

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ALCOHOL, OTHER DRUGS & YOUTH SERVICES

March 18, 2024 at 4:00 PM

Chairman Thomas called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Thomas, Barry, Vincent, Kantor, O'Neil

Messrs.: V. Sullivan, S. Richard, R. Stevens

1. Discussion with representatives from Freedom Movement NH.

Victoria Sullivan, Chair of Freedom Movement NH, stated thank you for having us here. We had forwarded some information for you that you should have in your packets that gives a little overview of who we are, what we are about, what makes us a little different than other sober homes in the city, and I'm not sure if you want to start with questions or how you want to proceed.

Chairman Thomas stated if you can go over some things that are in the packet, that would be helpful.

Ms. Sullivan stated ok.

Steve Richard, Co-Chair of Freedom Movement NH, introduced himself.

Ms. Sullivan stated Steve and I didn't know each other a year ago, which is really hard to believe now. We had both been looking to do a sober home that was different; that was a faith-based sober home. Our faith is important to each of us. I started having some conversations around the city about my ideas on how we can combat this crisis that we call the opioid epidemic, which is also a mental health crisis and a homeless crisis. Through mutual friends, we found each other, with Brittany Ping who I am sure you are all familiar with and a couple of other folks that joined our board. Steve happened to have a place that he had been looking at so everything sort of came together for us. We opened our doors in late July, we officially launched in August. We just got our 501C-3 declaration letter. We are officially a non-profit. We are a New Hampshire Charitable Organization as well. There are a lot of sober homes but many of them are for-profit. There is nothing wrong with that. We just do things differently. Freedom Movement NH is a faith-based sober home living environment that takes a whole person approach to liberation from addiction. That is what we concentrate on. We talk about a whole person approach to liberation from addiction. Our mission statement is that Freedom Movement NH is to provide transitional housing with peer support and the connections to wrap-around services in order to liberate and restore individuals experiencing homelessness and recovery from addiction in the Greater Manchester area. The vision of FMNH is by providing this faith-based and research-based whole person approach to liberation from addiction. We are able to equip individuals experiencing transition with the extra time and resources needed to experience true freedom from homelessness and addiction and live recovered, healed, and restored lives. We have some bullet points about who we are. We are a charitable trust. All the people involved with this organization are volunteers. We all do this with our own time.

Currently, we only provide sober living for men. Men who stay with us are required to have participated in a minimum of 30 days of recovery prior to coming to us. We use 12 separate approaches to recovery. We have a shepherding team that shares their Christian faith with the men in the house, a bible study is offered but participation is voluntary. Steve really heads up that shepherding team and works directly with the men on that. All men are required to attend meetings that support their sobriety. All men are required to work. If unable to work, they need to volunteer in the community. Since many of the men are coming straight from a 30 or 60-day program, we do provide a two-week housing scholarship while we get them on their feet. We are only able to do so through fundraising. Our goal is to stop the cycle of addiction that puts these men back on the streets. Being involved in their day-to-day lives and building relationships with them, we have seen success in getting individuals help when we see they are beginning to slide. We strive to provide men the tools they need to be on a steadfast and successful path when they leave our house. We are truly a movement. We are constantly reevaluating what we do and making changes to accommodate the individual while maintaining the safety of the group. We have built out our network and work closely with other recovery organizations, sober living homes, and faith-based organizations. We understand that we will not always be their last stop before securing permanent housing and healthy lives. Sometimes we will be their first house, sometimes their third, sometimes we will lose them back to the streets. Our hope is that we plant the seeds of success in every life we touch. We are here to answer any questions you have for us.

Alderman Barry stated thank you for what you are doing. Victoria, how many do you shelter?

Ms. Sullivan stated currently we have 12 men.

Alderman Barry asked how many can you have. What is the maximum?

Ms. Sullivan stated we can have 24.

Alderman Barry stated you are familiar with the city shelter here in Manchester. A lot of people that are in there are homeless. Some of them suffer from mental illness, some suffer from opioid abuse or alcohol abuse. Is that something your group could go in there and talk to these people to offer the sober living?

Ms. Sullivan stated yes. The thing with us is they would have to go into recovery for 30 days before they came to us. That is mandatory. You have to be sober when you come to us. We have people that have been in that shelter. We have people that were on the streets. We worked closely with Shane Bernier, who was working with the city for a while. It is a shame that he is not working with the city because he was a blessing to the people on the streets. Shane would work with them, often get them into recovery, and they would come to us from there.

Alderman Barry asked is there anyone in the City of Manchester, obviously Shane is not there right now, is there anyone else that you could rely on. Or someone you could reach out to? We need someone over at the shelter to get these people to agree to go into treatment counseling for the 30 days that you guys require; at least get started.

Ms. Sullivan stated I agree with you 100% and I do not think that we have anyone currently in the city doing that work. It is really important work.

Alderman Barry stated if someone from your group goes there and talks in a group-setting to people that are addicted or going through tough times that are willing to go to the Farnum Center or whatever, at least give that push or shove.

Ms. Sullivan stated we were talking with Granite Recovery and I believe that they do go in there from time to time to meet with people. I am going to be candid. You know me well enough so I'm going to be perfectly honest, maybe brutally so. There isn't a lot of outreach happening in our shelters here. Even if it is being said so. When we are talking to organizations that are going in there, people that are going into the shelter are used to going in, getting food, laying in a bed, and leaving. They are not used to talking to people, having conversations, or getting outreach. So, they are not looking for it. It is my understanding that people inside the building aren't actually reaching out. I did volunteer at 39 Beech Street, and that is what I witnessed as well. People would come in, they would get their food, lay down, and leave. There wasn't any communication or actual outreach working with this population. Building the relationships is so important. That is when they start to trust you so you can get them into shelters. That is why Shane's work was so important and Amanda's work was so important, because they built those relationships. I went on the streets with Shane, and it wasn't that he would talk to somebody and say hey, I know you are not doing well, come with me today. No, it was how are you, what do you need, what are we doing today, I'm going to see you tomorrow. Eventually, that relationship built into where that person was finally ready and got the help that they needed. Without that piece, it is going to be hard for this city to make a difference. You have seen the numbers. We are worse off today than we have been in a long time. That is a vital piece.

