

SUBSTANDARD LIVING CONDITIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 11, 2021

A meeting of the Budget Review Committee was held Thursday, February 11, 2021, at 7:02 p.m. via teleconference.

Chairman Schmidt

As Chairman of the Substandard Living Conditions Special Committee, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, I am confirming that we are:

Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means:

To access Zoom, please refer to the agenda or the City's website for the meeting link.

To join by phone dial: 1-929-205-6099 Meeting ID: that's probably not the same meeting ID, and do I have it? I don't I apologize.

The public may also view the meeting via Channel 16.

We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting, through public postings. Instructions have also been provided on the City of Nashua's website at www.nashuanh.gov and publicly noticed at City Hall and Nashua Public Library.

If anyone has a problem accessing the meeting via phone or Channel 16, please call 603-821-2049 and they will help you connect.

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting via the methods mentioned above, the meeting will be adjourned and rescheduled. Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote.

Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance. When each member states their presence, please also state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-To-Know Law.

Alderman Jette called the roll and asked them to state the reason he or she could not attend, confirmed that they could hear the proceedings, and stated who was present with him or her.

The roll call was taken with 5 members of the Substandard Living Conditions Special Committee present:

Alderman Jan Schmidt, Chairman
Alderman Ernest Jette, Vice Chair (arrived after roll call)
Alderman Thomas Lopez
Alderwoman Elizabeth Lu
Alderman Skip Cleaver

Also in Attendance: Alderman Patricia Klee
Justin Kates, Emergency Management Director
Bob Mack, Welfare Officer/Manager
Reverend Kristy Besada

Alderwoman Lu

Madam Chairman, if you'd like, I would be happy to read the meeting ID, I have it here.

Chairman Schmidt

Oh that would be super, yes thank you.

Alderwoman Lu

The meeting ID is 87822859455 and the passcode is 730844.

Alderman Schmidt

Super, thanks so much.

ROLL CALL

Chairman Schmidt

I am present and alone in the room.

Alderwoman Lu

Alderman Jette?

Alderman Schmidt

He has told me he will be late this evening.

Alderman Lopez

I can see and hear everybody, I am here, there are no people in this room and I am hear because we are having remote meetings due to COVID-19.

Alderwoman Lu

And the Clerk, Elizabeth Lu is here, alone, I can hear everything. Alderman Skip Cleaver?

Alderman Cleaver

I am here and I am alone and practicing social distancing.

Alderwoman Lu

That makes 4 out of 5.

DISCUSSION

- Current plans on the challenge of handling city emergencies such as fires and the plans that have been put in place to manage these events

Chairman Schmidt recognized Justin Kates and Bob Mack.

Alderman Schmidt

Thanks very much. And also in attendance we have Emergency Management Justin Kates and Welfare Office Manager Bob Mack. And we also have Donna Marceau and Matthew Plante and Reverend Kristie, sorry I can't read your name it's too small. And we also have Alderman Patricia Klee. Thanks very much for being here. I think what I'd like to do is take turns, open up and discuss the issue that we had talked about earlier about our Emergency Planning and what we do in case of and how do we notify people and what is the process? Should we start with Director Kates?

Justin Kates, Emergency Management

Sure. So good evening. So I will kind of give an overview of the current emergency plans that we have for the tenant displacement, large tenant displacement. And then I think what will be probably best is if I turn it over to Bob to talk about maybe what had happened prior to me coming on board back in 2011. A lot of this stuff predates me, it's actually back to Kathy Hersch's days working for the City when they looked to try and find ways to deal with Code Enforcement violations, Health Officer related activities where they had to condemn a building and try and figure out what they were going to do with folks who were no longer able to stay in those areas. So currently our process is if we have some sort of emergency situation that creates a problem at one of the large housing location within the community, whether it be an apartment complex, rooming house, anything like that, if the situation is significant enough for the Fire Department or the Health Officer or Code Enforcement to deem it to be a large situation what they will do is they'll call our office, Emergency Management. And we will respond to the scene, we check to see really the number of people who have been impacted by the displacement.

Things we are looking for are how many units, how many people within each unit. We want to know whether there's any medical needs or mobility impairments, whether they have any household pets. Really the key things so we know what types of resources are going to be necessary as we try and find locations for folks. The really big thing is, is we typically don't get involved if it is any less than 5 housing units. Most situations that we see across the community, the normal house fire or something like that are handled pretty quickly just by the Fire Department contacting the Red Cross and having them respond to the scene. So really we only get involved if it's something that's a significant scale; our rule of thumb is 5 units. Certainly if the Fire Department is having any trouble reaching the Red Cross they can contact us and get help. We are there to try and provide whatever support is necessary.

So after we have identified the circumstances and really what we have got going on, the number one thing that we try and do is see if those people have somewhere else to go? Do they have a friend? Do they have a family member? Do they have somewhere that they can immediately stay at for that short period of time? This is really important because what we are doing is we are triaging the people who have been displaced so that we have less people to deal with. If we automatically just say, you know everybody needs a place to stay it makes the task of trying to find an alternate location much more difficult. So always the first step is "Do you have somewhere else to go that you can take off to"? The other big reason for that is because people typically are more comfortable staying with a friend or family member than trying to find some other location that they are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with. So that's really reason we do that stuff first.

The second thing that we will try and do is see what types of insurance coverage they have. Now this isn't as successful as we would hope in most cases because primarily the people that need assistance don't have any coverage to provide them with a hotel stay or something like that. Their renter's insurance doesn't cover it, they don't have renter's insurance. So we typically end up skipping over this stuff.

However, this is another reason why many people end up finding a place to stay pretty quickly after being displaced and it doesn't involve our office at all because they have some coverage to provide them with a place to stay. Now if it has been determined that this is a significant incident, one of the first things that we will do is we will see if it's fire related or not, and that's an important reason because the Red Cross only responds to assist with some sort of a major fire. So one of the problems that we've seen in recent events where there's been a displacement of residents has been that it is not related to a fire. We had the issue over at the Canterbury Apartments the one time where it was the roof was about to collapse because of the snow load. We've had incidents where there's been damage due to pipes bursting. The circumstance we had over on Main Street this year or 2020 was the façade coming off the front of the building.

So none of these things have anything to do with a fire, so if you were to call Red Cross to come out and assist they are not going to be able to do anything unfortunately. So that's really where we determine kind of what types of resources are available to handle a large displacement. So in the event that it's not a fire, what we will do is I will reach out to Bob depending on what time of day it is, if it is during the day there are a lot more options for us during business hours. If it is on a weekend or at night, I will typically call Bob up via cell and we will try and figure out what resources are available that we might be able to connect people to whether it be one of the existing community shelters, we will just try to find some alternatives. And I'll let Bob talk more about some of the options that are available in the community after I finish going through this sequence of events.

The other thing we would do at this point is we would connect with, there's a new group it is called Community Connections, and this is – some of you may have participated in these meetings. It is being run by the United Way. It's a sort of offshoot of something that we've had in the City for a while but are voluntary organizations active in disaster. This is, you know, faith based groups, local non-profits and they have resources that they can provide during an emergency. And in some cases that might be shelter, it might be things that are necessary for folks who had to be taken out of their apartments or their rooms. So that would be where we would stop. We would basically try and find the right resources for those individuals.

Now one of the things that we would also look to see and this is before we commit any municipal resources is we would check with the landlord to see if they can place them. Now this is really dependent on the circumstances of the landlord. And in the case of one of the corporate apartment complexes, they may have additional space at one of their other locations. They may also have additional space within the building or the campus that the incident occurred. That's what happened over at Canterbury, we were able to move people to other buildings within the campus. They might have like a demo unit or something like that, that they can put people up in. But this has actually been the way that we have handled a great majority of the resident displacement is really by having the landlord provide some sort of assistance to the people who have been displaced. In most cases that's because their insurance will cover any motel expenses or anything like that for the residents. So it's really essential for us to try and find out what types of resources the landlord has before we do anything, you know, committing any City resources to relocating people. And that's in most cases where the event stops. The landlord gets motel rooms for the people and from there it is no problem after that. That's what happened most recently with the Main Street event.

