

**SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN
(PUBLIC PARTICIPATION)
November 16, 2021 at 7:00 PM**

Mayor Craig called the meeting to order.

Mayor Craig called for the Pledge of Allegiance, this function being led by Alderman Stewart.

A moment of silence was observed.

The Clerk calls the roll.

Present: Aldermen Cavanaugh, Stewart, Long, Roy, T. Sapienza, Sharonov, O'Neil, Levasseur, Terrio, E. Sapienza, Shaw, Barry, Gamache, Hirschmann

The Mayor advised that the purpose of the special meeting is to give residents of Manchester the opportunity to address the Board on items of concern affecting the community; that each person will be given only one opportunity to speak, all comments shall be limited to three minutes and any comments must be directed to the Chair.

The Mayor requested that any resident wishing to speak come forward to the nearest microphone, clearly state their name and address when recognized, and give their comments.

Kathleen Carswell, 385 Amherst Street, stated:

My concerns are quite a few for tonight. The first one is Mayor Craig I am calling you out and it is on your watch that that person died on Dutton Street in that fire because we do not have enough building inspectors to go and inspect these apartment buildings. They get passed along and delayed and I don't know what happens but we don't do checks like we should be. I don't live in that building but I have some friends that did. It took three and a half hours for the Red Cross to show up in an SUV with no supplies or anything. I went back and forth with my neighbor to get blankets, shoes, socks,

slippers, boots, you name it. Then I got insulted and sworn at by a police officer three times within 15 minutes. Never in my life, and I have lived here for 59 years now, have I been disrespected like that. I did not insult him. He asked me a question and I couldn't even get my sentence out. I just left it. I was waiting for the handcuffs to come but I didn't care. I am tired of it. The Manchester Police have to held accountable and you have to help me hold them accountable in our city. I have plenty of older neighbors who cannot or are afraid to speak up but I am not and you know that. I have spoken to you already in regards to issues and they are not getting addressed and we are tired of it. Also, my other issue is affordable housing in the City of Manchester. I live on \$1,600/month. I pay my taxes and your paycheck and everybody's paycheck in the City of Manchester. I help pay to do that. We have no housing affordability for anybody on disability or for older people. There is nowhere for them to go. Landlords raise the rents by \$150 or \$200 a month now because they feel like it and they know most of the tenants can't afford it where we live. Shame on them and shame on our city. We can build these luxury apartments and that's great but do we have the clientele for them? No. Do we have a waiting list to occupy them right away? No. Why don't we build more affordable housing in decent neighborhoods that we can call home? Also, I have to pay all of my bills on \$1,000/month. My medications and my payment plan for my Part D prescription plan is almost \$100. I live on \$1,000. You pay rent for \$1,000 and then you have lights and heat and phone and insurance and gas. You can't do it.

Chrissy Simonds, 394 Second Street, stated:

I am here tonight to thank my alderman, Bill Barry, of ward 10. Alderman Barry is exactly what we ask for from our alderman or alderwoman when we elect them for office. I called him when I was desperate because I bought my son a Christmas gift online and it was stolen after FedEx had delivered it. I called my apartment manager and she told me that in order for them to look at the cameras they needed a police report. I felt silly calling the police over an item that was below \$50. They are so busy that I didn't want to take up their time. I called Alderman Barry to see what his opinion was and he assured me that the value of the gift didn't matter because it was stolen and that wasn't right. I called the owner of my apartment building and got no help. I called the police and they were so amazing. They came that night and took a report and

assured me that it didn't matter how much it cost, it just mattered that it was stolen from me. I am a single mom and Christmas is the most stressful time of the year for me. We had a good outcome. They sent me a replacement and I was so grateful. I am grateful to Alderman Barry and to the Manchester Police Department. The Board of Aldermen and you, Mayor Craig, have done an amazing job. You can't fix everything and you have to follow rules and guidelines and policies. You are not miracle workers; nobody is. We all have to work together. Alderman Barry showed me and time and time again you have showed me Mayor Craig that we are a community and we really do care about one another. It is not always going to be rainbows and unicorns but as long as we all work together and we all believe in our one goal of making Manchester a better place, it is going to work out. I hope everybody has a great holiday. Thank you.