Chairman Thomas stated to go off of Alderman Barry's question, it seems as though your program, if we were to get some outreach into the shelters, such as Farnum to do residential and pull those individuals from there, you guys would be able to hook them right after Farnum or wherever they would go – Granite Recovery or wherever. You guys would make the connection there after these 28-30 days and we are going to grab them right away so they are not stressed about finding a place; they are going to be okay.

Ms. Sullivan stated that is the piece that the recovery centers are actually doing for us. We have met with them. We have invited them into the house as well. Now, they reach out to us saying we talked to this person and they like your program and they want to come to you. That is what we have been seeing more of that is really exciting for us. People are coming out of recovery requesting us; they want to come to our house because we offer something different. We are filling a niche; it doesn't mean the other sober homes aren't doing great work too. They have their own path and their own lane that they are in. We offer something different that people are seeking, and we make it clear when they reach out to us. Steve usually has the first conversation with someone that is interested in coming. We make it clear that we are a faith-based home. We are not going to shove it down your throat. I joke and say we aren't having baptisms in the showers on Sundays, but we are going to make the word of God available to you, and if

you'd like to be a part of that this is the time and this is the place. We welcome you to be a part of that.

Alderman Vincent asked it is on Amory Street. Is that where the housing takes place as well.

Ms. Sullivan stated it is on Manchester Street. The house is on Manchester Street. Amory Street is just the business address.

Alderman Vincent stated this location can hold up to 24 people. Right now, you are housing men. What are your thoughts on in the future having women and families? Is that something you see happening? What kind of support do you feel that you'll need for something like that?

Ms. Sullivan stated we have been talking about that. We want to do this really well first.

Mr. Richard stated it has been less than a year for us. Neither Victoria nor I come from recovery personally. There has been a tremendous amount of learning, and I would say our roles are very complimentary. Victoria is very outward looking to the community, and up until this point, I have been much more inside the home working with the men directly. We are hands-on one on one. With my past involvement with church leadership and working with men, it is a natural fit for me. This year is about establishing a really good first year for us. We mentioned we are a non-profit. We are not here for money. Nothing against making money; I am a business-person, so I make money in other ways. It is about the men. We have had a lot to learn. We have somebody on the board that is from the recovery space personally, so we have guidance. We recognize that there are areas and that everyone has gaps and blind spots, so you bring the right people on the team that can see the various aspects of what is needed. We have our outward city-focus, our inward-focus with my partner on the board, Ryan, who does a fabulous job. Year one is really about the men. We have talked about having a women's home in the future. We will know when it is time. Of course, there is a need, for sure. We want to make sure whatever we do, we do it well. That is definitely on the horizon; I couldn't tell you if it is six or twelve months out, but it is not like it is five years out. There is a need now. That is the direction that we want to move in.

Ms. Sullivan stated we have talked to other sober homes with women and there are very different needs. It is important for men to get to work, it is important for them to have a job with a path that has a future. For women, they often need to have more time out of the workforce to heal, because they have often been taking care of other people and haven't taken care of themselves. We talked about it before, and it is a different kind of responsibility and we want to make sure that we understand the different nuances and how to do that well when we go into it.

Alderman O'Neil stated I think I know where it is on Manchester Street.

Ms. Sullivan stated it is 99 Manchester Street.

Alderman O'Neil stated I have a few questions. The point about men needing to work or volunteer in the community, is it encouraged that they leave during the day and work and be back by a certain time? Is that how it works?

Mr. Richard stated yes, we have house rules. When they first come in, the first 48 hours are under lockdown. The first week, they begin to look for employment. There are a number of things that we work on. They have curfews every night, they can earn over time slightly later curfews. We are looking to work with the men. We see our environment as structured living, that as you show that you are doing better, then you begin to get more freedoms. The men that are in there, we just had our house meeting Sunday night, they talk about that they came here because they know they still need structure. They know they still need accountability.

Alderman O'Neil asked do you have companies that will employ or does a roadblock go up.

Mr. Richard stated the answer is yes to employment. They are expected to find work within the first two weeks. We scholarship them, not because we have a big pile of money somewhere. When we are not in the house, we go out to the churches fundraising, or whoever will give us some money to help us fund the first couple of weeks of them coming in. They have to do at least four applications, go on four job interviews the first week. We manage and monitor that stuff. I was in the house today; I have a few new guys. I know where they are in the process. I know where they filed applications. A lot of the guys actually serve over at 1269 Café. They know where the food pantries are and they are serving in a variety of different ways, some at churches, some at outreach organizations. The expectation is within two weeks, hopefully within a week, but certainly within two weeks, they have a job somewhere.

Alderman O'Neil asked based on the 12 you have, how many are able to find work versus volunteer. I think both are great. Are there obstacles in the community with people getting hired?

Ms. Sullivan stated there is an organization in the city that is called Freedom Staffing. Their goal is to work with people in recovery and get them work. It sort of never got off the ground. It is through the Zeal church. We found out through a mutual friend that they were looking for a director for that, so that is my second hat. I am now the director over there at Freedom Staffing. That is what I do; I work with people in recovery, men and women, getting them jobs and employment. Spectrum Marketing just came on with us, and we have some other companies that know these people are in recovery. They are great partners with us because they stay in communication with me. If they think, like I said there is a mental health piece to this as well, and if they see that someone might be struggling, they communicate that to me and we are able to support them back at the house or if they are in a different sober home because we have those relationships now. So, when we say we are building out this network in the city, I wish I could draw it out for you so you can see the web that we are creating that is wrapping our services around these guys. It seems like we make a connection and another appears that we can grab onto. It has been an amazing year. When I ran for mayor, and I was out there speaking to people, it was really obvious that no one was talking to each other. The organizations were not communicating. We were redoing the bad things. We were

failing over and over, but the good things that were happening weren't being shared. We weren't sharing the best practices. I have seen a huge difference in that over the last year. I am not saying it is us. I think in general people are communicating more around the city. You've got people that are more open to working with other organizations and not being so territorial about the piece that they do. We are starting to learn that we each have a piece of this puzzle, and ours looks different than others but that doesn't mean that their piece isn't just as vital or as important as ours.

