

REPORT OF THE SPECIAL FINANCE COMMITTEE

JANUARY 24, 2024

A meeting of the Special Finance Committee was held on Wednesday, January 24, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Mayor Jim Donchess, Chairman, presided.

Members of the Committee present: Mayor Jim Donchess
Alderman Patricia Klee, Vice Chair
Alderman-at-Large Ben Clemons
Alderman-at-Large Melbourne Moran, Jr.
Alderman Tyler Gouveia
Alderman Chris Thibodeau

Members not in Attendance: Alderwoman-at-Large Gloria Timmons

Also in Attendance: Alderman Richard A. Dowd
Alderman Tim Sennott
Alderman Derek Thibeault
Amy Girard, Purchasing Manager
Tim Cummings, Administrative Services Director
Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director
LaTonya Muccioli, Housing Services Officer
Steve Bolton, Corporation Counsel

COMMUNICATIONS

From: Amy Girard, Purchasing Manager

Re: Winter Overnight Warming Station Support Services in the amount of \$97,000 funded from 55810 Assistance-Shelter/Opioid Abatement Trust Fund

MOTION BY ALDERMAN GOUVEIA TO ACCEPT, PLACE ON FILE, AND APPROVE A CONTRACT FOR A WINTER OVERNIGHT WARMING STATION SUPPORT SERVICES TO INCLUDE STAFFING, PAYROLL, HR, CREATION OF SOPs, EMERGENCY STAFFING COVERAGE, TIME-SENSITIVE CLEANING, AND OTHER MANAGERIAL ELEMENTS TO AN OVERNIGHT WARMING STATION WITH EAST COAST EVOLUTION LEADERSHIP IN THE AMOUNT OF \$97,000. FUNDING WILL BE THROUGH DEPARTMENT: 171 COMMUNITY SERVICES; FUND 55810 ASSISTANCE-SHELTER/OPIOID ABATEMENT TRUST FUND

ON THE QUESTION

Mayor Donchess

And I believe Miss Bagley is here to speak to this item.

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

Yes, good evening. Director Bobbie Bagley of the Division of Public Health and Community Services. The contract that we're asking you to approve will allow for us to provide additional shelter support overnight as we have been experiencing over the past few months. In December, the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter opened up it's extended overnight shelter and warming station. Typically we don't see the numbers increase as quickly as we have at this point in time. They are running at capacity. As a result of that, we're looking to extend additional overnight shelter availability for those who are unhoused. In particular, using the opioid abatement funds. The largest number of individuals that we have been providing services to do have substance use disorder as one of their major issues and so it allows us to use this funding according to the RSA that's written for that particular funding stream.

The goal is to as you have noticed our weather keeps changing. It's getting colder to make sure that we can get people housed and off of the street at night if they're willing to use the shelter space. Because the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter is running at capacity, once they get to a certain number that's approved by the Fire Marshal's Office, they cannot let additional folks in and we don't want to have people out in the street overnight without protection.

Mayor Donchess

All right. Just to provide a little more information, this is of course at the UU Church on basically Canal Street.

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

Yes.

Mayor Donchess

They are donating the space but we will reimburse them for their expenses: electricity, heat, coffee, and other things which we expect will be about \$3,000.

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

Yes.

Mayor Donchess

This is for the staffing of that facility. We would be using the same provider as provides staff support in Manchester at a warming station shelter there. That's all correct?

Bobbie Bagley, Director, Division of Public Health and Community Services

That is correct.

Mayor Donchess

And we expect more cold nights where the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter capacity may be full and therefore extra capacity would be needed to keep people out of the cold.

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

Correct.

Mayor Donchess

We have a contract coming but right now we don't have a contract to present but it would be very basic. The point of holding the special meeting is we expect come weather certainly before our next Finance meeting and we were hoping the Committee would consider this on an emergency basis.

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

Yes and if I could add in addition Mayor, we did have an opportunity - LaTonya Muccioli who is our new Housing Services Officer, we had a chance to go by the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter just the other day to check out the warming station that they have there. The way that they have things set up right now is that the mats are less than three feet apart. They've already experienced a COVID. I don't want to call it an outbreak but it was two cases of COVID that then affected their staff. So once that happens and the staff can't go to work, so that's also going to reduce their capacity to provide the services. So if we have this additional shelter, it allows there not to be such a large number of folks that are at that one particular overnight shelter and we can spread more people out. So we also want to reduce the spread of COVID as we're putting this in place as well. So I just wanted to share that information since we just learned that this week.

Mayor Donchess

All right. Alderman Clemons.

Alderman Clemons

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. So just a few questions through you to Director Bagley. One is how many people can this shelter,

this proposed shelter, I don't want to say house because it's not a housing situation, right, so how many people can go in there at once?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

So at the UU Church, what we're asking for is an extended warming station which is not the same as a shelter. So there won't be mats on the floor. What it will allow for is individuals to go in overnight. There will be tables that are set up and people can sit and at least stay warm inside. We're expecting for there to be an additional up to about 25 to 30 people that they can take there.