In the event that the landlord is not able to put people up and it is not a fire, that's when we would start working to try and find some way for the City to handle it. It might be opening up a school gymnasium, setting up an emergency shelter. That's sort of our last resort and the reason for that is because that's not a permanent solution. It really creates a lot of problems for the school because now they can't do athletics or whatever the case may be. We've also done some alternatives where we've used, I think a good example is the incident that occurred on West Hollis Street a couple of years ago, it was like an 8-alarm fire. The approach there was St. Louis Church as a temporary shelter for folks. That worked out ok, it didn't impact the schools thankfully so we were able to use their recreation facility there at St. Louis Church.

So the final piece and I guess this is probably a good point to be able to turn it over to Bob is really the case management aspect of it. So most of these things, as one would expect, they happen at night, they happen on the weekends when none of us are around and so we've got to respond and try to figure out what is going on. But as soon as possible, we want to try and get them into Welfare to do Case Management. And that's where we start looking at the available resources, the Welfare or other partners has to deal with folks who may have been displaced. So Bob, I don't know if you want to talk, you might be able to provide some history prior to me coming on board because I think you may have been involved in that and probably also to talk a little bit about what community resources exist and what the Case Management process is.

Bob Mack, City Welfare Officer

Sure, if I may, Madam Chair. Bob Mack, I am the Welfare Officer for the City of Nashua. Basically as Director Kates has indicated the City has some plans in place for different responses based on different – the scale of whatever the emergency situation is. And that has a lot to do with what the response may be. As you mentioned, if it's a fire incident, the Fire Department is involved, oftentimes Red Cross gets involved, that's the primary responders. If there are just a few people that may be involved, a couple of units, it may be obviously a lesser need for a response and the resources, the triage, what resources do the tenants have, those are all things that are looked at. If they don't have resources then we may be contacted and kind of go through a list of options. We do some intake assessment, what are the immediate needs right now. Do you have a place to stay? As Director Kates said, "is there someone you can stay with that you are comfortable staying for a period of time and you can reconnect with us in a day or two and we can work on more longer term solutions". That's kind of how a lot of it works is we identify the need and then we respond accordingly.

I think prior to Director Kates coming on board, the City had developed some Emergency Preparedness Plans and we had various plans at the public health level and then at the City level as well. That has developed over time but really what I think we are looking at and most recently and something that kind of our Welfare Department on a day-to-day basis is deal with people that are displaced; whether they are displaced because of an eviction situation or because some of the things that we are talking about. It could be a fire, it could be a lack of heat situation; we actually got a call earlier this afternoon because a tenant had been dealing with a no heat issue for actually over a month and it just got to point where they were running out of resources. Code Enforcement got involved, so then they reach out to us and say, "We've got this tenant" and we gather the information and then we say, "OK what do we need to do next? What resources do they have?" If they have exhausted resources we have them complete our application process and we proceed accordingly.

In recent times, because of the current COVID situation and the homeless situation and capacity issues utilizing mainstream shelters is not always a viable option. If it is something temporary and is available we may be able to utilize or we may most likely lead towards a temporary motel placement so that person has an immediate place to stay. And then as Director Kates was talking about the Case Management types of activities can take place where we have conversations with them, we talk about other resources in the community. We have to communicate with the landlord and this usually isn't us from the Welfare Department but this is often either Code Enforcement or maybe Environmental Health that is communicating with the landlord. It could be the Fire Marshall's office to say "OK what is the status of this facility so can tenants move back into these apartment units that they were living in prior to this event taking place". So there's a lot of moving parts that are involved with assessing these types of situations.

I know one of the larger scale events that we dealt with, I think it was about a year ago, it was one of the rooming houses where there was a fire and there was basically water damage because of the sprinkler, the suppression system did its job and put out the fire but it created a lot of water damage. So there were quite a few people that were displaced and the Fire Marshall's Office was there, Environmental Health was there and the health officer gave me a call and said, "Let's get Welfare down here to assess this and see what resources we have". Our Emergency Management Office was there as well, Red Cross was there but because it wasn't actually a fire they weren't doing as much, it was more of a water damage thing. They were observing, taking notes, and we were working on alternative resources. We were able to work with the landlord as Director Kates said, working with the landlord is key in a lot of these situations.

The landlord at that facility was very helpful and accommodated a number of folks, and we were able to find some alternatives for some other folks as well. And they responded relatively quickly to get that entire building back up to an occupancy status so that the people could move in, in a relatively short period of time. So that's kind of a big overview. I don't know if there are any specific questions.

Overlapping conversation

Chairman Schmidt

I'll be there are. I'll bet there are questions. Shall we start with Alderman Lopez?

Alderman Lopez

Hello. So I think one of my main questions is actually for Director Kates with regards to Legislative support. There have at times been concerns raised about there being City Ordinances that support particular stress factors during a crisis. So for example, does a landlord really have to put somebody up if they are not able to occupy their apartment? Are we able to manage or supervise that at the City level? Are there any gaps in terms of Legislation or Ordinance support that you think we need to put either amend or make modifications to, to make sure that when we have that crisis situation the City has the authority to intervene the way it needs to?

Director Kates

Yes those are very good questions. I have 6 items and I'll talk about each of them. I am going to preface this with these are from the perspective of Emergency Management. They are from the perspective of trying to deal with large numbers of people who have been displaced. When you start talking about some of the more routine displacements, it creates – these recommendations I am making actually may create more problems. So I am prefacing this from the standpoint, it is for a large emergency. In order to really move these forward, we would probably need to get people like Code Enforcement and Community Development and some of the other key players who deal with these like evictions on a more frequent basis to make sure that this would actually work properly. Also, I will note that some of these things are in progress right now because there has been some action taken and I'll just kind of mention that all of them are really essential for us.

So the first important thing that would be helpful for Legislation would be ensuring that landlords keep their contact information up-to-date; having a process to enforce that. It has not been too bad in the past because the Fire Department does keep pretty good contact information for these folks, but there are certainly circumstances where if we had – even some of these smaller houses that might be 3 or 4 units, the contact information for the landlord may not be up-to-date.

Another issue, number two, is landlords that don't respond quickly enough to emergencies. This has been a primary concern for the Fire Department, Building Safety, folks – they need those landlords to be able to come and provide access to certain areas in the building or they've got to make decisions. So we can't wait around for hours for these people to show up. So that's another big problem is just the speed of some of these landlords.

Number 3 is a Unified Landlord Emergency Information Database. This is one that is sort of in progress right now. Sarah Marchant is taking the lead on this and is working to put something together that the Fire Department and Police Department would have access to, to be able to see that information.

Number 4 is something that we would be able to set up around after hours, basically after hours emergency assistance for the Case Manager. Right now as I had mentioned, if something happens at night or weekend, I have got to call Bob up, it's kind of like we make it up as we go along kind of a situation. It's not the normal "you've got to down to Mulberry Street and go through the Case Management process". In the past, one of the ways that we have circumvented that was again back before my time but there were these things called

Motel Vouchers. And what would happen is the Fire Department, Environment Health, my office, basically any of the Emergency Services who may find themselves in a situation where there's a tenant who can't go back into the building. They could basically fill out one of these vouchers, the person could take it to one of three locations; there was Motel 8, Lillian's and Country Barn. And they would at least get a place to stay for like a night or two nights until Welfare could open up on Monday and then they could go through the formal process.

So that would be helpful. I know the Fire Department has been a really big supporter of having something like that set up so that way it is just an automatic thing; they don't have to make any phone calls after hours. They just fill out one of the vouchers and get it out. The problem has been and I think Bob can probably expand on this, is our relationships with those different entities, they've not accepted the rates that we had paid in the past for motel rooms. So that would probably be something we'd have to work out there.

Number 5, is if tenants are displaced one of the immediate things that we want to see happen is that the landlord would provide prorated rent and security back immediately. Again the benefit of that is now that person has at least some money to be able to go to a motel room, or something like that. What we have found is that folks have been displaced, their landlord has put them up somewhere – that's great but they don't get their deposit back or any of their rent back and so now they are struggling once the motel room runs out.

And then number 6, this one is more general, it's not really specifically to the actual housing component of it, but it is the City expense of some of this is the ability to recoup costs to the City due to landlord negligence. For any services provided that are beyond our typical emergency response. And that would be motel rooms, staffing details is a good example. For the incident that happened on Main Street, there was a Police Cruiser that was out front for an extended period of time blocking off a lane because there were concerns about the bricks falling into the road. So just having a standardized process for that so that it's – again it's not each individual Department having to try and recoup those costs; it's just a standard City process.