Alderman O'Neil asked how do you staff, especially overnight. With volunteers?

Mr. Richard stated yes. I will select peer leaders in the house. These peer leaders have been clean and sober for a minimum of six months. We look for a year. Six months is the minimum, but I personally look for a year or more. Our current peer leader is 11 months clean and sober. We have a maximum of six residents to every one peer leader. In a home of 10 or 12, there are at least two peer leaders. If you have 20 to 24, we have three or four peer leaders. There is a lot of accountability there. We have cameras in the home in all the critical spots. I am not actively watching the cameras, but if something were to happen, the men know there is accountability. We are doing random UA tests throughout the week. That is something the peer leaders are doing. I am probably in the building five times a week. I am downtown a lot, so I will pop in for some time. At a high level, that is what it is.

Ms. Sullivan stated we said we are a movement. We want change and we want to do things. On that note, we have had discussions recently where we really appreciate our peer leaders and the work they do and we value them, but we are seeing that this isn't the best way to always go. It is the way it has always been done, but we would really love to secure funding so we could hire a clinical person to be in there. Going back to mental health, there are medications that have to be given, and it is not right to have someone in recovery handing out meds. That is the way it is currently done. We would really like to have a clinical person in there that isn't in recovery so that this isn't a temptation for them. That is a piece that we would like to incorporate in what we are doing that I don't think is happening necessarily that often in other places.

Mr. Richard stated to that end, a good friend of mine said to me recently, and it was really eye-opening and again I am not a licensed professional in this space, we are volunteers because the city needs it and it is in our hearts to do so, but he asked me what happens to an addict when they are squeezed. They use. We are now actively talking about peer leaders. How do we take more off their plates? Yes, they have some responsibility and leadership, but we don't want to set them up to fail. There was another eye-opening comment that one of the guys in the house said a few days ago. He threw out a percentage, 67% of statistics are fake and made up on the spot. That's a joke. He said there is a high percentage of peer leaders that relapse. When I heard that, it really set me back. I haven't been in the space long enough to know that, but I could see how that is if we put so much responsibility on them. They are in recovery as well. We are actively talking about how we offload that. We have already taken it on ourselves. We have taken some things off their plates in the last week or two. How do we implement a long-term plan that might involve a case manager, a professional coming in to provide that level of support and care in the home? That is our hope.

Alderman O'Neil stated I was away for a couple of years. You mentioned Shane and Amanda. Would that be Amanda Robichaud?

Ms. Sullivan stated yes, they worked together with GateHouse.

Alderman O'Neil stated I am aware of how great Amanda is. Somebody I know, she never quit on, and the young man is in recovery and trying to get a job. I never met Shane. I know they were a team at one time but they moved on from wherever they were at. Does insurance play a role in this at all? Medicaid? I got hung up about this time last year on a homeless veteran, and all he really needed was a house. He is over at Independence Hall on Somerville Street now. He was living in the shelter for two years.

Ms. Sullivan stated New Hampshire does a better job than Massachusetts. I know that first-hand because a family member of mine had to be put into treatment and I had to bring her up here. We could not get her a bed in Massachusetts.

Alderman O'Neil asked are you talking about Medicaid.

Ms. Sullivan stated yes. She kept getting promised a bed in Massachusetts and it never came. We were about to lose her. She would have lost her life and she is only in her 20's. New Hampshire saved her because I live here. I am grateful for what we have done as a state here. When it comes to the mental health piece of that, we just aren't doing enough. I don't know as a city what we can do. We have a gentleman that we are working with that we love and has come so far, and done all the right things, but he doesn't belong with us anymore. He needs to be in a medical facility that can help him with his meds. They keep putting him on meds for mental health, and they are not right for him. A couple weeks later, we can't help him. He is putting himself back in the hospital. He is reaching out for help and doing everything he can, and we have no place to put him. The two of us spent hours on the phone trying to get help, and there is nothing. There is no adult facility where this gentleman can go long-term. I believe if he wasn't with us, we would have lost him to the streets. The tendency is to go self-medicate when the medical system lets you down. That is a piece we need. I don't know how as city leaders we fix that, other than being voices on the state level, but it is really something that we have to address across the board.

Alderman O'Neil stated our committee chairperson has reminded me many times about mental health being the place to start. The model nationally was San Antonio, Texas, that is where they started mental health. The chair reminds me that mental health is where we have to start.

Chairman Thomas stated thank you so much for coming. I love how the residents are required to become employed or volunteer. That must be empowering for them, especially giving back to the community, showing commitment and accountability. Things like that go an awful long way. I am a big fan of faith-based treatment. A majority of my clients have had major success following treatment programs like this. Spirituality has given them a sense of purpose, guidance, and well-being. The brotherhood that can be developed is huge for them, because often times they have burnt bridges and have no peers or families. This is a good place to start, which can also be very insightful for

them too. This is a valuable program. You talked about needing funding. What would you do with that funding? You mentioned a case manager, and that is definitely needed. A clinician would probably bridge the gap with the gentleman who is having mental health issues in the home. They could navigate that for you. What else would you use funding for?

Ms. Sullivan stated I think we would like to give a little bit longer than two weeks for some guys. Some of the guys that come in might be looking for disability and are not there yet. They have to be careful. Some of them, with their mental illness cannot get a permanent job. They struggle. They can get a part-time job or something a little easier, but they have to be careful how many hours they work or it ruins their disability. We would like to have a fund that can help guys that need more financial support in the beginning.

