

Continuum of Care Board

April 15, 2022
Meeting Minutes

Meeting called to order at 4:04 PM.

Attendance/Introductions

- **Board Members Present:** Ben Stuckart (Chair), Shannon Boniface, Mary Logan, Gage Spicer, Daniel Klemme, Angela Chapman, Jason Campbell, Hallie Burchinell, Tim Crowley, Arielle Anderson, Jennifer Haynes, Mark Mattke, Robert Lippman, Dale Briesse
- **Staff Present:** Jenn Cerecedes, Kim Clifton, Heather Page
- **Guests Present:**

The Attendance roster listed above may not capture all the individuals that attended virtually if they joined the meeting after it had started due to the limitations of the virtually meeting platform

Shelter Operator RFP: Ben asked Jenn and Dale to present on the RFP. Jenn started by explaining the RFP was for a Regional Flex-Capacity Shelter Operator and received applications that were sent to the CoC RFP Committee. Jenn explained that the location piece had been unavailable for release due to the real estate negotiations/transaction that was still in progress at the time of the RFP release. However, once that was information was released, tours were given to some people, including some of the CoC Board members. The scope of services associated with the RFP will be related to the location (4320 East Trent Avenue) as there is no other location currently identified. There are two main goals with the opening of the shelter, 1. Adding more low-barrier space, 2. Flex space for inclement weather/emergencies. There would be daytime and night space so people wouldn't be asked to leave.

Ben asked about where the funding for the shelter is coming from. Jenn said that her understanding is that Council has allocated some money from ARPA dollars and that there is also funding from the Criminal Justice Fund. Jenn has not seen the final budget for the project but current CHHS funds are not being used for it. Ben raised concern over the 5-year lease and ARPA funds are only going to be available for about 18-24 months from now, so the cost of running the shelter and leasing the space will be high and could take funds away from other projects in the future.

Ben was also concerned that without a prioritization being completed there isn't a way to truly determine if this is the best use of funds in the system right now. To that end he also voiced concern about having this conversation at the end-point when there is a vote expected and not earlier in the process. He reiterated the need for prioritization so the CoC could look at what is needed now and what is needed later to help determine the timing and potential future impacts. Jenn responded by saying that where they have received the priority for this is from the feedback from the entire community including people on the CoC Board throughout the winter since there was not enough space for people and that the city is not in line with the Spokane Municipal Code. This has been a project in process since before January when Jenn was hired as director. However, this is the first space that has agreed to host a shelter and given the months it took to find a space, the fear is that winter will come again and we won't have a place for people to go.

Tim asked if the lease includes tenant improvements for the 5 years. Jenn had not been given lease information but knows there have been discussions around tenant improvements, but

unfortunately, has no details. Tim would hope there are tenant improvements so time won't be lost trying to get the space ready. Jenn said that there were tenant improvements identified to make it operational so people could inhabit it, and then long-term improvements once it has started being used. Jenn is aware that the tenant improvements they are currently negotiating would not prevent the building from being occupied quickly but it would be a staged approach such as port-a-potties and a shower trailer until full bathrooms could be built out. Dale included that the improvements would be done on a priority giving the fire suppression system needing to be installed as an example.

Robert asked if the lease was contingent on an operator and if not then why wasn't an RFP posted for this back in January (or when the scouting for a location began) in association with due diligence and best practice instead of a two week turnaround. Jenn said that the lease is not contingent on an operator. Jenn is not sure of what would happen if there was no provider for the shelter as that hasn't been part of the conversation and there are currently three separate applicants. Jenn did add that she and Eric were concerned about releasing an RFP without being able to talk about the location and facility and but released the RFP in the hope of being able to provide the location by the end of the process.

Mary asked if it was contemplated if any improvements that came forward would be paid with ARPA or Criminal Justice funds. Jenn said that normally at least some of that would be included with the lease but that she does not have that information at this time.

Hallie is more concerned with the location as it is literally warehousing people, supportive services are up in the air, cost is up in the air, we don't know what the remaining funds will be like to develop other steps and things that are more impactful. Hallie also took issue with the owner of the building being Larry Stone and how he just purchased the building in March and was the producer of "Curing Spokane".

