

Task Force on Brooklyn Housing, Health, and Public Safety
Meeting Date: Tuesday August 4, 12:30PM

Agenda:

- Welcome & introductions
- Expectations
- Overview - Background and purpose of Task Force
- Discussion
- Next Steps & Close

Meeting participants

- Janet Eveland - Action Baybrook
- Daisy Heartberg - Greater Baybrook Alliance
- Brian Zimmerman – The Transformation Center
- Billy Humphrey – City of Refuge
- Eddie Martin – Healthcare for the Homeless
- Phylcia Porter – District 10 Democratic Nominee for City Council
- Tisha Edwards – Director, Mayor’s Office of Children and Family Success, Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services (MOHS) (interim)
- Maria Martins-Evora - Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services (MOHS)
- Jessi Stevens – Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services (MOHS)
- Nicholas Blendy – Mayor’s Office of Government Relations
- Matthew Stegman - Mayor’s Office of Government Relations
- Dani DiPietro – Delegate Lierman’s office, State District 46
- Tyler McCurdy – Senator Ferguson’s office, State District 46
- House Judiciary Committee Chairman Luke Clippinger – State District 46
- Will Shorter – Delegate Clippinger’s office, State District 46
- Amelia Marcus – Delegate Lewis’s office, State District 46
- Delegate Robbyn Lewis – State District 46

Other members not in attendance

- Meredith Chaiken - Greater Baybrook Alliance
- Tei Pearson - Greater Baybrook Alliance
- Jen Berg - Friends of Garrett Park
- Joanna Diamond - Health Care for the Homeless
- Diane Ingram- Concerned Citizens for a Better Brooklyn
- Greg Sawtell - Community of Curtis Bay Association
- Lisa Bowling - Brooklyn Resident
- Major Byron J. Conaway - Southern District Commander, Baltimore Police Department
- Rachel Kutler - United Workers
- Gerardo Benevides - Youth Empowered Society

Purpose of Meeting

- Delegate Lewis convened Brooklyn community residents, local stakeholder groups, the Mayor’s Office and representatives from key city agencies in order to identify a way forward regarding the encampment of people experiencing homelessness located in Brooklyn, near the corner of Potee Street and Patapsco Road.

- Discussions will be grounded in respect and compassion for everyone.
- All perspectives, including those of people experiencing homelessness, as well as those of all residents, will be respected and honored.
- The complexities of the current moment - COVID-19 pandemic, economic recession, and more - exacerbate the long-standing structural and racial inequities that drive Baltimore's housing crisis.
 - The Task Force will focus on results while keeping these complexities in mind.

Summary of expectations expressed by meeting participants:

- Ensure that participants are informed about the efforts of the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS).
- Find ways to effectively coordinate existing city, non-profit and community efforts.
- Establish centralized housing & homelessness resources in Brooklyn.
- Find solutions to homelessness in South Baltimore.
- Gain better understanding of community-based stakeholders' efforts in the area, to build off of this momentum.
- Coordinate and communicate current outreach efforts.
- Ensure that public safety and crime prevention are taken into account.

Background

- Several members of the delegation have reached out during the 2020 legislative session and in the time since about a large homeless encampment on Potee Street that has become a community nuisance.
- Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services, in partnership with the City Health Department were implementing a coordinated agency response at this site, which included connecting residents to social services, health care services, health insurance enrollment, mental and behavioral health care services, etc.
- District 46 (D46) state representatives, viz., Senator Ferguson and Delegates Clippinger, Lewis and Lierman (or their designees) participated in a virtual meeting on April 24, 2020 on the topic of crime trends in Brooklyn. This meeting was convened by the Greater Baybrook Alliance (GBA). Other participants included Brooklyn residents, representatives from the Baltimore City Police Department and the Southern District Police Department. The Potee Street encampment was raised by residents on that call as one of their highest concerns, because in their view the encampment is a hotspot for unlawful activity. Focus of discussion was on law enforcement, not on housing, justice, and public health. Major Conaway of the Southern District stated that law enforcement has limited ability to control the conditions at the encampment, nor can policing address the root causes that led to - and enable - the encampment. Since policing alone was understood to have limited means to address residents' concerns about the encampment, more information was needed, particularly from the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS). A second meeting was scheduled.
- D46 state representatives (or their designees) participated in a virtual meeting on April 24, 2020 with Sheryl Goldstein, who at that time served as the Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and as such oversaw the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS). Other Mayor's Office and agency staff also participated in this briefing. Ms. Goldstein described the MOHS coordinated agency response activities that were implemented at the Potee Street encampment. At the time of this meeting, many face-to-face or direct service activities of MOHS