Mr. Richard stated many do not have licenses when they come in. Part of it is trying to get the basics. We have three gentlemen that moved in last week. I was talking to Josh today and he went to the DMV. He said he doesn't have anything but I need to show them permanent residency. He came back, he got the house rules, went back into the building and gave them a copy of the house rules that we both signed and said here you go. Here is my number, here is the address. That first week, it will often drag out to more than a week. Two weeks is what we can afford, and we can't even afford it to be honest, but we are doing it. We are finding a way to make it happen. Many times, it is 30 days by the time they actually get all their stuff back. Now they have a license, and they can go try to get more than a day-job, more of a career as opposed to daily work.

Ms. Sullivan stated a lot of guys come to us with nothing, because they have been homeless. Their stuff has been swept up by the city and thrown out, or they have lost it. They don't have as much as an ID. We have to start with that. If they are coming from someplace like Granite Recovery, sometimes they have started the process. They really are starting from nothing. They are building their lives over. We want to help them re-write their future. That is what we see in these guys. We don't take it lightly that they trust us and ask to come to our house. That is a huge responsibility and we take it seriously.

Alderman O'Neil stated you mentioned for-profit and non-profit, and you are truly a non-profit. If you had to guess how many sober living facilities we have in the city, how many are for-profit? I agree that most of the ones causing controversy are for-profit versus non-profit.

Mr. Richard stated a lot.

Ms. Sullivan stated I would guess maybe 20 and that might be way off.

Mr. Richard stated I am good friends with two owners, one that I have had for a couple years. One has over 100 beds in three different buildings. Another one has probably 60 beds. Between these two gentlemen, they are both for-profit, and they do a really good job. They have been tremendously supportive of us. What is a good blueprint? What does a good sober home look like? We started with that reaching out to them and then coming back and creating our blueprint, and then making our own adjustments to what

works for us. It is a difficult answer. Maybe there are 1,000 beds in Manchester. I don't know.

Alderman O'Neil asked how many non-profits are there.

Mr. Richard stated us and Lighthouse.

Ms. Sullivan stated I think that it is. Lighthouse also houses women.

Mr. Richard stated and Helping Hands.

Ms. Sullivan stated I think three of us: Lighthouse, Helping Hands, and us.

Chairman Thomas asked how long are they expected to stay each individual. When they do transition out, is there a plan for them, is there kind of a gap that we need to fill, what does that look like?

Ms. Sullivan stated six months to a year, and that doesn't mean that we boot people out in a year but that is usually a timeframe where they can get on their feet. With the housing crisis we have now, it is going to be a challenge for us. There is sort of a cycle in this city, and I don't think it's just here, I think it is just the way that this works. People often cycle to another sober home when they leave a sober home. We have guys in our sober home right now that were peer leaders in different sober homes. They may have relapsed, then they go through recovery, and they are back in a sober home or they go to be a peer leader in another sober home because they have no other place to be. There is this community that they have a hard time breaking out of. This is their safety net. We need to work. This is our next phase. We want to work on what that transition looks like, so the next transition isn't another sober home. If someone needs that ok, but we don't want that to be the expectation. How do we break that cycle and get people into permanent housing where they feel comfortable? It might be another transition. We spoke about this with Alderman Thomas. Maybe there is housing out there that we can find and there is another step in securing housing where that is the next transition where there is a lot more freedom. One person in there that you are accountable to, but you basically live a day-to-day life without your curfews and the other things, but there is someone there where you're still accountable and you can check in with them until you take that final step out completely. We need that. I don't think that is happening anywhere. I know Hallsville School, and I keep thinking that would be a great place for something like this. Maybe someone is listening that would purchase that for that purpose, you never know; you have to put it out there. That is a step that we need. Where do they go after sober living? We talked about the phases and stages of them in recovery, but they are still in a house where they are accountable 24/7 to somebody else and they have curfews and they are getting urinalysis checks. What happens after that? You put them in a place with no accountability at all? How do you function there? You need some kind of help still and assistance for that next step. We don't have that anywhere.

Chairman Thomas stated that's why I think that treatment is so important. You are not just learning how to live, you are learning how to change your environment, how to have peer support on your own, and how to have a friend. What does a healthy friend look

like as opposed to what I had before? All of those things are important, and you shouldn't be leaving treatment in a year. People progress every day. Thank you for coming.

Ms. Sullivan stated thank you for your time. You know how to get a hold of us if you have any more questions.

2. Discussion with Randy Stevens regarding his journey through recovery.

Chairman Thomas stated before you begin, I want to address the Committee. The reason why I asked Mr. Stevens to come and talk about himself is because I am still new here. I was reading over a lot of meetings from last year, and I know that Alderman Barry kept bringing up wanting to hear from someone who has had success. We need success stories. No one has come forward, I believe. I took the initiative, and here is Mr. Stevens.

Randy Stevens, Executive Director of Hope for NH Recovery, stated I am a person in long-term recovery. I have been in recovery since 2018. My story starts well before then. It goes back to the age of seven. I used to walk home at night from my friend's house, often in tears and holding in a lot of guilt and shame from the things that were happening to me at that time. I would look up at the stars on this long hill going up to my house, and I would pray to God. At that time, I was really well connected, I was going to Sunday school, but I was deathly afraid of the situation I was in and I wasn't sharing that with anyone. I would just pray to God and ask for help. Amazingly, every time I prayed, I was wrapped in this warm embrace and I was okay. It helped me to go another 16 years without saying anything to anyone. From the age of seven to fourteen I was being heinously sexually abused by my best friend's father. At the age of 12, when I started resisting, he began to introduce marijuana, alcohol, and other drugs into my life. It lowered my inhibitions and allowed it to continue for a couple more years. I never shared that with anyone until I was 23 years old when I was first seeking help here in Manchester. The first time I found recovery was in Manchester at the Farnum Center before it moved to its current location. I ended up at the Tirrell House, which is at 15 Brook Street. I did three months there. I was very successful for almost a year. I was able to stay sober. At some point I decided I wanted to tell someone about that. I was at Healthcare for the Homeless underneath 199 Manchester Street, and the response that I got was asking me if I had abused anyone. I was appalled that the first question that I received back from stating that I was sexually abused as a child was asking whether I had abused anyone else. Apparently, there is a high rate of reoffending when you have been abused. I didn't really feel like telling anyone else after that. I didn't work towards resolving my trauma. My addiction continued to spiral. I was in and out of recovery until 2017, when it all came to a head. I was sitting in a van with two babies in the back, and I was homeless, they were homeless, we were basically living in our van. I decided that enough was enough. I didn't want to raise my kids like this. It was horrible that I even got to this point in my life. I wanted to do something about it. If you know anything about the insidiousness of addiction and what it does to your brain, you'll find that it is kind of remarkable that I had that thought when my brain was hijacked and I was in a state of survival at the time. I remember looking at my babies and thinking enough is enough, I am done with this. I slowly started making changes. I started working more, reducing my use. It took another nine months. The incident with my children was December 2017. In

