

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ALCOHOL, OTHER DRUGS & YOUTH SERVICES

October 1, 2024 at 4:30 PM

Chairman Thomas called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

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

Messrs.: Alderman Fajardo, Alderman Long, J. King, I. Owens, O. Westover, R. Stevens

1. Quarterly Report (June to August 2024) on the 39 Beech Street Engagement Center.

Alderman O'Neil stated I asked the mayor about two things that would be good to know. That is housing placement – where did those twenty residents end up – and unemployment. Where did they end up? Those are good things. We should be supporting those that provide housing that are really helping out our citizens, and the same thing with unemployment. I remember years ago Alderman Long had worked with Home Depot in employing some people. I don't know if anyone can answer that.

Chairman Thomas stated I believe we did get something.

Alderman O'Neil stated if something came, I apologize. We want to be supporting the places that are actually helping out. We support a lot of places that don't necessarily help out.

Alderman Barry stated I think what you are asking, Alderman O'Neil, is the organizations that have been assisting us.

Alderman O'Neil answered yes.

Alderman Barry asked so you don't want names or anything like that; just the organizations.

Alderman O'Neil replied just the organizations. If it is Home Depot, as Alderman Long worked with years ago, we certainly want to throw some business their way if somebody is helping out a person with getting a job.

Irina Owens, Director of Homeless Initiatives, stated I saw the email come through. The response from the mayor might have just been an acknowledgement of the email. We can look into it. Jake is checking right now to see if he knows of some of the businesses where folks have gotten employed. I agree it would be nice to support them.

Alderman O'Neil stated it is good to know because we support a lot of organizations. These numbers are great. Twenty people in housing is great. Nine people employed is great. I would like to know where that is so we can make sure we are supporting

whatever the organization is or whatever the business is. If you need to do it with a phone call, that is fine.

Ms. Owens stated we can look into it.

Alderman O'Neil asked by the end of the week.

Ms. Owens answered yes, we can figure that out.

Chairman Thomas stated I believe Mike sent something out to the committee that I had sent. Everyone should have gotten it last Thursday. You compiled it at the shelter. So, we did get places of employment and things like that last Thursday.

Alderman O'Neil stated I will go back and look at that. Thank you.

Alderman Vincent stated the Manchester VA has a very successful program. We all know that they do very well with taking care of their homeless veterans. I didn't see them on the partnership. Is this something that we're looking to engage in a partnership with them to see what their successes are and how we can try to work with some of those areas? I am not saying it is going to be one for one, because obviously it is a different type of person. Is this something that you intend - to work with the Manchester VA to grow that partnership to help the veterans and to help across the board?

Ms. Owens replied they are currently working with the Mayor on the initiative to end veteran homelessness. I think you are referencing the resource fair.

Alderman Vincent stated I am just referencing it in general. From your standpoint, is this something that you're looking to do? I know the Mayor has the initiative of tracking that. It is a matter of whether we can implement some of those successes that they utilize to get their homeless population off the streets. I think I mentioned it before in a previous meeting. I am curious to see if this is something we are working on with them as a partner.

Ms. Owens responded yes we are working on expanding the outreach to different providers to come into shelter.

Alderman Vincent stated they have their own process on how they do it, which is successful. Are we working with them to see what they do to bring this success and incorporate some of those procedures? That is what I am trying to get at. Have we opened up a dialogue with them to say hey you guys are good at this? What are you doing that maybe we can tweak on our end on the city side?

Jake King, 39 Beech Street Shelter Manager, stated as a veteran I don't think we can do as much as they can do. They have the resources as veterans' support. What we do is we have a couple of veteran services that come in regularly and at the care fair and they try to get our folks to the VA. We can't emulate what the VA does. We can have a similar process.

Alderman Vincent stated that is what I am getting at.

Mr. King stated yes. We have a process of taking the veterans in and streamlining their access to the VA.

Alderman Vincent stated not just the veterans though. I am talking about using their procedures in how they deal with veterans, and then on the city side doing something similar for non-veterans. The way they are doing it is clearly working.

Mr. King replied right. I get what you are saying. I think the reason they can do it as successfully is because they have literally the entire US Veteran's Services with them. If we can get that same kind of level of support, we would absolutely love to do exactly what they do. I don't think we can do that right now.

Alderman Vincent stated if you identify what works and you bring it before us, I would be hard-pressed to say that you would find a negative response. Successful answers with a yes. If it is successful, that's what we want to bring. That's what we want to see so we can ensure that is what we are doing on our end as well. We are on the same page.

