

HOUSING, NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES & REDEVELOPMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

April 1, 2021

Members Present: Council Member Nicole Johnston, Chair
Council Member Alison Coombs, Vice-Chair
Council Member Marsha Berzins

Others Present: Barbara Abbots, George Adams, Andrea Amonick, Scott Campbell, Lana Dalton, Sharon Duwaik, Michael Franks, Elizabeth Fuselier, Jeff Hancock, Karen Hancock, Tim Joyce, Emma King, Omar Lyle, Rodney Milton, Mindy Parnes, Jessica Prosser, Roberto Venegas, and Cecilia Zapata

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Council Member Johnston welcomed all to the meeting.

MINUTES

Minutes of the March 4, 2021 meeting were approved.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

No announcements were made.

NEW ITEMS**Aurora's Emergency Rental Assistance Program Update****Summary of Issue and Discussion**

Since June 19, 2020, seven hundred twenty-eight (728) households have avoided eviction through the City's rental assistance program, totaling \$2,962,110.00. Staff stated they are working on an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the State in which the State will manage \$9M of the \$11.4M in additional funds that was awarded. This falls in line with what other jurisdictions around the state are doing to manage these funds. The State has a system in place to manage the program, which includes a dashboard where staff can review funds broken down by County. The City will withhold and manager \$2M of the funds for residents who have already received funding.

Questions/Comments

CM Berzins asked where the funds came from and how much is being projected to get through the \$1.9 trillion that was just passed. Manger of Community Development Rodney Milton stated the funds are from the second stimulus and proceeded to share a breakdown of the funds. CM Johnston requested to have the informational chart sent to the Committee in a format that may be shared on social media. Rodney stated that as staff moves through the implementation of the housing strategy, activities will be communicated so people understand how they may connect to resources and so outcome-based information and accomplishments are displayed. CM Johnston stated she spoke with a constituent with a disability who received an injury due to a fall and needed assistance. She found it difficult to get very limited resources and information from the County to the individual. She asked about the department's relationship with the counties and if there is a system in place or being developed to get the rental assistance information to the counties. Rodney stated that building those relationships is a priority and that staff is working on a seamless process for all to obtain information. He stated the IGA with the State is going to be beneficial because it's a one-stop-shop that helps folks navigate rental assistance. Staff is working hard to remove barriers, give guidance and help those in need. CM Berzins asked if there is a fraud prevention program in place to ensure these funds are going to the right people. Rodney stated staff verifies documents and monitors compliance. He confirmed that checks are going to the landlord and property management offices and not to the individual applying for assistance. He is unsure of the type of fraud prevention in place at the Federal level.

Outcome

This item was informational only and no action was taken.

Resolution Expressing Support to Work with the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative on Built for Zero on a Regional Coordination to Reduce HomelessnessSummary of Issue and Discussion

The Metro Homeless Initiative meeting on March 18th asked jurisdictions and counties to pledge that they will participate in a regional effort to reduce homelessness. Staff read the pledge which states that homelessness is an issue, that we will coordinate with the Metro Denver Homelessness Initiative on Built for Zero (getting the homelessness population to a functional zero), and to be innovative and pave the way moving forward on this type of work. Staff recommends the City signs the pledge and moves forward in participating in the collaboration.

Questions/Comments

CM Berzins stated it was a great idea but would not support signing a pledge without specifics, such as costs. CM Coombs stated she was on the call and that there wasn't a request for money. Any future spending would have to be approved by the City. She stated the pledge is a commitment to participate in a process with other regional partners to determine what are good steps to take as a collective to address homelessness and what specifically the City is going to do toward the effort. She felt they have carried out a clear process in multiple places throughout the country where they start the conversation with elected officials, followed by service providers, and finally bring everyone together. She stated it was a great idea and is excited to be a part of it. CM Johnston stated she supports the pledge and pointed out that the agenda item commentary indicated there is no public financial impact. She stated there are currently systems in place to collect homelessness data and Aurora was already doing other things, however this pledge was formalizing regional and collaborative coordination.

Outcome

Councilmembers Johnston and Coombs supported the Resolution and approved to forward the item to study session. CM Coombs requested MDHI attend the study session to give a presentation. Lana Dalton will invite MDHI and Community Solutions, the consultant company that is working with MDHI on this effort.

Housing and Homeless Services COVID-19 Funding UpdateSummary of Issue and Discussion

Staff presented on the current state of homelessness and affordable housing, the current timeline for cold-weather closures, and Federal dollars. The Point In Time count for 2018 – 2021 was shared. In 2021, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness reflected as 462, however, this is a rough estimate and it was not possible to collect true numbers due to the pandemic. Homelessness is increasing; therefore, it is important to address the issue through affordable housing and additional services in the community. The Housing Strategy listed affordable housing and rental units were short by 7,500 in 2018 for folks who earned less than \$25,000 a year, and this number has increased since then. 56,000 individuals meet that income threshold. The number of households that recently received rental assistance represents an indication of vulnerability of housing and potential housing instability.

Funding in the amount of 72M is coming to the City through Department of Treasury funds. HUD HOME Funds, CDBG, and ESG funds can possibly be anticipated for additional COVID relief. The preliminary number of HUD HOME funds in the amount of 4.2M is to be used specifically on housing for those most vulnerable. Staff presented suggestions for use of the funds; to include gap funding for five surcharge programs that have a public safety and homelessness nexus in 2022, safe outdoor spaces with programming, shower trailer, laundry, restrooms with programming, acquisition of property and/or purchase of an office building/multi-family building to convert into deeply affordable housing, land acquisition for a new shelter/construction of a new shelter, and to expand GAP financing for affordable housing development. The Committee was asked for input and highest priority as it relates

to the stimulus dollars coming. The recommendations will be presented at the Spring Workshop. (Note: recommendations will now be presented at a study session in May).