May 2018, I found out that my ex-wife was pregnant with our youngest child. I asked her to join me in the journey, and she wouldn't. I hadn't talked to her much about what was going on before then, but I was actively working on myself to not use. Having a family to support, I didn't think that treatment was a good option. We always find ways to put off doing what is right and needed when we are in an active state of addiction, even if you are trying to make that change. Change doesn't occur all at once, and it certainly doesn't happen overnight. I really buckled down in May and by August I was completely clean off a 40-grams per day Fentanyl addiction. On the journey to being clean and sober, I was sick the entire time. I was sober. I was experiencing homelessness because I couldn't stay in the environment where my ex-wife was still using. It wasn't safe for me, so I was couch hopping and letting my kids live in that environment because I didn't have a choice. September came around, and my ex-wife was arrested for selling drugs. I ended up with two kids, our apartment, and a whole lot of chaos of trying to navigate that and work as much as I can. Two weeks into it, my kids were taken by DCYF. The reason was neglect. I was doing my best. I was late to pick them up from the bus stop, and they were supposed to be going to my sisters who lived right down the street from us, and they were playing around in the neighborhood. I tried my best to get them back, it was eight drug tests in seven days. I passed all of them but couldn't get them back, and ended up relapsing. It lasted for about a month and a half, and almost killed me. I wound up in Portsmouth Regional Hospital with a lung infection and pneumonia, and they pumped a whole bunch of fluid out of my lungs. I had this doctor; I will always remember the way she treated me. She treated me like a human and was very kind and compassionate. She asked if she could provide any resources for me. She said I think you are getting better; you look better, I don't want you to go back out there and do the same thing again. I had a baby on the way. I have to get out there and do what I have to for her. I walked away from Portsmouth Hospital on November 20, and never returned to drugs. My daughter was born 18 days later to a sober father. I was still experiencing housing insecurity, and she went home with my mom. I spent every day with her. Thirteen days after she was born, the federal government picked me up for charges that I accrued when I was still on active use. I went to prison 30-days sober. I had a choice in that moment to allow this situation to spiral me down again or to use everyday to become the man I was meant to be. I chose the latter. I began working diligently on myself. There were no active AA meetings going on in the general population of Strafford County, so I created them. I started meeting with men, teaching people about recovery which wasn't much but we learned together and grew together. I did men's therapy to the community. I went back to general population and kept pushing AA meetings, helping with anything that I could, working on meditation and prayer, meeting with the chaplain, meeting with anyone who would meet with me to talk about recovery. I learned and read during my incarceration. I read probably 500 self-help books. Every day, book in hand, I was either meditating, praying, or working out; living some sort of balanced lifestyle. I ended up going to the Feds, and as soon as I got there, I got into a program called RDAP, the Residential Drug Abuse Program. Within three months I was a peer mentor there. I committed myself fully to this recovery journey. I created a meditation group there. I met with the drug treatment specialists. I did everything I was supposed to do and more. COVID hit and kept me in prison for an extra five months. God saw fit to keep me there, because I was able to take a little bit longer to be a mentor for a little longer. I didn't know I was setting myself up for success, because when I got to the halfway house here in Manchester it was across the street from the Greater Health Center of Manchester. I ended up walking

across the street and applying for a job as a peer support specialist. My friend told me that this was a great opportunity for me, and I had no idea. I was just learning what the word peer meant. I had no idea what I was going to do. I was going to be a recovery coach and help people with their journey. When I explained to my boss, my former boss, what my story was and talked to her about those things, she said this is awesome. She wanted me to share the story with other people. I started recovery coaching and hit the ground running. I was still in a halfway house. I applied for school. I needed to know more and know as much as I could if I was going to be in somebody's life affecting their life. I wanted to be the most educated and most effective person I could be. I am two months away from my Bachelor's Degree; I did it in two and a half years. Not tooting my own horn, but that is kind of hard to do. I am going into a Masters Program in May for Social Work. I worked my way up to lead peer specialist. I worked on crisis teams. I met my current wife, my forever wife, working crisis. She is a law enforcement agent in Manchester. I think that is hilarious. She is a police officer. She has been a cop for 19 years. She is a phenomenal human and was able to see past the label felon and all these things that hold us down. The most important thing about what I've told you is what I haven't said. That is the things I was doing when I got to the halfway house, when I began treatment for my substance use. When you are incarcerated and you're in these programs, you get a form of treatment but it is not the same thing as experiencing in-patient treatment out here. There is very limited clinical exposure. Working with a clinician, building my support network in my church, surrounding myself with positive pro-social people. If you weren't positive and pro-social, you were not in my life. That included the people at the halfway house. I worked as a mentor to other people in a professional capacity, but I did not surround myself with those same people in my personal life. That is a decision I had to make. I am okay with encouraging someone through texting or something like that, but really setting healthy boundaries around my life. I say that now, looking back it was a little rockier and harder to delineate certain relationships. Healthy boundaries and strong support networks are key to moving forward in success. I left the Mental Health Center and joined the Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative that is administered through Granite United Way. I worked there for three to four months, and was offered a job as the Executive Director of Hope for NH Recovery. That is where I am at now. I just started today. It is an interesting first day. I am grateful and excited to be here. I have so many things to talk about on the transitional moving arena, and support I want to provide Manchester, and insight. I am not sure if I hit all the points that I wanted to hit, but I think that is what I have for now.