Alderman O'Neil stated I'd like to follow-up on Alderman Vincent's questions. I was aware of a homeless veteran that finally got some help. He needed housing. He didn't need other supportive services, maybe disability services. He got in after a bit of time over at Independence Hall on Somerville Street. I thought this was where Alderman Vincent was going; I think it was part of where he was going. What is the connection with the VA and our program?

Mr. King stated the veteran services that come in have a primary goal to connect any of these veterans to the VA.

Alderman O'Neil asked has there been any success with that. Either the twenty that have been placed in housing or the nine that have found jobs?

Mr. King replied I would have to double-check. We typically in this field struggle to find veterans that will accept the support. We don't get a lot of veterans that come into the engagement center, unfortunately.

Alderman O'Neil stated this particular gentleman spent almost two years at New Horizons. All he needed was a bed.

Alderman Barry stated thank you for everything and the information you sent to us and the follow-up in reference to what Alderman O'Neil's concern was. That is exactly what we have been looking for and what we are hoping to get is to know how these people are actually doing and what organizations are actually working for us. Some organizations are showing up, but for some reason they just haven't hit it off with some of the guests that we serve over at the shelter. I know Chairman Thomas and I met with Dr. Masewic, his wife Heather, and a gentleman named Chris from ACORN. I think Chris was there last week. We want to clarify that they are there just as any other group. They aren't taking over; no one is taking over. We just wanted to make sure that the more the merrier. If they can add to what we are doing, and I did ask them personally that if there was anything that they saw that we can improve on or any suggestions or

ideas that they may have, to let us know. Thank you for what you are doing. It is always good to see success stories.

Chairman Thomas stated I also love seeing the success stories. I like going in there on Thursdays and seeing tons of agencies and providers and people engaging with them. I understand that a lot of times it is tough to engage with some of them over there. But people keep trying which is good, and that is all we can ask for. Thank you very much for all the hard work.

Alderman Barry stated we are seeing this. Unfortunately, the public doesn't see it. Just the summary of key achievements, I will actually read them so the public is aware what is going on. This is for June, July, and August. Housing placements had twenty guests housed. Vital documents acquired: twenty-five guests obtained IDs, birth certificates, or social security cards. Employment opportunities: nine guests gained employment. Detox and recovery services: five guests entered and completed programs. Bus passes provided: fifteen guests received bus passes for work and appointments. Total provider-guest connections were 458. I think that is great. If we can continue that and you can keep us updated, we want to make sure the lines of communication are always open. It is also important for the public to know what is going on. There are taxpayers and their money is going towards this.

Alderman Kantor stated before it used to be a low-barrier shelter. Has it gone to a high-barrier shelter yet? It hasn't. I am wondering about the safety. It is great everything that you are doing. My concern has always been the people there and their safety and if there are sex offenders there. Do those people have to register with the State?

Mr. King stated they have to register with whatever authority, local police department or state; they still have to register.

Alderman Kantor stated but then they are still allowed to stay there when there are women there. That is still happening, possibly. That is a concern of mine. It is great that you help with IDs. With that, the IDs, are you checking for warrants or harboring any alleged criminals?

Mr. King stated we don't have the right to look into people's warrants.

Alderman Kantor asked can the police come and ask if they are there.

Mr. King responded they are welcome to, yes. We have a good rapport with the Police Department and the Sheriff's Office stops by periodically. If somebody has a warrant for something violent or something really dangerous to the community, they will come and look. We don't hide anyone. I am very strict. I tell them if you have a warrant, you should take care of it now. If it's ten years down the road it is going to set you back, and they don't go away. They are able to come and check. They don't raid the place, which is great because then it would take away the safety and feeling of safety.

Alderman Kantor stated yes, the overall safety for everyone.

Mr. King replied yes. They are welcome to come by any time.

Alderman O'Neil stated I found the email and I apologize. In regards to the email, on the housing, what is Manchester Mental Health pivotal? What is Manchester Housing Authority pivotal? I don't know what Daire is.

Mr. King stated that is one of our employees; her name is Daire.

Alderman O'Neil stated it says she was pivotal a couple of times in here. Does pivotal mean that is where they are?

Mr. King stated pivotal means those are the agencies or individuals who made the connections to get them where they needed to go. One of the things that we are struggling with is even though these agencies come in, they are bound by HIPAA and they are not necessarily allowed to even tell us where people are getting housed. We can tell you the agencies that are making the housing happen, but we are not always allowed to tell you where they go and we don't always know where they go.

Alderman O'Neil responded fair enough. I saw some references to jobs. I didn't get close to nine. Gyro Spot and Giovanni's Pizza, which is good. I am looking for the places where there was employment. Can you work on that?