So those are the 6 items that have been discussed by the key stakeholders within the City that certainly Legislation would be helpful for. But again these are from Emergency Management's perspective. They would really need to be worked out especially with Code Enforcement to make sure that there are no efforts by residents to try and use these to their advantage against the landlord.

Chairman Schmidt

Yes, Tom, did you have a follow up?

Alderman Lopez

Yeah with regards to the City recouping loss and the potential impact that would have on a landlord, I mean with the 243 Main Street situation, the own the building, they caused the problem on paper that looks good. But at the same time if a landlord is potentially operating without a liquid cash flow, then they are not going to be in a place where they can meet certain needs. Do we have any, I don't even know how you would do this, but I know we require anybody who is putting out a sandwich board sign on Main Street to have like \$2 million dollars' worth of insurance coverage for it. Do we have any kind of mandate or would it be possible to mandate that landlords with more than 5 units provide proof of some kind of insurance or cash liquidity or an ability to actually reimburse if these things happen?

Director Kates

That's probably a Legal Counsel question.

Chairman Schmidt

Yes. That's probably something that the State would want to address; I am not sure we could address it as a City. That's a really good idea, we should think about that because that would help everyone involved, them having insurance to take care of this. Thank you, that's a good question Tom.

Alderman Lopez

I would imagine a lot of landlords don't necessarily expect to have a disaster like that but that's why you have the insurance in the first place. And they are often, particularly the ones we work with on Substandard Living Conditions, it's not like they are necessarily cruel, terrible human beings. They don't have a lot of cash liquidity based on their business model in order to address these issues. So they have to make compromises and a lot of times the tenants end up suffering.

Chairman Schmidt

Anyone else have a question? Yes Liz? Alderwoman Lu?

Alderwoman Lu

Thank you. Does everyone know whether landlords can, I mean a large landlord like that a multi-unit. It is legal to rent to others and not have some type of liability insurance or property insurance?

Director Kates

I don't know. Every circumstance that we've had where we've had a large displacement like that, the landlord has had insurance to be able to pay for folks to go to motel rooms. So it's never been an issue for any of the examples that we've had.

Chairman Schmidt

Yes, Mr. Mack?

Mr. Mack

If I may? I would suggest and again I am not an attorney or legal expert, but I would think that any landlord, if they have a mortgage they are going to be required to carry some sort of insurance and liability insurance. And if they are renting a property, it makes common sense but that doesn't always mean that they would carry the proper level of insurance coverage that they may need. But I think as Director Kates had said, in our experience dealing with some of the landlords they have been able to meet some of those basic needs. If it extends beyond a longer period of time that's when they may have more struggles over the long run.

The other thing is, as I think was mentioned earlier, is renter's insurance is something that can be very beneficial to the folks that are renting but not a lot of folks that are at the lower income thresholds carry renter's insurance either, unfortunately.

Chairman Schmidt

Yes, it's a good tool for renters to have but it is expensive. Elizabeth, did you have another question to follow up?

Alderwoman Lu

I just had a couple of comments. I wondered why we can't gather our landlord information that we are working on doing but including something in our property bills that just informs them that they are now required to provide some contact info. I was curious, I thought maybe there's a limit to what we can send with the property bill. And, of course, they don't all go to – property bills go to the owner. I also just wanted to ask whether or who would be calling Emergency Assistance? The Police that are called? I may have missed that at the beginning of the meeting. Initially who does call, who has that number for Emergency ...

Director Kates

For Emergency Management, in my office?

Alderwoman Lu

Yeah.

Director Kates

It would be whoever the, what we would call, well it would be the agency that's in charge of the incident. So if it is a fire, it is going to be the Fire Department. If it's a health related emergency, it is going to a Health Officer, Code Enforcement, Building Safety whatever the incident type is, is where we would get the call from.

Alderwoman Lu

Ok thank you, that makes sense. I'm all set.

Chairman Schmidt

Anyone else have a question? I would just like to say that we did have Nelson Ortega come at our last meeting. Your number 1 through 3, I believe they are working on it quite hard, collecting landlord's names, making sure that there is a contact within a certain area just if anybody can remember what that is. I think it's within 30 minutes or something like that and the data base. And from what I understand they may have something like 75% of the landlords already at least on cards if not on the data base. So I know that that is something they are working hard to make your job a whole lot easier. And the Police would have access to it 24/7. So that would be a gift to both of your departments I am sure, just to have that information. So that there would be after hours response, Building Management, rather than the owner does that work for you as well?

Director Kates

Yeah it can be whoever is the point of contact, they can make decisions about the property and this is honestly just as important to the Police Department and the Fire Department as it is my office. So in our case, we need to reach out to the landlord or the building manager, property manager, or whoever it is, about trying to find a place for these people to go. But the Fire Department, the Police Department like if there's a break in or something they still need to reach out to somebody pretty quickly in order to secure the property and deal with any issues that are there at the facility. So yeah all of our Departments really want quick response from whoever can make decisions and deal with whatever needs to be done. Because we can't tie up Emergency Resources there all day, all night which is certainly is, I think of the Laton House, as an example, we were there pretty much all night the one night and then I think the next day right Bob? It was a pretty long event.

Chairman Schmidt

What was it that happened at the Laton House?

Director Kates

Well for there, it was primarily figuring out what locations we would be able to put people back into and then which places were not going to be accessible for residents. It was one of those situations where we had to go back and forth with what was the landlord going to be immediately fix and get cleaned up. They are working to get all these different contractors and things like that on scene. We've go to work on their timelines and see how quickly they are going to be able to get those spaces back up to the standard that Building Safety wants to see; that the Fire Marshall wants to see. So there's a lot of going back and forth between the Departments that enforce the Code and then the landlord who is going to be responsible for getting the resources there to get those people back in. The longer that we are waiting for the clean up to take place, the longer we have got residents who are displaced and don't have somewhere to go.

Chairman Schmidt

Right, right. Thank you. Alderman Klee, you had a question?

Alderman Klee

Yes for Director Kates. The Laton House that one seemed to have been extraordinarily long time. Is that because exactly what you were saying, well there were a lot of people that were displaced and so on. But it did seem to go on for awful long time, more than I would have thought.

Director Kates

And again the reason for that one was really because of the unique circumstances there. The fire really only impacted a small portion of the units. It was really the damage from the water that really created the other problems. But once they are in there inspecting the repairs that need to take place, there are many other things that now have to be done during any repairs. So it's almost like this unraveling thing that just turns into a big mess. So I think that's probably one of the more unique circumstances. In most cases, as long we get the landlord or the property rep there quickly and can make an immediate decision to say, alright we are going to put all of these people into motels, it actually turns around pretty quickly. And that's honestly what happened at 243 Main Street. The person responded, the landlord responded and they took care of those folks and it was resolved right then and there.

The same thing went, you know, for like Canterbury is another good example where the roof collapsed but there's also a difference because it is a Corporation Entity so they have a lot more resources that they can, you know, move people to another room somewhere else on the campus pretty quickly. They don't need to move them into motel rooms.

Alderman Klee

Madam Chair, may I please have a quick follow up?

Chairman Schmidt

Certainly.

Alderman Klee

Thank you. Director Kates, again going back to the Laton House. So if I am hearing you correctly, the issues there were, I know there was a lot of water damage and that's why people got displaced. But once you got in there, there were other Code violations? In a case like that, where as you said, things just kept unraveling; they fix something but as you were in there inspecting you would see that this wasn't up to code or that wasn't up to code. In those cases, would the ... I know the City obviously did take care of this and every time I hear another story it was like, "there's one more issue, there's one more issue, there's one more issue" on that

particular one. Is that when the City comes, do we ever hold the landlord or in this kind of a situation responsible for these people being displaced longer than normal?

Director Kates

So right now we really don't have anything that allows us to take any action. I mean we could certainly take action as to not allow people to stay back in those rooms. But we don't have any legislation that allows us to pay for people to stay somewhere or anything like that. I think the closest thing that we've talked about but still really not to the extent you are talking about is when there was the allowance of ticketing that was done a couple of years ago where you could ticket landlords for sort of minor violations and things like that without having to go through the historically long process. There was an idea that you would be able to use the revenues that come from the ticketing to be able to pay for any costs that are involved with displaced residents or things like that. But there's not really a formal process and I don't believe that would be enough money to be able to pay for the cost that would be involved in relocating people.