Alderman Vincent stated thank you for coming. I'm sure it wasn't easy. It sounds like something you have said a lot. I don't know anything of you other than what you've said today, but I am pretty proud of your accomplishments. You have had a tough road. The deck was stacked against you from the get-go. I admire your push. You should be proud of yourself; your children should be proud and I'm sure they are very proud of you. How old are your children now?

Mr. Stevens stated 14, 12 and 5. I also married into a 14-year-old and twin 12-year-olds.

Alderman Vincent stated an instant family. I am glad you came today. I am proud of you. I don't know you, but I wish you nothing but the best. Your story is wonderful. The people sitting behind you deal with people that are in that earlier situation on a regular

basis. If we have more positive role models, you are a success. You have a Masters degree and got a Bachelors in such a short period of time. You are a pillar. You should never forget that. Sobriety always looms heavy. You never want to fall back. You are passed that point, but it is always there. I talked to a lot of people I know that suffered from sobriety going on and off, and one day is one day. Two days is one day more than one day. Years are years. Don't ever look back. Keep looking forward. I'm happy for you.

Mr. Stevens stated the reason I remain successful is that I stay in therapy. It doesn't end. Someone who has experienced the trauma that I have, that is not something that we want to stop. This is an ongoing, everyday journey. I keep that strong support network around me, including my wife. That is the support I have.

Alderman O'Neil asked as you sit here today as the Executive Director of Hope for NH Recovery, and your life journey which you are a hero, what would you say if you could pick one thing that elected officials like us could make a difference with. What would that be? Sometimes elected officials try to solve everything and we end up solving nothing sometimes. If there was one thing through your journey and now in your professional career with a couple different agencies and now as an executive, what would that one thing be?

Mr. Stevens replied supporting those that support people in that transitional period. Prevention is amazing and very needed. Post-vention is what is going to turn things around in Manchester at this current state. The need is so dire. If we can create recovery-oriented systems of care that are integrated and support everybody that is in the program from multiple areas – mental health, substance use, housing issues, justice involvement – supporting those core areas you can increase the chances of success per person. In those transitional programs, and I don't know if this is something you can do directly, but supporting the people that are going to do these things. Having those life skills taught. Having case management available for people getting their basic needs met like IDs, food, Medicaid, whatever they need at that time to get them off to the right start. That transitional period where they have now made that decision, like someone like me sitting in that van knowing I needed help but had no idea where to get it. I was not comfortable and had so much stigma, we have to reduce the stigma around getting help. We want people recovering as loudly as possible so those people who are suffering silently can go and get help. They say okay it is possible; I can do it. Randy did it, he did it five years ago. I can do it.

Alderman O'Neil stated you said something that really struck me just now. Four pillars I'll call it. You talked about substance abuse, housing, mental health, and justice. Did I write that correctly?

Mr. Stevens said justice involvement, mental health, substance use, and homelessness.

Alderman O'Neil stated I wrote it as housing.

Mr. Stevens said housing instability; whatever you want to call it.

Alderman O'Neil stated those pillars, I don't think we talk about them that way. Especially adding that justice piece, that is powerful. Thank you for that.

Alderman Barry stated you said when you first went into federal prison you were already 30-days sober. I know one of the things that we wanted to implement is that, for example, a county jail in Hillsborough County has some type of program in there, like an outreach program to deal with people. As hopefully some of you know, unfortunately, something like 85% of people that are incarcerated are somehow or someway drug related. That includes not just drug use and selling, but also crimes that they commit to get drugs or while they are on drugs. People don't realize that. That is what is happening. It was good you were 30-days sober, but a lot of people don't have that going for them when they get arrested. Usually, they are hitting rock bottom at that point. Did you find it tougher? How did you find it in Strafford County, and how long were you in there? Did you take steps right away to start helping other inmates?

Mr. Stevens replied yes, before I even went in I was already actively in AA. I was going in with 30 days where I was actually starting to do things. That being said, when someone is in 30 days of recovery, especially coming off of the things I was coming off of – my body and my dopamine levels were all out of whack. I was constantly crying. I had an advantage. I had gotten ear acupuncture done in the first couple of weeks. It is called AcuDetox treatment. Now I am a provider of that.

Alderman O'Neil stated there is a picture from many years ago where the five of us had that. We all had that in our ears. We sat right here doing it.

Alderman Barry stated it was this Committee. I was the chairman back then. I was trying to run the meeting with these needles in my ear.

Mr. Stevens stated coming full circle, that money you have Laura Cooley and Elizabeth, was used to allow me to become an AcuDetox specialist. I ran a clinic over at Hope for over a year while I worked at the Mental Health Center and provided treatment to countless people. I got people from places of housing stability that only felt comfortable was coming in. They had mental illness, substance use disorder, they get treatments and I was able to talk to them and get connected, and now they are living and as far as I know, still living in housing and off the streets.

Alderman Barry stated see, Alderman O'Neil, some things do work. We do get it right sometimes.

Mr. Stevens stated ear acupuncture, especially for this population of people, is a very inexpensive way to create – never mind the physiological stuff it does for the body and the reset of the stress but there is a report by Chinese scientists that showed that dopamine, serotonin levels started to balance back out shortly after treatment. It is incredible. On top of that, the connection. Somebody is sitting in the chair; I connect with people. That is what I do. I am a people mover. When I get a chance to talk to someone, I can help to motivate that person into a state of change.