Mr. King answered absolutely.

Alderman O'Neil stated those two things are big for me. I think you are making great strides.

Alderman Fajardo stated I am curious about the update. Was that written by Irina and Owen? The update that we received didn't have any names signed to it. I wasn't sure what office it came from.

Ms. Owens stated we took the report that Jake's team sends over every month and we compiled into a three-month update.

Alderman Fajardo stated ok that's all. I was just curious as to who to say thank you to.

Mr. King stated me, I did it and I was pivotal.

Ms. Owens stated when I say we, I should really say Owen because that is his thing.

2. Discussion with Hope for NH Recovery.

Chairman Thomas stated hello, Mr. Stevens. Thank you for joining us. I know we had you in the beginning of the year to talk about your year with Hope for NH Recovery. We heard about all the great things that you were starting to do back then. We wanted to have you back because you have kind of exploded Hope. You have so much going on there and we wanted the public to know more about what was going on. We have had people come up to talk during the public comment of the BMA meetings who have mentioned that there are no agencies or not enough. I really want and I am sure all of us really want the public to hear that there is a lot out there. So, you are on.

Randy Stevens, Executive Director of Hope for NH Recovery, stated Hope Recovery was started in 2015. It is a peer-to-peer recovery community organization. Basically, that means people like me, with lived experience, get to share our experience, strength, and hope with others and encourage them to live the life that they want to live. Something that is self-directed, free from substances, etc. Most of my peers are either fully-certified or working towards dual certification for both substance use, which is the CRSW side, and the mental health side. Fun fact: I helped develop the new CPSS training so my staff did it from all sides. They don't get a break. We do peer-to-peer one-on-one coaching, which involves taking a member through an intake and then recovery planning sessions that happen weekly. We have about 350 who are active members who are engaged in that individual coaching. We also have group coaching which happens four days a week. Three of them on the dimensions of wellness and one is for people in early stages of recovery with less than a year of sobriety. What they find is a small group setting where they get to have the same kind of feel as the one-on-one coaching but amongst their peers so they can share a little bit more and get some social support and that connection. What we do, is we normalize the recovery process. We are living examples, each of us that are employed or who volunteer at Hope, are living examples of what recovery can look like for people. We get to engage with people at various stages from the pre-contemplative I don't have a problem kind of stage all the way to somebody who has been safe and maintaining their recovery for years. Some of our members have more than thirty years of sobriety. It is pretty amazing to see. We have pro-social activities that are happening every day. When we are open, we have a pro-social activity happening, whether it is chess club or cribbage tournaments, games like corn-hole, book clubs, various things like tai chi, yoga two or three nights a week. It is always evolving and changing and growing. It is really based on what the membership needs. When people come in and identify a need, like somebody really likes tai chi. So, they find somebody or they are trained in providing tai chi so they start that group. It is member-driven and it creates a culture where you can be empowered to do whatever resonates with you and whatever your truth is. We bring that to the community and make it better. We encourage everybody to bring things to Hope. We just opened up the Laura Cooley Community Wellness Clinic. We are providing free services such as massage therapy, ear acupuncture, acupuncture, acupressure, sound healing, meditation mindfulness, crystal healing, and more. We are always changing and always growing. These things can be found on our website, RecoveryNH.org. Within that wellness clinic we also have workshops. People are bringing in self-love workshops. They are calling them worth-shops, self-love worth-shops. It's really cool. Some people are doing art and bringing other services that they find around the city that our population of people might not necessarily have access to. We provide a space where they can come in. It is almost like a spa in there. Maybe not as nice as yours, but it is pretty nice. We also have community events that are happening quarterly or more. In November we have an occupational wellness resource fair. It is basically an occupational fair for people to find work, to find the skills they need to be successful in a job, learn soft-skills, interviewing with people like me or with Andrea from WorkPath Staffing. She is going to help me and is working directly with me to make this happen. We are going to bring in our partners from the Mental Health Center and we will bring in a job placement service. It is going to be awesome. We had a fair where it was more focused on the vendors coming and having job opportunities. This one will be a little bit of that with a lot of building up people's skills and making them feel comfortable going into this workplace.

Alderman Barry asked did you find it, because obviously you are engaging people over at Hope for NH Recovery, do you find that the people playing corn-hole and things like that where they will follow the leader and they will all start joining in. Some people are pretty shy and they don't get involved right away, but they may get involved by playing some games like that or with some things to entertain themselves. Then that branches out into substance rehabilitation. They will then get involved with group sessions to deal with substance abuse.