Questions/Comments

CM Johnston suggested to line the recommendations up with the strategic plan and housing goals, include the short term/long term programs and timelines, and indicate these are evidence-based driven recommendations. CM Coombs asked to clarify if the request was to add 4 to 6 million to GAP Financing, or add 2M to increase the amount from 2-4M to 4-6M. Staff clarified it was adding 4-6M. CM Coombs stated the palette homes presented at the safe outdoor symposium were promising and asked what the benefits or reasons would be to add another shelter building versus having a significant number of palette homes. Lana Dalton stated the brick and mortar option will last longer, includes service provision such as a kitchen, and offers a centralized place for staff and individuals to go to during the day. However, brick and mortar would be more expensive.

CM Berzins stated the suggestions were good. She asked what percentage of people in encampments will not go to a shelter. Lana stated that in very cold weather it's a small percentage that does not accept help. She stated some are hidden and some really do want assistance but don't know how to obtain resources. CM Berzins stated it was heartbreaking to see people on the side of the road and wished everyone who needed assistance would accept the resources offered. She stated that when individuals leave their location, they leave stuff behind and knows staff is inundated with cleanup.

CM Berzins stated she is on the Board of FRA and they are dedicated to raise funds to move Comitis and AuMHC to another location. She said she didn't understand why the City was not working with Comitis. She stated the best solution would be to find a large tract of land with a building already on the land or build one. She stated she didn't understand why, with the large amount of money coming, the City would not work together with Comitis to make it a much better and bigger place. Roberto Venegas stated it has always been money and finding the appropriate site. He said having a lot of buildings was disjointed and services were not delivered efficiently. He stated it would be a mistake if the City would not take this opportunity to leverage the funds to create a long-term solution. He stated discussions are occurring to make this happen. CM Coombs stated she is on the board with Comitis and there have been conversations regarding the deed restrictions. She felt issues of support provided by people on the campus get painted as a negative to have Comitis and the Day Resource Center (DRC) there. There are volunteer students who need and want to volunteer and benefit from the participation. Proximity to the campus is important to the board and to the students. She stated others must recognize that the campus and the FRA are engines for gentrification in that area and there is most likely no place that is optimal for the DRC and Comitis. She stated there will need to be some compromise. She believes it will always be an issue for the FRA to have the DRC and Comitis in their "backyard" and that is not a dynamic she wants to see or support. CM Johnston pointed out the proximity to the VA, which was a huge investment, and knows the intersectionality with veterans and homelessness. She stated there must be equity in those services while maintaining the partnership and coming up with some compromises.

CM Berzins stated there are numerous plans for low income housing that have been with the Planning Commission waiting to be approved for many months and hopes to see approvals and building soon. Plans include apartments and lower income houses that will help our supply of homes.

Outcome

This item was informational only and no action was taken.

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

Housing Strategy Update

Staff stated they are governing and organizing themselves to make sure various departments, agencies and staff are aligning their activities with the housing strategy. Rodney once again described the working groups and

responsibilities related to each. The groups are working on their objectives and outcomes will be communicated. He announced the department is in the process of hiring a community engagement manager.

Mental Health Co-Responder Program Update

Staff announced the program manager position has been posted. The program working group which includes staff and external partners are working on program logistics. The program is anticipated to begin in June of 2021. The program name is being finalized.

Youth Violence Prevention Program Update

Staff announced the new program manager will begin on April 12, 2021, which is also the start of Youth Violence Prevention Week. A proclamation is being prepared for that week to be read by Council. An action table has been created to determine performance measures and priorities, and to work on RFPs to fund the various programs. Once the manager begins, the department will work closely with Denver on coordinating youth pop-up events and other events. CM Johnston stated there was unanimous support for the City to join as an official member of the Rocky Mountain Partnership that addresses violence issues and has a collective impact way to coordinate efforts. Staff stated they have met with the RMP and will continue to work with them as they navigate through the program.

Updates from Community Members

CM Johnston invited community members to give updates. Brian Arnold stated he was the president on the board at MDHI as well as on the design team for Built for Zero. He stated he would have a presentation ready for study session on the Resolution.

Chance Horiuchi stated she’s been to some public meetings and understands residents are not in support of the development for Habitat for Humanity off Havana. The bid board recently asked her to be a participant at those public meetings and discussions.

Melinda Townsend of the Aurora Housing Authority stated they recently received 20 additional congressionally awarded mainstream vouchers. The vouchers are for individuals with adults in their household that have disabilities. Seventeen (17) Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers were also received, bringing it to a total of 135-137 VASH vouchers for Veterans. She stated they are moving forward with their development at the Fitzsimmons location next to the State Veterans Administration Nursing Home. The development will include 50+ units of housing for senior Veterans, Veteran spouses, and Gold Star Parents (parents that have lost a child in military conflict). Lastly, she stated Aurora@Home is working on a new strategic plan.

Sydney Makita of the Community Housing Partners and chair of the Home Governing Board stated they applied for state tax credits for a project of 93 units called Eagle Meadow Homes on 2nd Ave., however, they were not awarded. When the second stimulus was approved in December, the 4% tax credit was at a better rate, but still didn’t allow them to work on some of the deeply affordable units as anticipated. They will reapply in August and hopefully hear the result in November.

Next meeting: Thursday, May 6, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

Meeting adjourned: 9:46 a.m.

APPROVED: *Nicole Johnston*

Committee Chair, Nicole Johnston