Alderman Barry stated to reiterate what Aldermen Vincent and O'Neil were saying, thank you so much. You certainly have the courage to come in front of us and talk about

your past, but now your future, which is looking bright. I am hoping you can stay in contact with us and assist us somehow or someway. Whatever you think we need in this community, let us know. We are absolutely open.

Mr. Stevens stated anytime I can help at all, let me know.

Alderman Kantor stated your story is remarkable. It gives so much hope to so many people. I appreciate you sharing. My brother, I could have lost him, but he chose a different path. The Fentanyl is a nightmare. I just want to be able to support the programs that really work. Clearly, God has put you in this role of sharing and thank you so much, and believing in people, and giving people the courage. I can't thank you enough. I am a little emotional, as you can see. I have my brother in jail with no AA meetings there. We need to work the system so it synchronizes so everyone that is an expert in their field is sharing. The sad thing is GateHouse is not here. That really bothers me that there is no outreach. Do you guys have outreach? I witnessed Amanda and Shane help people. I know someone personally that is six months sober because of their commitment to people. I have to bring this up. It is so important that we find a way of synchronizing all the non-profits and supporting financially the ones that are really truly. Not everyone is going to make it; it is life choices. However, we can support the ones that are really guiding people the best way they can possibly do it. How can we support you?

Mr. Stevens stated ultimately, what I plan on doing, and I guess I'll give you a tidbit of the vision of Hope. Starting a training center, where I am training other recovery coaches using my lived experience and skills at being a trainer to help motivate people to want to be a part of that workforce. We need people that are willing and able to share their lived experience with other people to create that connection. In that, having a team that has satellite offices across the city. I was thinking of someplace like St. Andrew's or some church that has space available. Have a recovery coach or two planted in those locations across the city so people know this is a place where you can find hope and find some recovery and get some coaching. That being said, the jail is currently working with Revive. Maybe there is a collaboration that could happen there. I wasn't the ED when that happened. I would have preferred Hope being in there because it is our city. Finding a way to outreach those people. I have a health and wellness curriculum that I developed for Valley Street. I had to pilot it in Strafford County because I couldn't get anyone at Valley Street to call me back. It was very successful. I had people come out and get connected with me. I was able to give them clothing, get them into sober living, and be that peer to them. That was on a volunteer basis out of Strafford County. That is quite a distance away. If we could have it here, that kind of program where people know this is the person that kept showing up and delivering this message to me and now, I know exactly where they are. They are at Hope. I'm going to that place to get some help. At least they are getting some sort of skills, some foundation to build off. When you're in a state where you've been arrested and you've stopped using drugs, there are still drugs in jail but you can't use the same quantities that you could on the street, that being said you have an opportunity to do some thinking. If we don't provide a stimulus or catalyst for that thought process, it is less likely that they are going to think they should change. If we have somebody that says I have been exactly where you are, I made the change, this is what I did, here are some skills, and you can do the same thing and live your best life. Valley Street, Strafford County, Merrimack County, the

other ones, are all a great place because they are short-term facilities where people are going to end up back and they have an opportunity. Instead of going back up the street, they can go to Farnum Center or Granite Recovery and get some help. Having that conversation while behind those walls. I created a theory when I was incarcerated that watching the lack of support as people exited prison, I was thinking why not have somebody connect with them and a social worker come into the jail and see them and connect with them on their way out in the last six months of incarceration. If we had that kind of bridge. Get somebody to help get your ID. We'll fill out all the paperwork, as soon as you get out you get your ID so you don't need to spend those first weeks or a month searching for those things. We already have that going. It increases the chances they are going to be successful. I have so many ideas.

Alderman O'Neil stated I am a layman in this. If I wrote down those four pillars, is work an early pillar? Or do they need to overcome those four basic pillars first, then employment?

Mr. Stevens replied in my utopian world, I see a program where somebody comes in and they fall into those four pillars. They are sitting with their intake clinician, and the clinician says what are your strengths, how can I help you to do what you want with your recovery. Not telling them what they want, but getting buy in from the person by asking what they need. What do you need to be successful? You don't know? Okay let me educate you on some things and we will develop that plan the further you get on your journey. Then moving through what is called a low-intensity in-patient program for a month or two where they are developing those basic skills. They are not worried about work. They are connected with Medicaid or whatever that is paying for their time to get themselves right. The second stage, they are in a more intense in mental health training, almost taking classes in a sense but they're not just free to do whatever they want. This is also the time when we start learning job skills and developing them as peer support specialists if they want to join the recovery field. No offense to anyone who is clinical here, but everybody should go through the recovery coach training. It is great for connection. Even if you want to be a mental health counselor, go through recovery coach training, it is the best thing you could do. Everybody gets that foundational training. Every peer gets that training, because you don't want people going out sponsoring people and they don't have a clue about what they are saying and they effect people in a negative way. We want to effect people in a positive way. That recovery coach training gives you that ability to be like maybe I shouldn't let you call me at 1AM, maybe I shouldn't be your friend, I should be your sponsor. Healthy boundaries they are developing. We get them connected with vocational rehab but they want to be in a trade. They phase up and are in a sober living environment where they pay for their space, all the skills they learned now they have a case manager helping them to do it. You are actually doing your budget and following it. I met my wife in November 2021 and started getting paid money in May 2021. The whole time, I was wasting money. My wife said hey, this is how you do a budget. Now I can actually pay bills without freaking out every paycheck. Those are the things we aren't taught. I didn't have anyone. As much as I love my mother, she did not teach me about budgeting. I watched her spend everything she got as soon as she got it. That was what I was taught. I had no clue. I didn't know what I didn't know. So many people are brought up in environments like that or worse. They aren't taught interpersonal skills. They don't know how to communicate

with anyone or to pay bills, buy things. That treatment period of time is when we need to be teaching people those skills.

Alderman O'Neil asked when you get your feet under you, I recall what Hope and that complex was setup for. Maybe we can get some information on the original approvals, which would be how many years ago now? If we can get the background, I think it has developed or adjusted over time. What was planned and what is going on now, Madam Chair, if we could get that it would be good to know, because I really don't know. It has been a long time since I have been over there.