Brandon Lemay, 20 West River Drive, stated:

I am disappointed that Joe Kelly Levasseur couldn't visit us for public participation but I am here once again to address you about homelessness. We tried to get one shelter resident here tonight, her name is Tricia McQuade, but unfortunately due to medical reasons she was unable to make it and asked that I speak in her place. It wouldn't have made much of a difference if she were in good health because attempting to get her a pass to come here was a frustrating process. First, we asked a shift supervisor who referred us to the shelter director who then referred us to the marking director for some reason that I can't explain. It felt like they just kept referring us to different people who told us to talk to somebody else. As we know, check-in at the shelter is at 6 PM every day. I want to put out for the record that this meeting started at 7 PM. That is one complaint that I have brought up before. In theory, if you have an event like the BMA meeting or a job that requires you to stay out later, you can get a pass to check-in later. In practice it is not that easy. Too often I have encountered somebody at New Horizons Shelter that couldn't get a work pass approved in time and they had to choose between their bed and their job. It is getting cold out and beds are filling up most nights. Most of the time, they opt to lose their job rather than lose their bed. Last Monday I observed the check-in process and saw four people turned away due to a lack of capacity. It was a cold night. Why are we punishing houseless folks for having a job or wanting to participate in local government? Putting aside the fact that you can be employed and

be houseless in Manchester, shouldn't we reward you for an honest day's work or exercising your freedom of speech? I don't think we should be punishing you. One thing I want to point out about the shelter is that I didn't have this kind of a restriction on my freedom when I was a high schooler going to West High School. My parents were a little flexible if I had work or a meeting to attend but the shelter isn't. I want this board to work with the shelter. I know they are a private organization but I really want to encourage civic participation and participation in the workforce among shelter residents. I want to reduce those barriers. I would absolutely love to have some of these folks come and speak about their experience. I am sure all of you are sick of hearing from me and I would love to have them speak too. I just think they are adults and we should start treating them like it. Thank you very much everybody.

Ashley Poulin, 184 Oakdale Avenue, stated:

I am here tonight to speak about my concerns as a community member regarding the state of homelessness in our city. I am concerned with the fact that the only option the city has to offer is a privately run shelter. FIT or Unfit, whichever, receives a sliver of city funding as their overall funding and that has been an extremely poor investment. Yes, FIT is the only option and because Manchester is not fulfilling its duties to serve our neighbors, I hold you also responsible for everything I am about to share. I am concerned that October was a deadly month. I am concerned that one person died due to not having access to their medication and why you may ask. The staff working that shift was one. It is literally not even possible for someone to manage that all alone. That death falls on FIT and the people in this room. People quit jobs but they don't quit managers. I beg you to look into why they cannot keep staff there even though they just added a \$3 raise to their hourly pay, something that should be highly desirable given these times. My voice may shake and it is not nervousness, it is rage. I am concerned that 7 PM check-ins for adults for no real reason, adults who don't have cellphones, watches or sometimes equal mobility access are held to this tight petty adherence. I have personally witnessed a manager radio up while people were working up that ram at 7:04 PM to simply say do not let them in. When I asked if there were available beds, this person said they were late and they didn't get up in time. It was a cold night. I posted about this on social media and if you would like I can check the exact whether

but my guess is that it was in the 30's. We all live here and we all sleep here and we know the weather has been very cold recently. I am concerned that another person nearly died in the bathroom because again a single staff member was working and they were not able to complete bathroom checks. Regardless of your personal feelings about folks who are addicted, I choose to not judge people by the worst thing they have ever done and keeping them alive one more day gives them another chance. My partner is an addict. She has been sober for several months. She has been sober for several years. Relapses happen. Real people give back. She is a marine and she gives back to the shelter and she has her own business. We are missing out on taking care of these people who have all of this potential. The cost of homelessness to our city is greater than decreased property values. We are losing lives and all of the potential in those people. I have personally witnessed everything I have shared today and more. I have called and emailed and taken to social media and now I stand before you, actually I am sitting, to ask you what you are going to do. Real tangible answers are needed now. Lives depend on it. I am tired of crying. These are my neighbors and your neighbors too. Do better.

Samantha Colby stated:

I am currently living in Manchester without an address but I formerly resided at 199 Manchester Street. I am here to share my experiences from the shelter and open your eyes to the pain that myself and many others have experienced living there. First call for wake-up would be at 6 AM. Often I would be sleep deprived; many of us were. There was no consideration to the noise, PTSD, emergencies, bedbugs or other issues that disturbed our sleep. Showering early was nearly impossible given how few working showers we had. On the days where I could get in the shower, I had to bring all of my belongings with me in garbage bags to avoid theft. There was no safe space to store my belongings and this often discouraged me from showering at the shelter altogether. If I got downstairs in time for breakfast, I was lucky if I could even eat despite my stress. Often I would have to go without breakfast just due to time limitations. We would all be told to exit the building at 7:45 AM. It didn't matter if it was cold or raining. Very rarely would we be allowed to even take cover by the ramp. The shelter support staff and case management were spread so thin. Between the policies and rigid schedules, it