Chairman Schmidt

Didn't that come out of the last Committee that would be taken, where did that go?

Director Kates

It's in place now. I think all of our Code Enforcement Departments can actually do that process now. That was discussed a couple years ago and I think it was after one of the incidents where we didn't that capability available to us. And the State then allowed it and that became a resource available to Code Enforcement and many of the other Code Enforcement Agencies in the City.

Chairman Schmidt

Alderman Lopez you have a question?

Alderman Lopez

Yes but I also have an observation that that Legislation is literally why this Committee was formed, it was to address that situation where there was somebody decided to do a reality show about bed bugs and it kind of blew up in the landlord's face. So this Special Committee is like the result of its creation was really that and we just kept the Special Committee on because do we want to make sure there was an additional vehicle to review issues with Substandard Living Conditions.

Chairman Schmidt

So your suggestion is that the ticketing didn't work or the ticketing is not bringing in enough money to make it work or it is too awkward to use?

Director Kates

No I wouldn't say that. I don't think it was intended for what I was thinking that it could be used for. I would actually say that and this would be something for Sarah and some of the other Code Enforcement related folks, to ask them how they think it is working out. I don't know that, that's not an area that I work in. But the primary area that we were looking at when it was discussed many years ago was where do we get the money, the revenue to be able to pay for the emergency responses that the City would take on if there was some sort of a displacement of residents. That was the piece that we never ended up figuring out a solution to that.

Well I will let Bob talk about this. But the other source of funding that we've used for these types of situations has been the General Assistance Fund but from my understanding there are stipulations on how that has to be used and when it can be used. Bob I don't know if you want to mention about what the requirements are with that?

Mr. Mack

If I may, Madam Chair?

Chairman Schmidt

Yes, please.

Mr. Mack

Yeah the General Assistance fund is a City fund where we provide short-term interim assistance to folks that are in need, whatever that need may be whether it is a financial need or a situational need as we are talking about here. We have some discretion as how we utilize that as people apply for it and get assistance. Now we could, if there were certain circumstances I suppose where we were spending money on tenants and there was some sort of negligence, I mean I don't know how the City would pursue something like that against a property owner, if that's kind of the question that is being posed. Do we have any recourse to recoup funds that we spent in some sort of temporary emergency assistance for folks? You know, for example, if someone doesn't have heat and they are displaced and the City helps them temporarily, does that go back to the landlord? In that sense it could be that the applicant or the recipient of that assistance who is typically on the hook, if you will, to repay that assistance if they are able, could then pursue a civil claim against the landlord that says I had to incur this expense because of some sort of negligent action. But again we are kind of getting down into some legal questions, I am not an attorney and I don't play one on TV. So I don't want to be getting too deep into the weeds on that one.

Chairman Schmidt

You don't want to be held accountable.

Mr. Mack

I do not, no. And again, it gets complicated and we do refer a lot of folks to NH Legal Assistance if there are any legal questions between them and their landlord.

Chairman Schmidt

Thank you, any other questions. Yes Alderman Lopez.

Alderman Lopez

Yeah I had one I just didn't want to interrupt too much. The City Welfare funding and support, I do not believe there is anybody who is on call per se. I think Bob just sort of gets pulled into it. But there is the potential for when you move a bunch of people who are in maybe, when you a bunch of people out of a disaster area, the ones who are most likely going to need the support are the ones who don't have other types of resources. So you are more likely to get people who have barriers with transportation mobility like physical mobility. They may not even have a regular supply of food or anything and they are being asked to leave their apartment with no necessarily the opportunity to prepare for those things. So one of the things that I was hearing from constituents that were relocated to Motel 6 was they all just found suddenly found themselves in a motel where there's like no kitchenette. A couple of them had microwaves at most and we were able to pull together a really good community support, thanks to the Southern NH Emergency Alerts.

People came and donated food and prepared meals and everything for them. But that doesn't happen all the time and it might be a good idea to consider some kind of general framework for saying, "Look there's a crisis in the City. We are announcing that this is happening. Anybody who wants to donate or contribute something do it here". I mean I always think of the Red Cross as the first likely partner but it seems like they are somewhat restrictive in what they will work with. So have we looked at something like the United Way that might have more general focus or ability to react to that kind of stuff?

Director Kates

Yeah so that is exactly, that community connections process. So since COVID-19 ... we have always worked with United Way but really since COVID-19 we have started leveraging them as a real convener of the various community organizations within the City who want to contribute something to the disaster response. We had historically tried to do that on our own using the VOAD, the Voluntary Organization Active Disaster. The problem is, is that was a purpose built kind of coalition that was just focused on disaster response. So you really couldn't keep people engaged through the year because it was only around disaster stuff.

Alderman Lopez

You don't have enough disasters to keep

Director Kates

So the idea with Community Connections is, is Mike is coordinating these folks on a quarterly basis with different topics and engagements that are trying to keep this group together. And then what we can do is in the middle of a crisis we would reach out to this coalition and then figure out what resources might exist. I think this is an important part of that though is we need to know what the need is. So when we go out to the scene, we are asking a lot of questions about what are the unmet needs that they have because they've been displaced. The problem that we say during the 243 Main Street incident was all the unmet needs were sort of handled initially. The Fire Department went home, I went home, everybody went home and then we starting to find out that there's other things going on or that there's other needs.

So in that case we need to find where do these people reach out to if there is some sort of a request for assistance after everybody went home and the building is locked up and the building is closed down. That's I think the area where we would need to try to figure out some kind of solution. The kind of typical response that most community organizations would give to somebody who has an unmet need would be to call 211. But I don't believe 211 is going to make that effective connection between the caller and the local resources here within the City.

Chairman Schmidt

Tom, did you have a follow up?

Alderman Lopez

No, I agree. I think 211 is very good as a directory resource. They have been doing more than usual with providing COVID connections. They also are partnered with the former Safe Station program to provide a gateway to recovery. So they have been moving a little bit further into not just giving out information but being able to connect with direct resources. What happened with 243 was particularly a problem because it happened right before a long weekend. If it happens during the week and there's a disaster than people can get through the night and then they can reach out to whatever agencies they may already be connected to or City Welfare during the day. We just kind of need a weekend on call person who is a general touch point. And even if it is not a person but maybe a phone number that is consistent and the voicemails are collected somewhere and then when there's a crisis someone knows to keep an eye on that. We do use a similar system for that for Coordinated Access Bob I think can say.

Chairman Schmidt

Alderwoman Lu?

Alderwoman Lu

Thank you. Is 211, I'm sorry, Alderman Lopez just mentioned coordinated entry and just to Alderman Lopez, is that the 211, Coordinated Entry?

Alderman Lopez

Kind of but so 211 does do coordinated entry for the statewide resources. Nashua, before 211 was doing that, created an 844 number so it's 1-844-800-9911. That's Coordinated Access for housing instability. If you are looking for emergency shelter as a single adult or family that basically goes to a voicemail that is shared among partner agencies. And the partner agencies have all like made up a schedule of who is going to make sure they are taking the calls that day. And Bob can probably speak more to this but I have seen 211 taking on a bigger role of that because there's that overlap. I am going to talk on our next topic; we have limited shelter resources in Nashua so for example if you're a single woman, and you can't access the available shelter that you could access, then you want to use 211 because then you can connect with the statewide ones and it sucks, you are going to have to go to Manchester or Keene or another City that has shelter space. But 211 can facilitate that transfer and at least you have somewhere to stay.

With the Coordinated Access it is something that has benefit because it is local so if you don't want to leave the City you are going to have more direct advocacy with the local. I would definitely say Bob should probably clarify my statements because that's in such a point of transition that I am not even sure how much of what I said is changing.

Chairman Schmidt

Mr. Mack, can you fill us in?

Mr. Mack

Sure I can follow up. I do think Alderman Lopez you had a very good summary of what the crisis assessment referral, the coordinated access process has become. Its primary focus is housing resources and getting people connected to those resources. Just to kind of meet some immediate needs and also maybe some longer term needs. And then 211 is they not only do that aspect for the State but they also do a whole of other things as far as information referral and resource engagement and connection. They gather a lot of information for statewide resources. So that crisis assessment and referral process is that local collaboration of a lot of the non-profit community organizations in our region that work together to help this vulnerable population.