Chairman Thomas stated absolutely, I would love to know also.

Alderman O'Neil stated I remember what the original spot was and the original partners. Are you responsible for the building?

Mr. Stevens answered no we rent the space.

Alderman O'Neil asked you rent.

Mr. Stevens replied the rest of the building is a co-op.

Alderman O'Neil stated CMC was involved.

Mr. Stevens stated yes, CMC is right across the hall from us.

Alderman O'Neil stated I don't know who could pull that together for us. I apologize, I thought you were in charge of the building. If we get that info, Madam Chair, on what was originally approved, and it was approved here because I think there was some funding. Has it transitioned, adjusted, etc.?

Chairman Thomas stated I know where you're going with that. I think this is a great opportunity. I feel as though he is a great leader and he can steer us in a lot of good directions and get us some information that we need to progress things. I did want to say, I liked your question Alderman O'Neil that you brought up about the four tiers. Obviously, residential treatment is very important with agencies that work and want to work and are doing good things for the people. A home doesn't just make someone okay. Their mind has to be healthy. If you are giving those individuals the 28 days or 30 days, that is 28 or 30 days that their mind is healing. That is not a lot of time, but at least it is time where they can start thinking rationally: what do I want, what do I like. If you think about it, their life was probably so busy before. What were you busy doing? Selling drugs, going to Massachusetts every day; I'm so busy. What are your activities? Nothing. People have to redefine themselves. Treatment is very important for that.

Alderman O'Neil stated I will send my phone down the line. I was a little rude in looking for it. This is the picture of three of us. You can see the ear acupuncture.

Mr. Stevens stated Elizabeth is going to love that you brought that up.

Chairman Thomas stated like Randy said, these things can be so inexpensive to do. Why are we not incorporating these in our engagement shelter? Things that can be going on that really make a difference. Connect people like Randy to programs such as what we just heard of. These are things that really work. You have to keep going. You can't skip something in your plan, because you're going to go back to square one.

Mr. Stevens stated I intend on, very shortly, setting up a lunch and learn, and inviting you aldermen, all of the city's leadership over to get an idea and a more in-depth picture of what I plan to do with Hope.

Chairman Thomas stated thank you so much.

Alderman Barry stated I have some new business. The other day, myself and Alderman Thomas went over to the shelter. We had a nice visit. Adrienne was there and she showed us around. A few things caught our attention. One of the things that I have said quite a few times, is why we don't require identification when people walk through that door. I spoke with a gentleman today from Keene, who runs the Keene shelter. He says they require identification, and if homeless people come in to use the shelter and don't have identification, they have a case worker on site that will assist them on getting identification, whether it be social security identification, a social security card, a non-drivers or drivers license, or a birth certificate, or all of the above. They are very important, because if these people are looking for counseling or Medicaid or whatever, they need to show identification, or even for something that I've always pushed for, which is employment. We need to do that. Like Alderman Thomas is saying, shoving is loving. We need to get these people back into the workforce, back into society so they can be proud of themselves and start doing what they should be doing and hopefully getting out the door. Unfortunately, there were quite a few in there while we were there that weren't engaged. They were sitting there, on their phones, conversing with each other, which is great. Some were sleeping, there were probably about fifty people in there.

*On motion of **Alderman Barry**, duly seconded by **Alderman Kantor**, it was voted that the Beech Street Shelter require some form of identification and if the person doesn't have anything, that the shelter assists them in getting it.*

Alderman O'Neil stated I think Alderman Barry is right on with this. A non-drivers license ID, and I don't know what other forms there are. Maybe they can help them.

Alderman Barry stated non-drivers, social security card, or a birth certificate. The challenges that Keene had were if they were out of state. If they came from out of state, they found a way to do it. I hope the gentleman I spoke with will email me over their procedures for everything. That will come in handy. The other thing that we noticed was Adrienne has a person that works with her, Owen, who does a great job. We think it is important that we actually have office space at the shelter because one of them, if not both, should be there on a daily basis to oversee the operation. It is so important that we have someone there. I'd like to make a motion, and I did speak to the Mayor this morning in reference to it and he is in favor of it.

Alderman Barry moved that the Housing Stability Department be housed at 39 Beech Street. **Alderman O'Neil** duly seconded the motion.

Alderman O'Neil asked where are they located now.

Alderman Barry stated I believe at the Health Department.

Chairman Thomas asked can we add to the motion that both Mrs. Beloin and Owen's offices are in 39 Beech.

Alderman Barry stated that is fine. There is quite a bit of space.

Chairman Thomas stated there are quite a few offices that Mrs. Beloin also mentioned aren't being used. There are three offices in the back. Even if each one of them has an office of their own, there is one open for if there is outreach.

Chairman Thomas called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

Alderman Barry asked can we request to have that on tomorrow night's agenda.

Lisa McCarthy, Assistant City Clerk, stated I don't think we can do that. We don't have a placeholder on the agenda for the committee report.

Alderman O'Neil asked new business.

Clerk McCarthy stated you could bring it up under new business, but the Mayor's Office is adamant about not having committee reports come in on the same night.

Alderman Barry stated in the past we have had meetings on Tuesdays where we reported out that night.

Clerk McCarthy stated yes, but we are no longer doing that. That does not give the public the chance or the Aldermen the chance to see the report and understand what is being voted on. It will be reported out to the Board on April 2.

Alderman O'Neil stated maybe we can bring it in under new business tomorrow night. We will be getting into budget season soon.

Chairman Thomas stated we will also be recommending that the policies of the shelter come to us for review.

*On motion of **Alderman O'Neil**, duly seconded by **Alderman Vincent**, it was voted that all policies related to the Beech Street Shelter be reviewed by the Committee.*

*There being no further business, on motion of **Alderman Barry**, duly seconded by **Alderman Vincent**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Clerk of Committee