Mayor Donchess

Yes, go ahead.

Alderman Clemons

My second question is about the funding. So this is \$97,000 from the Opioid Abatement Trust Fund. How much money is in that account right now?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

So from the reports that I receive from our Finance, right now it shows that there is about \$336,000 in there at this particular time.

Alderman Clemons

Follow up.

Mayor Donchess

Yes.

Alderman Clemons

So the \$97,000 will get us how long will that last?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

So we're asking for these services to be provided until April 30th.

Alderman Clemons

So it's \$97,000 until April 30th and then if we wanted to do this again next year it would be more expensive. It would probably be more expense, right, because we'd want to do I would assume in the fall?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

So it would cost more if we were to do this next year because we would start it earlier and probably the cost will go up with the cost of staffing. So it will probably go up next year, yes.

Alderman Clemons

I guess my final question on this would be do we intend to use that trust fund again later on this year for the same purpose?

Bobbie Bagley, Director, Public Health and Community Services Director

For the same purpose?

Alderman Clemons

Yeah. So in other words, I assume this is something that we want to do, right, on a continual basis? So is the plan to go back into the Opioid Abatement Trust Fund to fund that next year or later this year?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

So as far as later this year, all of the emergency shelters that are opening across the State will all close on April 20th. If we wanted to extend any additional shelter space, that would be something that we would have to further speak with the UU Church about because we've also agreed with them that this would close on April 20th. If we needed additional funding, the funding in the Opioid Abatement Trust can be used if the majority of the folks that are using the space show that they have opioid disorder that we can actually work with them around referring them other services. So that funding is really restricted to individuals that have opioid use disorder.

Mayor Donchess

Okay. I think the question is if after the spring comes and then comes the fall of 2024 – November/December it starts to get cold again - if this is successful and if there were a proposal to again offer a warming shelter possibly at the UU Church for the 2024-2025 winter would you anticipate again going to the Opioid Trust Fund dollars in order to fund that second year of this program?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

If that funding would be available and, again, it would be under the conditions that the majority of folks that we are providing that shelter space for are individuals that are struggling with opioid as a disorder, yes.

Alderman Clemons

Okay. I'll just end my comments with thank you for answering the questions. I'll end my comments with, you know, we need to help people and I'm for this but what I don't want to see happen is us to do this and then forget about it come September or August. We need to plan to have this again. So that's where I'm going to leave my comments.

Mayor Donchess

Alderman Klee.

Alderman Klee

Thank you. I'm going to piggyback onto what Alderman Clemons had to say. I think that it should be part of the budgeting process as a city as a whole. I'm not putting this on any one particular person. I think we have to look at it as this is going to be an ongoing issue. This isn't the first time we've had to talk about warming stations and you've been right there to do everything you can, so thank you for that. Thank you, you did answer some of the questions I already had. The hours of operation for it is it going to be an all-day thing or is it only in the evening?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

So the extended warming station that we're looking to set up at the UU Church will run from 9:00 to 6:00 am and the reason why we're looking for it in the evening is because Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter has the 24/7 so they're open all day.

Alderman Klee

May I continue?

Mayor Donchess

Yes.

Alderman Klee

In reading through this and knowing that this is done I think in Manchester, Concord, a few other places, this is actually a third party so we're paying them for their staffing and so on it's not city employees that are doing this, correct?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

Correct, this is not city employees.

Alderman Klee

Right so it's this third party and so on.

I just want to kind of reiterate what I said at the beginning and what Alderman Clemons had said - budget process is right around the corner. I think as a city and I know Alderman Lopez has been asking for these for a long time and things aren't getting better as far as the unhoused population needing something like this and thank you. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Donchess

Alderman Gouveia.

Alderman Gouveia

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Just two quick questions, sorry if you already answered them. I guess at the point how often is the Soup Kitchen at capacity and can we expect this new warming station to be at capacity frequently or what do we expect?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

So with the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter, we actually didn't expect them to reach capacity so quickly. At the same time we did because during the summer we realized that there was a large number of unhoused individuals throughout the City of Nashua. We've also realized that there have been individuals that are coming from other towns as well. People go where the resources are, and they go where they're also taken care of, and where they are respected, and where there's compassionate services being provided. So we've had an increase in number of folks coming to Nashua for different reasons.

Last year when the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter opened their extended shelter, the numbers didn't start going up until around February. It opened December 1st and within a matter of weeks they were already at capacity. So they expected to run between 28 to 30. Last year, they were averaging about 26 and they in December were already at 28 and sometimes they had over 30 individuals there.

Our goal is to kind of decrease that load on them and so we don't know how many people will actually access the UU warming station but they will be able to go there rather than having to stay out in cars and stay out on the street where they have been staying right now. So once they know that's available to them, we're expecting people will utilize it.

Alderman Gouveia

Great, thank you.

