the data, so he is asking the group to provide that approval today, with apologies for the short notice and urgency of the request. Scott reviewed some of the 'highlights', the most significant being that the total PIT number being reported this year is about half what was reported last year. While this sounds good – it really isn't, and we need to be very careful how we present this information. We have not really reduced homelessness by 50% in the last year. Funding that allowed for the use of Hotels as emergency shelter is now gone – resulting in more than 1200 fewer ES beds. We do not know where all those people are now, but it is not likely that they all secured safe stable housing. Also, as discussed earlier, removing BRAP from our TH inventory means we are no longer counting those 530+ beds. At least those folks are likely still being housed by BRAP. We need to be sure we explain the context surrounding these numbers before we share them, and people draw the wrong conclusions – like thinking we don't really need more shelter funding if we only have half as many people experiencing homelessness now. We can talk more about framing that conversation next time, but first, we need approval to submit the data to HUD. **Jerry B. made a MOTION for the Board to approve submitting the 2024 PIT and HIC data. Seconded by Erin K. APPROVED without objection.**

9. Coordinated Entry
We are still referring to our CES as a "pilot". It is, in fact, fully implemented statewide. **Donna K. made a MOTION to remove the "Pilot" designation from documents and discussions of CES. Seconded by Scott. APPROVED without objection.**

7. Big Thinking Topic
- To Record or not to Record our meetings

8. Agenda Setting
- Board Retreat Recap Continued
- Board President Nominations
- Plan on another 3-hour meeting to cover everything
- All were invited to email Cullen, or Scott with suggestions for next month's agenda.