Mr. Stevens responded yes. If I were to tell you that you can quit smoking by taking this class or you can play this game and quit smoking, which one sounds better to you? Especially if you don't want to quit smoking. What we try to do is try to create a community-feel where we are not trying to show people this is how you recover. No, you can recover in a normalized situation. Having connection, friends, social connection is huge. Johann Hari says the opposite of addiction is connection. That is what we are trying to build, opportunities for people to connect. If that is over a game of corn-hole, if a connection can be made...I have had many conversations where I am shooting hoops with someone and playing. What I teach is that it is not what you're doing it is the context of the conversation you are having while you are doing it.

Alderman O'Neil stated this is very similar to what I asked before, and I understand and respect that you can't follow – I wasn't thinking about that but that was a good education process for me – but similarly it is important if we can track jobs and housing that you may come across. We need to know what is working. I like how you folks presented it, Manchester Housing Authority pivotal. Now I know Daire, pivotal. Mental Health Center pivotal. We kind of know what agencies are playing a role. Same thing on the job side. The holistic is pretty neat what you are providing there. If you had to guess, how much of the holistic care that you provide helps them to take the next step, whatever that next step may be for them? Is it 10%, 40%?

Mr. Stevens answered I am not sure as far as the number, but I can give you an answer that might fit. I, within two weeks of early recovery, had ear acupuncture. I couldn't stop moving at that time. I couldn't stop moving long enough to have a conversation with somebody. People weren't really wanting to engage with me. I was at Safe Harbor in Portsmouth. I had ear acupuncture and walked out of there 45 minutes later and was like thanks, bye. It never clicked in my head that that experience led me to be able to sit and breath and start to think rationally, just from that reset I had to my nervous system. I don't think we can put a number on the importance of that connection but I can tell you that I see people come in manic. They are shaking, they are upset. We put needles in their ears and they sit and listen to soothing music, they talk, and they leave calm. Like how I left. I can't track that right now, but what I have done is started intake surveys to kind of gage on a scale where somebody is at to collect some quantitative data. Then we have three months' follow-up. I haven't been open three months, but in three months I can give you some numbers. The idea is we can track if this is improving the quality of people's lives and how many people are affected, and how well are we doing, or where do we need to improve.

Alderman O'Neil stated I appreciate that. I fully support those efforts. I think the world would be a lot better if we took care of ourselves in a holistic way. I owe you a picture

from the time I was over there of getting ear acupuncture. I was one of the aldermen getting that; it was done right here.

Mr. Stevens stated I am state certified, so whenever you want another treatment I just need to grab my stuff.

Alderman O'Neil responded there was something to it.

Mr. Stevens stated in twenty minutes, your whole central nervous system resets.

Alderman O'Neil stated we had a better meeting because of it that night. There was no yelling at each other. I am fully supportive of those efforts in trying to bring a different spin to the care of people.

Mr. Stevens stated it is really about helping people to see themselves as a whole person and not as one individual symptom. When you start balancing how you are feeling inside with everything you have going on outside, you are starting to see some changes. I was always taught to make the inside match the outside. Start with the inside and then work out.

Alderman Barry stated it was pretty amazing, Randy, because after they did it to him, he didn't speak for the rest of the night.

Alderman Kantor stated I wanted to say thank you. Connecting and overall well-being is so key. Helping people make better choices when their nervous system is a little more chill is priceless. The accountability and the caring is so important. Thank you for leading the way and everyone with their accountability and transparency has just been wonderful.

Alderman Long stated thank you for the services you give. I'd like to answer one of Alderman O'Neil's questions. One hundred percent of the people that are there today, one hundred percent of them are working towards recovery. Of the ones that go tomorrow, one hundred percent of them are working towards recovery. That is a positive thing. How many people are Manchester people? Do you get people from outside of Manchester? Which is ok, I am just trying to figure it out.

Mr. Stevens stated we serve Greater Manchester, all the way from New Boston to Londonderry, Auburn, Deerfield, Goffstown. We have an area. There are twelve RCOs in the state and there are twenty-one centers across the state. Each RCO has their own area that they serve. We share ours with Revive. Revive came into Manchester a few years ago but they are primarily out of Nashua. Most of the people that we serve, I think it was 89%, make less than \$30,000. With that said, I don't know how many people are travelling from around the state to come to Hope on that little of an income. I think we are serving predominantly Manchester residents. I don't actually have a number, but I can start tracking that.

Alderman Long stated that would be interesting. Where can the City of Manchester help you? Where is it that the City of Manchester can be of help to you whether it is marketing or whatever? I turn people on to Hope for NH Recovery a lot.