Mayor Donchess

Alderman Moran.

Alderman Moran

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Director Bagley is this a low barrier? Will they be escorted out if they're under the influence or?

Bobbie Bagley, Public Health and Community Services Director

All of the emergency shelters that are opened are supposed to be low barrier. The UU Church's warming station will be low barrier.

Alderman Moran

Thank you to the UU Church for offering their space for free. Other than \$3,000, that's a very kind and generous of them to do that.

I do think this is a little bit too little, too late. I absolutely support it. I do agree with Alderman Clemons and my colleague from Ward 3 regarding the need for this to be initiated earlier in the fall technically mid-November/mid-December and I'm just disappointed that we're doing this now versus back in December. Because I know I've been a practicing social worker here since 2018. I was well aware prior to the shelters cold hours opening up that they were already at capacity before they even opened it. If I had access to that data or knowledge and that Alderman Lopez also had access to that and I believe I communicated that through meetings with the city staff that knowing that then, why did we take until almost February to do it now? So I'm just concerned that we didn't treat my unhoused constituents with dignity, and respect, and we waited too late.

Mayor Donchess

Alderman Thibeault.

Alderman Thibeault

Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Mayor. So I'm not on this Committee but I do have maybe a question or a concern. So I think this is the right thing to do obviously. It's one way of saving people in this turn you're saving them from the weather and keeping them in a safe place. I do believe that this is something we're going to do that it's not necessarily a temporary thing, right? We're going to do it hopefully next year. When I look at the finances for it, three or four years this fund is pretty much gone. I'm sure we'll get more stuff into it but over time it's going to whittle down with \$97,000 every year, it's going to go down. So my concern is only all right we're going to do this, it's the right thing to do, how are we then going to still have money to work on the opioid crisis in the city? This part doesn't solve that, it just helps those people get some shelter.

How do we help them with the opioid problem? Because that's not getting better either and it's not a city thing it's a State thing. It's bad all over. So my only concern is over time are we going to have enough money to combat the issue that we're trying to solve. It's almost like we've got all these things and we're trying to grab from this pot but I hope they pass it. I think they're going to pass it tonight but I just hope we have an eye on what we can do to solve that problem. I know if it was easy, it would be done. So I know it's not an easy problem but I am concerned that that continues to get worse and I'm afraid this year could be another crazy year as we get closer to the November election so thank you.

Mayor Donchess

Alderman Klee.

Alderman Klee

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Not a question so much as a comment. Prior to coming here, I went to the crime watch meeting at the Amherst Street School. I was speaking to a couple of people there - one from the FBI agent as well as some of the NPD and Somersworth has a facility that they had built specifically for this and they reached capacity almost immediately because other communities were sending their unhoused there. So as Director Bagley had said, this does, you know, I know we're going to hear people that are going to say build it and they will come but the problem is we have so many here that we have to take care of. We can't just put our fingers in our ears and ignore it. I really do want to see this get budgeted so that we're not attacking the trust fund as Alderman Thibeault had mentioned so I just want to reiterate that. Thank you.

Mayor Donchess

Anyone else? Well I think you understand the motion.

MOTION CARRIED

Mayor Donchess

Thank you very much Ms. Bagley.

Now Ms. Bagley introduced her briefly but could Ms. Muccioli stand up please. Why don't you come up to the microphone. This is LaToyna Muccioli. I've only met her once but she just started and she is the new Housing Services Officer who will have two primary duties - areas of responsibility. One - helping find housing for the unhoused - the people that the Community Health workers are locating and targeting for the need for housing; and number two will be helping

with the Housing Trust Fund which Matt Sullivan staffs and which we want to use to maximum effectiveness. So maybe since we have a couple of minutes would you mind telling us a little about yourself.

LaTonya Muccioli, Housing Services Officer

Sure. So I started last Tuesday, so I'm brand new. I'm still learning, getting to know everybody. Prior to my role here, I was the Director of Elder Services at Gateways Community Services in Nashua also known as the Area Agency of Greater Nashua. My interest with housing came about through that role. Unfortunately, we serviced a lot of individuals throughout the State of New Hampshire and housing was one of the primary issues that impacted health directly. The New Hampshire shelter system does not really assist individuals that need personal care or are unable to care for themselves. So these folks are kind of left in the wind to kind of figure out where do we put them. Often times City Welfare puts them in motels but that's really not the solution. They need more care than being in a motel room. So that's where my interested in the issue with housing comes from just because our elders and individuals with disabilities seem to be a forgotten population in terms of assisting with housing.

Mayor Donchess

All right. Well we really appreciate your joining us and we look forward to working with you over the next few years.

LaTonya Muccioli, Housing Services Officer

Thank you. Happy to be here. Nice to meet you all.

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN KLEE TO ADJOURN
MOTION CARRIED**

The Special Finance Committee meeting was adjourned at 7:22 p.m.

Alderman Tyler Gouveia
Committee Clerk