Dale presented on the RFP committee. He noted the quick turnaround for the committee as they received the applications late on March 31st with a deadline for April 7th. Dale added that 7 of the 9 RFP Committee members participated in this late review since not everyone was available that quickly. There were representatives from Singles, Coordinated Entry, Spokane County, Non-profit, Spokane Housing Authority, Justice, Youth, Lived Experience, and EWU Social Work. The committee came out with the following statement recommendation: **"We have come to the unanimous decision to not consider the Salvation Army application. Given to what we have seen we recommend both remaining proposals be considered as models to support the homeless within the Spokane region. We recommend a rethinking of the unique funding within our communities at this time to do something broad and innovative to what is really needed to really respond to what is needed for our community. We also encourage feedback to be gathered from individuals who are currently homeless. We recommend Guardians be the chosen applicant because it meets the scope of this proposal with negotiated reduced funding. We ask the City of Spokane and the CoC Board to negotiate the level of funding down. We also recommend funding Jewels Helping Hands at a level to support the tent city, pallet home options, and parking program where they are at their current location. All options for transitional shelter during inclement weather should be considered, including hoteling."** Dale continued by reviewing the scoring for transparency. He indicated that the Guardians came out on top and that the Salvation Army would have been second, but it was noted during the exit interview that there was a large inaccuracy in the Salvation Army's application and that was why the committee chose not to consider the Salvation Army.

Robert brought up that there is concern with the Guardians scoring lowest on staffing when the shelter is going to be so large. He also noted that the Guardians have little to no collaborative community engagement regarding services and programs. He went on to ask how does the city assist in supplementing when this promotion of wrap-a-round services is occurring and since this is a presumed contingent lease, is the Board able to implement their own contingences or recommendations as they vote. Jenn answered that recommendations regarding the lease could be taken into consideration, but she doesn't know if it will translate as the lease is out of scope with what the discussion is today (the RFP). For the supportive services part, while the current RFP included supportive services, if the operation can be started so the doors can be opened, the supportive services can be done by different provider and that can be a separate RFP later. Jenn included that there could be a benefit to that by drawing more providers who may not want to run shelter operations but are experts at community connections.

Tim asked that the successful applicant should be given time during the negotiation of the contract to look exactly at what they are providing, make sure there is a clear understanding of intent, and that there is capacity to carry out the scope of work.

Ben wanted to consider the size of the building. He acknowledged that over 100 buildings were looked at, but if it was started from scratch, would it be a 250-person facility. His concern is that if the CoC approves this, we will be locked in for a long time and given what happened at the Convention Center with the same operator, he fears the continued demonization of the homeless population as all of the blame fell on them and none of it on the Guardians who were running the emergency warming center at the Convention Center. Ben wanted to know how staffing at the new 250-person facility was going to be different then the staffing at the Convention Center especially when other places are reducing size to 100 or less and providing more specialized services. Jenn responded by saying that the City does recognize that smaller, more scattered shelter spaces are a best practice, but that there are a variety of examples of successful larger shelters – one being in San Diego and one being in Colorado Springs which has a capacity of 450 people. The City has been extremely challenged to find a location that a building owner will allow us to use and a neighborhood will allow us to locate in. Jenn followed up with the staffing portion by indicating that the Convention Center was opened very quickly (practically overnight) and over the holidays when people were out, there wasn't a lot of thought put into the space prior to letting people in, the ingress/egress flow of people throughout the night was a challenge, and the anticipated volume of people was not in line with the reality as the Convention Center was initially opened for 150-person capacity and ended up with more than 300 people routinely. However, whether the Guardians or any agency staffing can handle a large shelter isn't for the City to say, but is for the CoC to talk about and decide as part of the RFP process, but with proper planning, issues like what happened at the Convention Center should be avoidable.

Gage asked for clarification since to him it sounded like the new shelter is in a hurry to open which was something that was considered an issue with the Convention Center. Jenn agreed that there is a need to open quickly, however, the time that has been spent on this is lengthier than the time that was spent opening the Convention Center.

Hallie wanted more information on the larger shelters in San Diego and Colorado Springs – what was the level of training that went into opening the shelter, how much time went in to plan it, what is the success rate, how do the people who are being served there feel about it, do the Guardians have the training to operate such a model, what evidence based best practices are being used. Her concern continuing with the Guardians scoring lowest on staffing and collaboration.

Dale followed up by saying that he has questions about all of the agencies and doesn't know that

any of them can pull this off. He would like to see the partnering agencies get around the table for this. He also included that PIT numbers would be helpful since if they at least had numbers and could see how 250 people sheltered could help but that it won't mean much if there isn't housing for people to transition to. He also indicated that we don't know how many people will actually utilize this space since he has heard there are people who won't go. However, he feels the need to get something going because of the potential for wildfires from people camping. It may not be the best movement, but something has to get started to increase capacity.