Alderman Lopez

And to that point I guess it is worth observing if we were to create some kind of afterhours support, that in my opinion would be a place to do it because the partners in that are going to be non-profit organizations that work with people who would be disproportionately impacted by that. Like if you have your renter's insurance then you are not going to be set back for months by being moved to a motel and using your last \$10.00 on a cab to the Soup Kitchen to get dinner or something like that.

So you are also going to have other resources in terms of friends and family who can support you where a lot of times when you've experienced housing instability or the kinds of emergency situations that people currently use the Coordinated Entry system on, you don't go quietly into homelessness, you already use every hope that you have, checked in with every friend that you can use, stayed with every family member. So people who are using that system now, are definitely going to be much more vulnerable to this kind of crisis. So there might be a role in just adding a menu tree to that and then having or making sure that the City checks on that.

Chairman Schmidt

Yes, Mr. Mack?

Mr. Mack

Thank you. And I think there was a question in that I believe for what that phone number was and the Coordinated Crisis & Referral Line; it's been called a number of different things is, oh I see Kristie put it in there, 844-800-9911. So I think in a way we are kind of looking at two different things. When we initially started talking in this conversation a lot of it, as Director Kates was saying, was about response, assessment and some triage and saying, "Ok what are the needs" and a lot of people are dealing with certain type of emergency response situation and crisis situations aren't necessarily the same ones that are calling the crisis assessment and referral line just – I don't want to call it more routine – but a more regular kind of situation that as Alderman Lopez said this has probably developed over a period of time and they didn't just all of a sudden fall into this situation; although some do in some instances, but they have been accessing some of these services along the way. So there are kind of a couple different parallel tracks that we may be looking at here as well.

Alderman Lopez

Individual crisis versus disaster.

Mr. Mack

Yeah, yeah.

Chairman Schmidt

Alderwoman Lu, you had a question?

Alderwoman Lu

Yeah actually I got distracted with the question I asked Alderman Lopez, because he had finished saying that, just as I was about to speak. But I just wanted to ask about the hotels and that we don't have hotel vouchers anymore. It just made me wonder, it seemed, I had assumed that our City would have some type of contract with hotels at all times because if you have a contract then you get a better rate if you do have a catastrophe then if you don't have a contract. I mean if we go to them with 60 people when we really need it and it's hard to get a reasonable price and especially during this time when I know a lot of the hotels are needing business. So is that something that we are going to be working on, is replacing those contracts?

Chairman Schmidt

Mr. Mack?

Mr. Mack

Yes thank you. So I guess I would say, it's not that we don't have a voucher system for motels. I guess the voucher system that Director Kates was referring to was kind of like an afterhours emergency response option where say someone from an emergency response department like the Fire Department, if it wasn't a Red Cross or Salvation Army issue where they could help someone, they could make a phone call and put someone up with one of these vouchers and then they would follow up with City Welfare at the next business day.

We actually developed that system a number of years back and then it really wasn't utilized; and so it kind of fell by the wayside. But in the meantime, through our Welfare Office, we have continued to maintain relationships with local motel establishments to assist people on the day-to-day who need assistance with emergency shelter placement because they are homeless for whatever reason. So we still have those relationships; we don't necessarily have contracts per se but we have again these relationships with local establishments that will accept our voucher payment and they will fill out our paperwork that we need to get in order to assist people in these facilities.

We have, under recent times, had some hotels reach out to us because they say, "Hey we have some availability if you need to utilize our facilities" because under the current COVID situation not as many people are traveling and staying in hotel and motel establishments. So we do have those options, we do have those options for potential temporary isolation or quarantine if people are diagnosed as COVID positive or have some suspect situations where they need to self-quarantine. We've worked with the local shelters around some of those cases as well and we have been able to place people directly off the street into some of these locations on occasion. Thankfully, I'll knock on wood; we haven't had to use that to an excessive point. But we are prepared to do that as we need to. I hope that answers your questions.

Alderwoman Lu

I see so I misunderstood, thank you.

Director Kates

Yeah and that was probably because of the way I had mentioned it. It really, the resources exist, it's not a situation where we can automatically after hours do it without Bob getting into it. That's the big thing. I have got to reach out to Bob and then Welfare will then take care of it there.

Mr. Mack

And I think we could explore different options, if I may, Madam Chair.

Chairman Schmidt

Yes, please do.

Mr. Mack

We could explore different options as to how to do that whether it is a voucher or some sort of credit card payment. Again it would be – I think the concept is, is to meet the immediate need based on the First Responder's assessment of the situation and finding out if the individual or the household has any alternative resource. If they don't it could be, I don't want to call it a band aid, but it is a quick fix to meet that immediate need. They have a place to stay, they have some food, you know, a meal they can eat that night and then they can connect with the mainstream resources the next business day. So that's really what we could visit that to try to set something like that up again.

Chairman Schmidt

So there's a really good base in this City of managing issues through your organization, is that right Mr. Mack. I mean you understand what is needed, where to find out, how to manage it. So tonight what we really talking about is the next level up, the thing that happens once every six months or once a year or something big that really is going to take the whole City to deal with. The Firemen come in with the trucks to put the fire out or the Police have to manage people driving by because a building is fall down. These are the big issues. Are there smaller issues where you actually do have to reach out to the landlords, something unlike the Laton House, unlike Main Street?

Mr. Mack

Again I would say you know earlier this afternoon, Code Enforcement working with a tenant, they didn't have heat, it was kind of trying to be addressed, it was kind of a one-on-one thing and we were able to ... they were in communication with the landlord who was working to address the issue. So there was just some immediate need that they may need a temporary place to stay for a few days until this heat issue can be resolved. I believe it was mentioned earlier that some of these landlords, I believe it might have been Alderman Lopez that they are kind of operating month to month, you know, if they don't get the rent paid then they don't pay their mortgage and they are not big, big business landlords. So they also would work with Code and with the City and maybe Urban Programs to get the heat issue addressed through some of their programs, because some of these people are lower income even though they are property owners. And they have a program where they can get their heat fixes and everybody can return to their living situation with working furnace and heat and safety and security.

Chairman Schmidt

I think the Reverend has a question for us.

Reverend Kristie Besada, Main Street United Methodist Church

Thank you, Madam Chair. My name is Kristie Besada, I am one of the pastors at Main Street United Methodist Church in Nashua. I have heard a lot of really good Legislative suggestions. I'd like to offer an 8th of this after the 7. It seems to me that sometimes an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And a number of the scenarios we have talked about this evening or have been talked about this evening include our lowest income tenants in the town are some of our lowest cash flow landlords in the town. And situations where the landlords perhaps cannot afford to maintain their buildings well.

One of the outcomes of the most recent City Housing Study is the suggestion of an affordable housing trust fund. And one of the ways that this gets used in various cities and towns is for a maintenance fund for landlords who are cash strapped to keep their buildings up to code in the first place. So for example, in the case of the Laton House perhaps the landlord could access funding in a loan or interest free loan in order to get that building up to code even if the tenants are not able to pay rent at that time and might have made that situation much easier. Likewise with maintenance of the façade at 243 on Main Street and then again for landlords who are having trouble with furnaces and such to make those repairs so that we are not paying for all of the emergency response which tends to be quite a bit more expensive than maintenance. So I would just lay that out there as a suggestion and thank you for your time.

Chairman Schmidt

I think perhaps next month we could have you come back and we could talk about that. That sounds like something this group should discuss. Alderman Lopez, did you have a question?

Alderman Lopez

Right along those lines, I just wanted to say it louder for the people in the back. When Code Enforcement is addressing an issue that is related to occupancy and that type of thing, they do have resources through Community Development that they can point a landlord to. They don't just say, 'Fix this or we fine you more'; they can help. So there may be landlords watching this or there may be tenants that are watching this who are afraid of bringing up issues with their landlords that might include plumbing or unsafe staircases or falling windows or whatever. Just because the issue comes up doesn't mean your landlord is going to kick you out and try to find somebody else to move in because number one, although this a very common fear, the landlord is not going to get somebody to move into an apartment with broken plumbing and unsafe conditions. But by bringing it to your landlord's attention or if you are a landlord working with Code Enforcement when they come in, they do have resources and knowledge as to how you might be able to navigate that situation too.