was difficult to get much done on my own. Finding work was very difficult due to the policy on late passes. Sometimes it just wasn't feasible or obtainable and many people had to choose between a bed or their job when coming to the shelter. It was often a fight to survive. There was a persistent fear lingering in the air. The policies and mistreatment and barriers often made the residents short-tempered and combative with each other. The management obstructed attempts to speak out for positive change. Bathrooms and showers remained broken. Complaints go unanswered and towels and blankets were often unavailable. The bedbug problem persisted. This would turn even the most reasonable and even-tempered person sour. I found myself on an increasingly self-destructive path emotionally and there were very few people I could turn to for help. Multiple times I had spoken to staff and often my concerns were left unattended. A member of staff broke the rules to be able to talk me down from suicide. She took me outside and for the first time in a long time, I felt listened to. She cared more about the safety of the residents than policy or arbitrary rules meant to cage the residents both figuratively and literally. The staff member was mentioned in a public statement against FIT as someone deemed qualified to run a shelter and someone with the knowledge, personal attention and care to be a real manager. As a result of being mentioned, her employment with FIT was terminated. The stress that she endured working around unnecessarily cruel policies partly contributed to her taking her own life. I would not be here without her. There have been deaths at the shelter due to a myriad of aforementioned problems. With all the suffering, the prison like policies, the negligence and the corruption, some people remain on the streets or in camps and some die on the streets. The tumultuous experiences of those at the shelter and those turned away should demonstrate how desperately we need change. On behalf of the residents of the shelter, and those who died due to that place, we need change and I ask that you please do anything you can to bring forth that change. This is happening on your watch. Please act now before more lives are lost. We cannot do this alone. I am sorry if my voice is shaking but thank you for your time.

Dan Wright, 518 Cartier Street, stated:

I am speaking today as someone who used to work at the FIT shelter, and there are lots of us because every good person who works there either quits or gets fired. At this

point not one member of their shelter support staff has been there for a full year. The “senior staff” has become two or three people that were hired in the middle of last winter even after they already raised the pay for all shelter staff by over 20% per hour. FIT says this is because it is a tough job and that is partly true but as almost any former shelter worker will tell you, it is only tough because you are a good person who is being forced to be needlessly cruel all day. We loved working there and we really loved working with the residents but the job quickly becomes a daily exercise in working around the grossly inhumane policies and heartless edicts from management just to try to make the lives of the residents a little bit less awful. The people who run FIT have been operating without any oversight and without any accountability for way too long and the result is a shelter that has become nothing short of a vermin-infested deathtrap. Even now there are more homeless people sleeping outside instead of in the shelter because they would rather risk freezing to death than endure the policies and conditions of this so-called low barrier shelter. FIT is trying to whitewash all of this and put a Band-Aid on the bullet wound by making a few changes here and there now that we have been making noise to politicians and the press about this. All it shows is that many of these things, which residents have complained about for years, could have been fixed with a simple phone call at any time if the people who run that shelter actually cared about the negative impacts that their conditions and policies have had on the residents at their shelter. FIT needs to change their entire approach and they need to change their entire management team, including the shelter director Rebecca Picardo, as well as their chief programs officer, Megan Shea. They must be held accountable for what they have done and they must be replaced by competent leaders who actually understand the concept of harm reduction. The people who made this mess should not be the ones in charge of cleaning it up. The leaders of this city must demand that these changes be made immediately for the good of the homeless and for the good of the city at large which is not being helped when the needy and desperate are being made needier and more desperate by the same people who are supposed to be giving them some actual help. Thank you.

Maria Devlin, 122 Market Street, stated:

I serve as the President and CEO of Families in Transition. I am here tonight with Roy Tillsley, our incoming board chair and a previous member at New Horizons. We are here tonight to speak on behalf of our emergency adult shelter which has come under scrutiny in the past several weeks. We want to bring resolution to the conversation that has started with an anonymous letter from a group of unnamed advocates on October 19 and related comments to this body since that time. As we had previously stated, we believe in the importance of advocacy for those we serve. We recognize that this is an ongoing dialogue and we value feedback and constructive criticism. We strive to improve our services. Our board of directors and staff take feedback seriously and with an open mind. Since receiving the anonymous letter, we have been working to address several of the concerns outlined – the purchase of a refrigerator for medications, the repair of showers, the handicapped lift and the creation of a system for towels and sheets are just a few. We continue to meet twice a week to review and address outstanding items and also stand firm on our policies for people's safety, including a fence which recently prevented the possibility of a much more severe incident. Despite our progress, we continue to receive harassing and hostile criticism on social media and at our facility. We have been the target of astonishingly negative feedback, misinformation and false claims from the critics, community members and some people recently involved in the election. Too many people are happy to talk about us but too few are talking to us and checking the facts behind the complaints. After a peaceful protest last month, advocates are outside the shelter almost every night. They have trespassed on our property, shouted and videotaped our staff, and frequently cause disruption to our services. They have taken to incessant emails and phone calls involving staff, city and state officials; all of this taking up critical staff resources whose role is to serve our participants. The energy spent managing these affairs is reducing our efforts to continue to work with the over 600 participants across the state and to ensure that the adults at our shelter get the attention they need for housing stability. In October alone, we housed 14 adults from the emergency shelter. This is hard and expensive work and we need our time, resources and attention spent on those efforts, not responding to threats or misinformation. Families in Transition would like to emphasize on public record that the adult shelter is privately owned and operated and we work hard with limited resources to provide the services to as many homeless

individuals as possible. We reject the demands by advocates regarding shelter management. We deny any misuse of funds and we continue to refute any demands by the advocates regarding changes to our policies and procedures. Persistent approaches to this body to address grievances consume the community's resources. We are grateful for those in the community and here tonight who have called to support us and work with us in partnership. We are grateful to all of our staff and volunteers who continue to show up every night despite the recent challenges. Thank you.

Jaimee Thews, 293 Sagamore Street, stated:

I am very concerned hearing all of these stories tonight and I hope you guys are able to come to some resolution for the homeless population and create some affordable housing. I am here to talk about...I wanted to give a big thank you and a shout out to Officer Steven Duquette and all of the officers and staff who participated in the recent Citizens Police Academy. It was great to learn about what the Police Department does and about the positive programs and policies that Manchester PD has in place. It was very eye opening and I have a greater appreciation for all of the difficult situations that MPD officers and staff face with their work. With all of the bad stories that we hear about policing on the news, I felt it was important to share a positive experience with Manchester's Police Department. Chief Aldenberg and all of the officers did an excellent job answering the many, many questions that the participants had. I highly encourage everyone to sign up for future Citizens Police Academies on the Manchester Police Department's website. I think that the community would benefit from a greater understanding of MPD's work and I am hoping that the aldermen can share this information with their constituents and promote diversity and participation in future academy programs. Thank you.

Glenn Ouellette, 112 Auburn Street, stated:

The elections are over. I come here once a year after the elections to say that now that they are over, let's get together and get what needs to be done done for the citizens of this city. No more politics. In the last two years, there has been too much politics on this Board and too much arguing. Aren't we all working for the same reason? To solve the problems in our city. I am going to reiterate again because it is important that we

have had over 14 encampments picked up this year. What are we doing? We break up encampments and they start new ones. What are we doing to lower the temperature? Last month, for over two weeks, people who wanted beds at the shelter were calling starting at 7:30 AM or going there at noon or in the evening and being told there are no beds yet every time we come here you have a report that says there are an average amount of beds available. Where are they? In those two weeks, 30 people needed a bed. Last year, we had a hard time finding an emergency shelter for the winter. Well today is 11/16. Where are we? I am hoping that we do not repeat what we did last year. We cannot solve the problems if we repeat the same mistakes. The shelter is like housing. It is housing so why aren't we sending inspectors there? Do they have a certificate of compliance? Probably not. They get a lot of money from the federal government and some from the city. Why are we as a city allowing a shelter to continue having bedbugs? That elevator that we are talking about has been broken many times in the past few years. Maybe it is time for us to replace it if it is that old. We hear from them that it is hard to find parts. Maybe it is time to replace it. We need to lower the temperature. When it comes to crime, yes some crimes have gone down but the violent crime is not going down. In the last five weekends we have had violent crimes in this city. It is really disturbing and they are not all downtown. They are all over the city. They are in different areas and as we all know it is basically caused by the drug addiction. We need to find a better way to quell this drug addiction. I am a strong believer that all shelters and all housing of any kind should follow the rules for safety and the housing code. Please insist that that happens. There is nothing wrong with having recovery centers and there is nothing wrong with having shelters. We need them but they, too, need to abide by the law. Thank you very much and Happy Thanksgiving.

*There being no one else present wishing to speak, on motion of **Alderman O'Neil**, duly seconded by **Alderman Long**, it was voted to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented.*

*There being no further business, on motion of **Alderman Cavanaugh**, duly seconded by **Alderman Roy**, 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.

City Clerk