Arielle acknowledged that this current plan is reactive and rushed and that we can do better but ultimately, we have to have someplace for people to go to so outreach workers can save lives. There is value in all of the other pieces, but we know every year the CoC and community put pressure on the City to open something up, and now there is something that will have inclement weather space.

Hallie feels like the City is including additional things into something people want just to get it pushed through. In response to Dale bringing up fires, Hallie said that if people don't want to stay at the shelter there will be fires anyway and additionally this isn't an inclement weather shelter, it's a 24/7 shelter with flex space so she is concerned about the criminalization of the homeless people once this shelter opens. Her fear is that there is a political agenda in this to increase stigma surrounding homeless people and to increase the criminalization of being homeless. She believes Larry Stone bought the building intentionally for this purpose, that it will take a lot of work and money to make it a trauma-informed space, the potential provider doesn't have a lot of experience with trauma-informed care – there are many problems with this plan.

Ben interrupted the Shelter Operator RFP discussion/vote to ask for the Board on the call to agree to allow Heather to send an email with the information regarding the reallocation of rapid rehousing funds for an electronic vote to be done since the RFP discussion is taking up the time in this meeting. None disagreed.

Eric Finch (joined late) acknowledged that this isn't a perfect space and shelter, but it is a way to increase capacity and it is available now. He asked that people allow the incremental changes to happen while still working toward addressing the other issues surrounding homelessness in our community.

Dale asked when the opening date would be. Eric said he doesn't have an exact date, but his best guess based on getting the lease completed and making improvements would be 6-8 weeks at the soonest. Eric also piggy-backed on what Jenn said about having more planning completed for this shelter than the Convention Center and that if we can get an approval for an operator we can negotiate the contract with them and even look at getting another group to help with services.

Daniel Ramos (joined late) offered to share some of the preliminary PIT numbers if it would help people make a decision for their vote. Ben declined due to time constraints.

Motion by Tim, seconded by Dale, to vote on the CoC RFP Committee recommendation to recommend the Guardians be the chosen applicant because it meets the scope of this proposal with negotiated reduced funding, and ask the City of Spokane to negotiate the level of funding down to provide funding to Jewels Helping Hands at a level to support the tent city, pallet home options, and parking program where they are at their current location, and that all options for transitional shelter during inclement weather should be considered, including hoteling; **failed** – 8 aye, 3 nay, 6 abstentions. (12 yes votes are needed to approve.)

Mary asked if it would be possible to recommend both providers to work together in the shelter. Ben suggested to take two weeks and have a few people dive into this and then come back with a compromise for a vote. Mary agreed.

Motion by Gage, seconded by Robert, to allow for more research and conversation around the RFP and shelter space to come up with a potential compromise before coming back for a vote in two weeks; **approved** – all aye, no nay, no abstentions.

Eric asked that everyone remember that we aren't having a vote on the location but just on the operator. This is a no vote on agreeing to what the CoC RFP Committee has recommended. It is not a no vote to have the shelter move forward. The City wants the feedback and wants to make improvements to the overall system and planning in parallel with this one option.

Ben said that he has three different City Council Members texting him right now because they are very interested in what the CoC is doing and will listen to what the CoC says.

Eric clarified that he is only trying to clarify that with other RFPs it didn't seem to include more than the RFP itself when there was a vote on an RFP.

Robert clarified that the additional look into the operational piece is to ensure due diligence on their end, especially given the size and potential.

Brian was concerned with the artificial constraints placed by the City on the process that doesn't mirror a human-focused or dignity-focused set of parameters. He likened the new shelter to being given a plate of lima beans, that you don't like, and being given the choice of a spoon or a fork to eat it. He is fully aware that it isn't Eric or Jenn doing it. He suggested that the City placed the parameters of it not being in the city core, near a school, or in a neighborhood. His concern is that the parameters are problematic. He also brought up concern that at the next election everyone will hear about how "we solved this" when that won't be accurate. He also brought up that it is hard to argue that we don't warehouse the homeless when we are literally looking at putting the homeless in a warehouse. He said the issue is the location but that's the starting point.

Mary wanted to make sure that her and Ben's suggested motion was not to the building, but to see if there could be a flexible approach to the operator.

Ben said that he would work to put something together to send out regarding how to move forward and be ready to vote again in two weeks.

Meeting Adjourned at 5:19 PM.