Chairman Schmidt

Thank you, excellent suggestion. Code Enforcement can be your friend in this case, very helpful. Any other questions? Alderman Klee you've been awfully quiet tonight.

Alderman Klee

I know so unusual, I'm just taking it all in. And Alderman Cleaver...

Alderman Cleaver

Every time I get ready to ask a question, somebody else asks it or it gets answered inadvertently.

Chairman Schmidt

So I am glad you are here anyway. And I noticed that Alderman Jette has arrived, he got his question answered about the number, did you have anything else you want to talk about tonight sir.

Alderman Jette

No thank you for the invitation, but just for the record, I got here at 7:40, I was attending the Mayor's Ward 5 Town Hall Meeting and that's why I couldn't be here at 7:00.

Chairman Schmidt

I hope yours was as good as ours was in Ward 1. It was very good to hear from the Mayor and hear directly from him and have questions answered. Any other questions on this? Hearing none, then I guess we could allow Director Kates and the most kind Mr. Mack to go off and have a good evening. I think, yes, Alderman Lopez would actually like to bring up a ...

Alderman Lopez

Maybe they don't want to leave if they want to participate in the following discussion. So if you don't mind Madam Chair if I could just introduce...

Chairman Schmidt

Please.

Alderman Lopez

OK so I had asked initially if we could bring this to the Human Affairs Committee and because of the timing involved, it made more sense to do it here. I was hoping Director Bagley would be in attendance as well but I am sure Director Mack, I'm not sure what you call Welfare Director but Welfare Director Mack is here and can speak to it. I have been receiving a lot of concerns particularly from downtown merchants about the increased prevalence of people seeking places to stay warm during the day. I mean that's not really a surprise because we've had a number of recent blizzards; we have had some really acutely cold weather which we typically have right around February.

This is a challenge in a good year, this year, because of COVID a lot of the daytime locations that people might be able to use to be productive or to use their time a little more effectively when they are homeless or don't have a place to stay overnight are closed. So HEARTS has to be closed at the moment because of COVID, Revive Recovery has daytime programming that normally people would be able to access. They have to do that by appointment only. The library is a very common place for people to use computers, read, work on paperwork, applications that kind of stuff and that's not available. So we are in a situation where we have less places for people to go during the day who don't have homes. And we have a higher risk of having them all moving around and encountering different populations and doing that kind of stuff.

And so the concerns and I want to stress that they were concerns from merchants are to the effect that they have been noticing people coming in small groups of 3 or 4, maybe purchasing a coffee and then kind of just hanging out there for an hour or two hours where it becomes obvious that they weren't there to be patrons, they were there just to warm up and they didn't have the resources to fully utilize the location. I've heard from landlords that are concerned at an increasing occurrence of finding people in doorways or maybe sleeping in boiler rooms in hallways of apartment buildings. That kind of stuff that are clearly without shelter or a place to stay and are looking for some sort of place to just kind of escape the weather.

I've been in contact with a lot of people to be honest, trying to identify community partners that might be able to help. And I look at the potential partners in three categories; there's the faith based churches, there's the non-profit organization and charities and then there's the City and Municipal resources. The difficulty we have with City or Municipal resources is you have to lay a lot of infrastructure before you start a program up. You have to have a location, you have to have staffing and it all has to be publicly vetted and voted on. And you have to have authorizing Legislation and that kind of stuff. So the City does a great job in planned emergencies but it doesn't react on a dime when there are things like inclement weather, especially when our services are limited.

The faith based community has access to large building spaces where social distancing is possible and there's enough airflow that you are not necessarily going to have a problem congregating 10 to 15 people in that space and allowing them to just warm up periodically. But there are challenges on the faith based side both in having experienced volunteers to run it and the liability that might incur from bringing in people in an usual manner.

And then the final partner that I was looking at were non-profit organizations, so the Soup Kitchen comes to mind, HEART Peer Support was one that I had approached. The concerns that they have had are largely that first capacity; the Soup Kitchen is running a warming station during weekdays and people can warm up there, but they also have to do other things with their building, whether it is moving everything around so that you can run the pantry. Whether it is having the kitchen area realigned for dinner and that kind of stuff. A warming station is meant for somebody to just warm up. It's not a day program or you can stay there all day, it's a landing pad and then you have to take off again.

So the Soup Kitchen hasn't in the past been able to offer more than its able to. Traditionally they will offer emergency support during the day if there's a blizzard or you know freezing cold weather temperatures and that kind of stuff. But that also means that if they are doing that on their shelter space they have to double the staff that would be required. So there are a lot of logistics challenges that non-profits have where they can't just open up longer or extend their timeframe.

Finally there was also volunteer capacity. A way to offset the staff supervisory part and make sure that those staff members that they have, have people there that can support their programming and manage the station along with them. So the United Way has committed to participating in the conversation about warming stations and can help to recruit volunteers and put people into a program. The Soup Kitchen and HEARTS are both willing to explore models where we would be able to do that; where we would be able to use their locations to implement it. And basically the remaining challenge is making sure that the program has funding and keeping in mind where this a year where fund raising has been heavily impaired, you can't really go to the charitable gaming or the large scale fund raisers that might normally have been had. So money is tight.

So we are making progress on this and I wanted to have the discussion here about these particular challenges with some of the stakeholders. I know Kristie and Bob probably have input but I also wanted to make it clear that we are addressing this issue. We are trying to do something about it and it is not that nothing is happening. But often when we don't meet a need at the City level, it comes out in other ways. So you may see an increase in panhandling downtown, you may see people coming in to try to stay warm. And when we don't address people's needs in a traditional way, they are going to find another way to solve it. So I wanted to bring that up as a topic of discussion while also giving credit for the work that is being done to try to solve the issue as well. I think you're muted Jan.

Chairman Schmidt

Well I did that so I could blow my nose, I apologize. Mr. Mack is there anything that you'd like to add to that?

Mr. Mack

Certainly. As Alderman Lopez says this is an issue that we have been aware of in the community and with the current pandemic a lot of the usual places that had been available for folks are no longer available; just simple basic places such as the library. And I know that Reverend Besada at Main Street Methodist used to run a program and they aren't able to do that now. There are some warming stations that have been established throughout the community but are they meeting the need that we have? I'm not sure of that; it doesn't appear that way. So in a previous conversation that I had with Alderman Lopez and I know Director Kates and myself and Director Bagley and Cheryl Lindner from the Mayor's Office also had a conversation about this and we have coordinated a meeting next Wednesday to meet with some of the community partners to explore this further to figure out what we may be able to do to enhance our services, provide additional services, make sure that we are providing safe services for folks.

I think this issue also of warming stations it can also be a more complex issue when you start talking about some of the most vulnerable and the homeless populations. And we do have a pretty extensive outreach program going on in our community where there are people out there trying to engage with folks and get them connected actually to shelter resources which may hopefully get them into longer term – either short term housing options and longer term housing options which might help alleviate some of these issues. But again there are some capacity issues, we do have some programs expanding their shelter programs in our community; the Nashua Soup Kitchen Shelter Program at Spring Street. Again they are in an expansion phase, that will take some time. We have Family Promise which is just developed (audio cuts out). Bringing those partners together I think is (overlapping conversation).

Chairman Schmidt

You cut out for a minute Mr. Mack. You were talking about Family Promise and then you froze.

Mr. Mack

So these are important resources for our community and we have called these partners together to meet to talk about what can be done. Can we reinstate some of these programs? Can we bring in some additional volunteers through United Way or some other resource? So we do have a meeting scheduled for next week to talk about this.

Chairman Schmidt

That's stupendous. It is a shame that we have to re-do this every year. We should be ready in December for weather, it happens, it's winter, it's New Hampshire. If we could get something like the plan that Director Kates has that's all laid out the process to do things, that would be a big help if that's part of the Wednesday meeting, that would be awesome. Alderwoman Lu, did you have a question?

Alderwoman Lu

I did but again you just said the Wednesday meeting; which meeting are you referring to? Do we have one coming up?

Chairman Schmidt

No, we don't.

Mr. Mack

This is just a meeting that's been coordinated. It's not a scheduled committee meeting it was ad hoc, we pulled together some folks from the community so that we could have a conversation about this.