Mr. Stevens replied yes, marketing. The way we have been working, we work with Irina and Owen in various capacities so we are working together pretty well. I will be sure to bring it to you guys when I have a need. I don't have anything off the top of my head right now.

Chairman Thomas stated thank you. You just put on a huge recovery festival this past weekend, didn't you? I did go. I was very shocked. I shouldn't have been shocked, because you do great work. I was shocked on how many agencies were there. It was great because a lot of them wanted to come to 39 Beech. A lot expressed how wonderful you are doing over there and the work that everybody is doing over there. Thank you very much.

3. Discussion regarding the use of public bathrooms.

Alderman Long stated I have been struggling for years with getting bathrooms for the homeless. I know the chemical bathrooms didn't work. I have a road trip tomorrow to look at a bathroom. There are five of them in Cambridge. They are \$350,000 each. There are bathrooms that I recognize for \$180,000. There are also homeless grants to help buy those bathrooms. I think if we immediately get three bathrooms placed somewhere... I stopped at 39 Beech, went outside and had a smoke with the homeless that were sitting out there. I asked them, reasonably how far would you walk to use a bathroom. They said four or five blocks, which makes sense. If I have to go to the bathroom, I'm not thinking I have to walk a quarter-mile. Placing these bathrooms...you can't steal the toilet paper, they are self-cleaning, the sanitizers aren't made with alcohol so you can't use them to start a fire and they are outside where you are watched. Every issue that we have with use of public bathrooms is taken care of now with current IT. Some of them are timed. If you don't get out within fifteen minutes, a light blinks and you go in there to make sure somebody didn't OD. It is time, because I have had residents call me when they see people leaving the back of their houses and they go check and there are signs of somebody staying there for the night. I wanted to bring that up. I spoke to the mayor about it. We are moving people from areas; we are moving them from different place to different place. We still have the issue. It is just spreading out more. I thought at the very least we should take a serious look at providing bathrooms for the public, including those that are homeless so we don't get the calls about them using people's backyards or businesses' doorways. At the very least, that is a human need. It is important for us to take a look at that and start thinking of where we could look at three locations where these could be put that would help relieve the residents and the businesses.

Alderman Barry asked when you go are you going with the mayor.

Alderman Long replied I am not sure if his schedule allows it. We are going to Cambridge.

Alderman Barry stated a concern would be, you say that there is a timer, but who monitors it. Is that something the city is going to be responsible for? Who is going to monitor it if someone is in there too long? For example, if it is going to be used to sleep in. That is one of the problems we have had with the portable outhouses that we set up.

We have done it quite a few times in the city and it just hasn't worked. We've had so many overdoses in there, people taking the sanitizer for fuel and to drink it because of the alcohol. It is gross when you think about it, but unfortunately when someone is desperate, they will use whatever they can to get their hands on, anything that will get them that high they are looking for and the bathrooms have been left in a mess. It is unfortunate because we are responsible for them. Even in Veteran's Park where we have the Welcome Center, we had bathrooms in there and they turned them into a pigsty. It is not everyone, but there are a few bad ones. They ruin it for everyone else. They have used the bathrooms in City Hall and done damage in there. It is unfortunate because if everyone behaved, we wouldn't be having this problem. Things would be a lot smoother in our city, but there are a few bad apples and they ruin it for everyone else. Whatever you can find out about who monitors it would be great.

Alderman Long stated as far as someone monitoring it, 115,000 people will be monitoring it; people that live in the City of Manchester. The light is blinking; we know somebody has been in there for too long. We don't have to have someone sit there to monitor it. If I walk by and I see the light blinking, and I'm knocking on the door or open it up to see if somebody overdosed or somebody is trying to sleep in there, or whatever. The fortunate thing is this issue has been going on for a long time and it is a United States issue. Technology has come forward, listening from all other municipalities saying here are the issues we have, if you come up with something we will buy it. Technology is out there. There are several bathrooms we could look at. This is put on a pad, a concrete pad, so you can't tip it over. You can't see into them, but if somebody were to OD or something you could hear it, it is open in the summertime. It is closed in the winter-time. You'd be able to tell. I find it appalling we are violating people because they are going in the alley. If I'm at City Hall right now, there are no bathrooms here and I am going outside as soon as I can looking for the closest bush. When you got to go, you got to go. At minimum we ought to be looking for toilets.

Alderman O'Neil asked did you mention the name or manufacturer.

Alderman Long replied I have it here somewhere. I was shocked when somebody told me the price. I figured it would be \$80,000 or \$100,000, but when they told me \$350,000, I thought that is not the bathroom we are looking for.

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

A True Record. Attest.



Clerk of Committee