Alderwoman Lu

The meeting you just mentioned. OK, sorry about that. I hate to ask this but I have to ask, I'm not clear what issue we are discussing right now. I mean I understand it sounds like we are talking about it is wintertime and there are people who don't have a place to stay. I thought our focus tonight was warming daytime stations. I just wanted to clarify just so I understand, what are we talking about here at this meeting? Because I heard a lot from Alderman Lopez about who he has been talking to and who has agreed to help but I don't clearly, if we can just state the focus.

Chairman Schmidt

Where we are at this point, Alderman Lopez has been putting together a meeting that will be discussing the problem we have with a lack of warming stations; places for people to go. And it is an emergency if you think about what we are seeing as far as temperatures go. But Alderman Lopez, did you want to answer.

Alderman Lopez

Yeah I wanted to clarify that that the highest need for warming stations are the homeless because when you are staying in a shelter in the City, if the shelter closes during the day you do not have a living room to stay in so you are now, you need a warming stations, because you are about to spend 16 hours in weather that can be below zero. So we have weekday warming station option only really one, only the Soup Kitchen.

And there are periods of the day where that's not an option because they are doing other things although they are working to try to make it so that they can do many, many things at once. We run risks when we have single non-profits becoming responsible for a lot of different things, because if something happens at that site and we just made them responsible for emergency shelter, Soup Kitchen, food pantries all that stuff; we lose all of that. So there's a little bit of a danger in putting too many eggs in one basket although you have partners like the Soup Kitchen who are better positioned to do it. And in context, the homeless situation in Nashua that is precipitating this problem, there have been a lot of program cutbacks over the last even year at the State level and the local response level.

For example we are down an entire emergency shelter this year because Maple Street Shelter closed last year; that was 25 beds female and male. The Soup Kitchen can expand their program offering and are working on a very ambitious plan to do that but at the end of the day we will still have only one shelter in the City for female homeless individuals. And as a former shelter manager myself, there's a vulnerability there because if a person breaks that organization's rules then there has to be an administrative response as part of their guidelines. So if you are kicked out of the one shelter in the City, you are in no shelters in this City. You can maybe relocate or most likely not. There are also other conditions where people who might need the warming station can't access the shelter because for example they have a pet that they will not part with. So there are a lot of people who choose to stay in cars with their pet so they don't have to give it up.

There are other conditions too where people might be banned from both shelters, there are issues with substance use disorder where someone may not be eligible for either shelter because you have to be dry and we don't have a wet shelter. So these are different conditions that are all kind of coming together. Like as a City we discontinued Safe Station because the State model became way too demanding for the Fire Department to be able to manage while also responding to Fire Station calls. And most of the funding for shelter support comes from the State level which is like deploying Federal Funding and that can be changed or modified or even directed to other specialized programs. So Nashua has been very good at dealing with people who are either presently homeless, at risk of being homeless or coming out of homelessness and those people tend to have less resources and need somewhere to be during weather related emergencies, very, very cold weather and even very, very hot weather.

So we have worked on warming stations in the past and we worked on cooling stations in the summer, as places that people can endure the climate when they don't have their own ability to live or to control the climate that they are in such as in a living room of a home. So there is a lot of homelessness happening related to the warming stations. They are the population most likely to be in need of it and they are also the population that is the hardest to track, the hardest to reach out to, the hardest to even tell about these programs. So part of what I was trying to bring up in this meeting and what my purpose was, Alderman Lu was to share some of that information because downtown merchants are not social workers. So they don't know what is going on. All they know is more people are showing up in their shops than they are comfortable with that aren't even buying anything. And landlords are concerned about people breaking into boiler rooms and trying to sleep there. And everybody feels very bad bringing this issue up because nobody wants to target people who are already miserable and having a terrible time but when people get desperate there do become safety issues. So we are working on trying to expand the availability of warming stations at least to meet some minimal level of need.

With the Soup Kitchen being the only one really running one right now, there's that single agency problem where you may not be able to go to the Soup Kitchen and therefore you can't access the one warming station. But another problem that we have is the Soup Kitchen is really effectively not open on the weekends. They have volunteers making sandwiches and doing the meals but they are not running their full day programs. The pantry is nothing like what it normally is and there's no warming stations anywhere in the City on Saturday and Sunday.

So that's kind of what I think that the most urgent need is based on what I am hearing from constituents and what I see in the community is how do we figure out a solution to get through Saturday and Sunday of the next 6 to 8 weeks to make sure that we don't have people suffering from frost bite, pneumonia, hypothermia. We also don't have people trying to solve problems using the wrong tool. If someone is trying to warm up, we need a place for them to warm up. If someone needs to use a bathroom, we can't have the only bathrooms available being the ones at restaurants that are trying to reserve for their patrons.

So that's kind of a lot of what I was trying to present and I think Bob mentioned that there have been efforts in the past of warming stations and it was challenging when we had the library and all of these other programs and all of these other partners, just to get word out to tell people where to go instead of these decisions. Right now, it's even more of a problem because we are being caught flatfooted. We generally need to come up with these plans earlier in the year but COVID-19 has been taking up a lot of attention and strategic planning and we haven't been able to do it. So as an Alderman personally, I wouldn't say we did it and that there are definitely services available. We know there are gaps, we are working on it and we are trying to address it.

Chairman Schmidt

I think you are going a long way toward making sure it is done right as well.

Donna Marceau I just wanted to mention that along Main Street there are Christian Churches and Lent is coming up that's 40 days is there some way to approach some of the pastors there to say this is an emergency we really need some help here, just to try to get some of the people into those spaces? Because most of the spaces are big and they could socially distance and maybe some of the volunteers could help out there and maybe have a schedule? That would be a good place for people to get warm especially during the next 40 days because that's really key to get us into spring.

Chairman Schmidt

Thank you Donna Marceau a good suggestion. Will that be part of the discussion on Wednesday gentlemen?

Alderman Lopez

So it was one of the avenues that I explored and I know Kristie is here as well and I want to say for her so she doesn't have to, that puts faith communities in a very awkward situation because it's not as simple as just opening your doors and letting people in. If you are inviting people in who might have a higher exposure rate of COVID because you're moving from population to population. If you are how do I say this, if your parish is a little more elderly they may not be fully equipped to be able to manage any kind of behavioral dysregulation that would encounter. And then just finding somebody who is willing to commit to staying there is difficult. So that's why they have concerns about insurance, that's where volunteers become a challenge for places like the Soup Kitchen or HEARTS that would otherwise have – they have a building but they can't necessarily just pull out a new budget and add to staffing.

So these are some of the challenges that alone these individual entities are facing but I think collectively Nashua has the ability to solve this. We can definitely get to the next 40 days and extend over the weekend, it is just a matter of putting the right heads together and presenting enough of a model that somebody can competently just say, "Yeah we can do it, let's do it, we'll do it for the next couple of weeks". So at this point I think we have all of the puzzle pieces together, we just need to have that meeting and get everybody to start putting the puzzle together.

Chairman Schmidt

Super, any other comments?

Alderman Lopez

I would support the efforts of these non-profits if you as a merchant for example are concerned about panhandling, put up a giant sign that says, "Please support non-profits instead of panhandlers". The Soup Kitchen is in the middle of trying to provide an alternative resource to many of the people who don't have better choices, by expanding their shelter capacity considerably. That will be a huge benefit to the community to have the Spring Street School remodeled into the shelter model that they have. It will have an entire floor for family shelter space so that you have adequate sized units that entire families can be living together rather than a lot of what we see right now where one parent might take one or two kids; another parent might take another one. You might leave your children with your cousins or extended families or someone else so that the children aren't in an emergency shelter and then the mother and the father might be split into different shelters based on availability sometimes in different cities. Just having them together, is going to help a lot for families.

Chairman Schmidt

It'll make a huge difference; it'll make a huge difference. Alderman Jette? Oh I'm sorry, you weren't finished?

Alderman Lopez

I just want to explain some of the efforts that are being done but because I have painted a big picture of what we have lost but that program is also going to have double the single men's shelter space; double the single women's shelter space. It will have activities for daytime programming; it will have a room where you can put a daycare so that there's childcare that's available. And it will have housing opportunities for people to move into semi-permanent housing or traditional housing.

So if you are a merchant downtown and you are trying to figure out, "how do I solve this problem", you do not need to reinvent the wheel and you don't need to hold a collection for the guy outside or address it yourself.. Help the non-profits that are already trying to tackle this. That's just what the Soup Kitchen is doing. Revive Recovery, HEARTS, Peer Support; they are all tackling this with their own particular bundle of strength and I think it's important to know that if you are a downtown business owner or a merchant. You don't have to try to solve the problem yourself, you have allies and you have people that are working on it that could use your support.

Chairman Schmidt

Always a good idea; we are stronger together. I think Alderman Jette had a comment.

Alderman Jette

Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. Alderman Lopez, I can't think of a better person to be coordinating the effort and trying to solve this problem.

Alderman Lopez

I keep trying to.

Alderman Jette

You have a good grasp on all of the problems and probably the possible solutions, you know, mentioning the Nashua Soup Kitchen. Director Reinke and all of his volunteers are doing a fantastic job and I am looking forward to when they fully open that Spring Street asset. So I am not as knowledgeable as you are so forgive me for this question; but you mentioned that the problem is that people have places to stay at night but then during the day the shelters close.

They used to be able to go to the library, for example, that among other places have closed. So you are trying to solve that problem. My question is why do the shelters close during the day? Is there something we could do to help them stay open during the day so that people wouldn't have to be looking for some place to warm up during the day.

Alderman Lopez

Yes. Again, speaking as a former shelter manager, the reason shelters close during the day specifically is because you can't have a 24 hour occupied space. I know Maple Street specifically had to close to do things like vacuuming, and washing and case management and stuff where you can't do that with 40 people on the site because your staffing is focused on monitoring and maintaining positive behaviors and that type of thing and safety instead of focused on doing things that might make sure that the location is being preserved, the building is being well-maintained and everything that goes along with that.

There's also challenges with staffing, particularly finding evening and overnight staff is a challenge and then you can't have those same staff members work during the day. It's very difficult to work shifts that occur throughout the entire schedule. So you have to have a different person and a different group of people to run a day program and that type of thing. Now shelters do generally try to, I know the Rescue Mission is maintaining availability of its programming and its space to its residents during the day. The cost is they can't be open to the public during COVID-19 because basically they are a capsulated community and you can't introduce outside variables to that if it is a residential kind of situation.

So in the Rescue Mission's case they aren't able to be as much of a warming station as they have been in the past specifically because they are the only option for the people staying there. In the case of the Soup Kitchen and particularly Spring Street, Donna may be able to speak to this but I would probably say that that's a brand new program and it may have already extended themselves out because of COVID, they have already made modification. So Ash Street shelter used to manage I think probably at most 16 single adults; women upstairs, men downstairs. And when COVID-19 happened, State Guidelines and healthcare regulation require that you have social distancing between people, especially when they are sleeping because they are all sharing the same air. So there was an effort earlier this year or earlier last year to address this by creating what were called decompression shelters, because it was understood that a shelter the size of Ash Street Shelter which could formerly take 18 people, now can basically take 11 and that depends on what gender or layout.

So you lose even more shelter capacity. The decompression shelters never happened because they were planning those in the spring and what the State ended up doing instead of actually having additional state-funded shelters so that you could maintain the same level of capacity in the City but in different locations, they just gave out a lot of tents. So that was where as municipal Aldermen started to see a lot more people noticing homeless people in Mine Falls or living under bridges and all of that kind of stuff because the State gave them tents and said, "This is your solution, this is your little isolation chamber, you'll be safer from COVID by doing this". So that created a lot of problems with regard to homeless shelter capacity that were never solved. So the Soup Kitchen has recently attempted to solve this and serve the Nashua Community better by restoring some of the lost capacity by opening the Spring Street Shelter early.

So the Spring Street Shelter needs a lot of renovation, and they've barely begun it and they are about to do their fund raising campaign. But it is also currently being occupied in the basement level by a shelter that was designed not as a shelter with a day program or what the Soup Kitchen has been running for over 30 years in terms of helping homeless people find housing, find jobs, find work, find school. They've had to make a lot of changes and so I would say what is happening at Spring Street right now really resembles an emergency overflow shelter more than what the Soup Kitchen has typically done in the past. The Soup Kitchen does still provide the education supports and does still provide the job development and Case Management Services. But you have more people in the area, it is a more institutionalized site and that's because it was rapidly converted to address capacity needs, not program needs.

So it would be good if you could keep that open for the residents in some ways because they would have somewhere warm to sit; they could use the bathroom. But it would be problematic because you are asking people to stay up to 72 hours in the same space where there's no television, you can't really cook food, you can't do anything other than maybe read a book or play on your cell phone. So using a place that is right now designed primarily to take people out of the cold as many people as can be safely done overnight makes it not a great place to try keep open during the day. And because of the increased number of residents that they put in that site, they had to pool of their staffing in one place and they wouldn't have it for the daytime without making that plan. They are working on a plan and they are a partner in trying to make the warming station happen and what it might look like if we do manage to connect all the dots is people staying at the shelter overnight still have to leave in the morning but they can at least go to the Soup Kitchen for breakfast, then they can do things during the day, or try to use whatever time they have and then return to the Soup Kitchen at some point during the day and warm up and then they can return again for dinner and then they could return to shelter.

Even that is not a good solution; it is not what I would recommend to somebody with experience helping people face homelessness and overcome challenges. I would say you need to create something that they can go to during the day where they have access to the internet, where they can make phone calls, where they work on applications and generally spend that time productively improving their situation. But we are not there, we don't have that resource. The best we can do right now make sure we at least have a place where people can use a bathroom and get out of freezing weather over Saturday and Sunday during the day. That's the goal and that would be an improvement in the situation.

Chairman Schmidt

That the emergency; I'm sorry I just said that's the emergency that we are dealing with at this point. You are right.

Alderman Lopez

We are not trying to create any kind of luxuries we are just trying to triage.

Chairman Schmidt

Right. Alderman Jette did you have a follow up?

Alderman Jette

No, I'm all set. Thank you and thank you Alderman Lopez.

Chairman Schmidt

You certainly are a font of knowledge, most of us never even had the questions, much less the answers for, so thank you for speaking tonight.

Alderman Lopez

I am optimistic. I think even if we can address the need by bringing it to this Committee and having the rest of you participate to bring visibility, people might be watching this with ideas. So if somebody is watching and says for example, "Wow, he's right that's terrible". If you only have a warming station where people can sit and stare at a wall for an hour, it is better than them freezing but maybe I can help donate tablets or laptops or something like that so at least people at the warming station could be productive. That might be a help. So I think the community of Nashua has a lot of very resourceful people, they just need to know where to go, who to talk to and how to contribute their strengths.

Chairman Schmidt

Have you also invited the folks from Community Connections to be part of this next Wednesday?

Alderman Lopez

I'm not sure what the relationship between Community Connections is and the United Way; I think they are the same thing.

Chairman Schmidt

OK.

Alderman Lopez

United Way is a major partner of this because the one thing that was really holding everybody in place was a lack of volunteer capacity; United Way thinks they can bring that.

Chairman Schmidt

Excellent that's wonderful. Any more questions anyone? Nobody? Well I think that covers what we wanted to handle, this short little meeting it turned out to be a little bit longer. Thanks to everybody for all your questions and the information that we can't make a decision on today but we can certainly bring forward to bring the answer in the future. At this point we would ask if there's anyone for Public Comment and I guess Donna Marceau would you like to say anything further tonight?

PUBLIC COMMENT

Donna Marceau I do want to thank everybody and I am glad that people are focusing on this and especially Tom with all his knowledge and experience in this issue really brings an expertise to this. So thanks everybody and we will solve this together. Thanks Jan.

Chairman Schmidt

You bet, thank you.

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN

Alderman Lopez

I have spoken enough.

Chairman Schmidt

You could go on all night I think.

Alderman Lopez

Yeah it's a passion so I admit it.

Chairman Schmidt

No, when you've got the information and we need it, this is what we are here for.

POSSIBLE NON-PUBLIC SESSION - None

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY ALDERMAN CLEAVER TO ADJOURN BY ROLL CALL

A viva voce roll call was taken which resulted as follows:

Yea: Alderman Schmidt, Alderman Jette, Alderman Lopez
Alderwoman Lu, Alderman Cleaver 5

Nay: 0

MOTION CARRIED

The meeting was declared closed at 8:47 p.m.

Ernest Jette
Committee Clerk