and the coordinated agency response team had been reduced or suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was discussion about public safety, law enforcement, and whether the residents in the encampment should be moved, to what location and how. The legal status of the land was discussed. D46 reps asked whether moving residents in the encampment made sense during the pandemic, and raised questions about public health, human rights, housing opportunities and other matters. It was decided that in order to determine a way forward, broad, results oriented conversations between all stakeholders, including residents of the encampment, should be undertaken. A task force format was agreed upon.

- During the months of May and June, D46 reps and the Mayor's Office team began to assemble a framework for this task force. Delegate Robbyn Lewis served as point person. Outreach to a broad range of stakeholders was conducted to identify individuals to invite to the Task Force; a concerted effort was made to identify and invite residents of the Brooklyn neighborhood, as well as other community-based stakeholders.

Eddie Martin remarks

- Housing crisis is a structural issue, there are no quick fixes.
- Engaged in a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) of West Baltimore neighborhoods around housing and homelessness.
 - What they heard was safety as the main concern for residents.
 - Question asked, why do you feel unsafe? Are there truly safety issues regarding homelessness, or do the feelings of unsafety stem from stigmas around homelessness?
- Setting the stage for how we shape these conversations about addressing homelessness – eliminate the stigma and belief that people want to stay on the streets. For instance people have often been in shelters where they do not feel safe.
- How do we treat people with dignity and respect?
- GOAL – address the discomfort and stigmas we have towards homeless individuals, and work towards a better solution.

Jessi Stevens - MOHS Report

- MOHS Outreach team started to go out to the Brooklyn encampment almost every day, starting in early 2019. Worked to connect individuals to all relevant services, shelters. Outreach continued on a weekly basis.
- Ran into issues of working to remove the encampment because of confusion around who owned the land the encampment fell on. Hard to know who to involve.
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, MOHS stopped going into encampment – started instead to deliver PPE, other protective equipment, and continued to try to supply individuals with shelter.
- In March of this year – HCH, MOHS, and the Health department went in to provide Hepatitis A Vaccinations (March 27/28)
 - Now setting up a time for COVID-19 testing in the encampment sometime this month – as well as connections to shelters, to isolate at a location if needed.
- MOHS has set up portable restrooms and tried to go weekly to provide updates on services to encampment residents.
- Reiterated what Mr. Martin said about compassion, and understanding that those in encampment feel safe in this community that they are familiar with.

- **Tisha Edwards added:**
 - Testing – Lord Baltimore TRI Center Program – if individuals at the homeless encampment are found to be covid positive, there are open rooms available here immediately so they can safely quarantine and receive other necessary health support.

Janet Eveland - Resident perspective

- Stigma with homelessness vs. actual concerns for safety.
 - There are actual safety concerns around drug dealing and violence, and encampment residents engaging in illicit and illegal activity within the neighborhood.
- Homeless encampment is on a brown field, it is illegal to build residence there. This also creates its own set of health issues with respect to these individuals.
- There are no services for homelessness in Brooklyn. There's a need for locally based services.
- There needs to be a coordinated approach – housing inspections should be coordinated with the health department, law enforcement, etc.
- Need to also look into BPD as a partner too, to help get problematic activity taken care of.
- Residents generally need more help from the city to free up vacant homes to house individuals, and more money for temporary and supportive housing.
 - Don't have Vacants to Value program in Brooklyn because Brooklyn is not in any Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) redevelopment programs
 - This could be a priority for the Task Force group to change this.
 - Delegate Lewis asked – anyone from the city who can comment on this?
 - Tisha Edwards – recommendation is that this task force may want to have structured conversations with (DHCD) to talk about what they are doing across the city around “underinvested” communities – and what would be the process to bring their programs into the Brooklyn area.
 - Need people from MOHS who are familiar with rapid rehousing services. Interested in building capacity for service providers. DHCD needs to lead to help understand how to leverage opportunities.
 - **Nicholas Blendy – happy to take the lead on outreach to DHCD**

Billy Humphrey comments

- His organization does direct services to many in the encampment.
- This is a multifaceted issue, layered with substance abuse, mental health, etc.
- Main concern is around public health and the encampment and the conditions in which encampment residents are living in.
- Dignity and humanity have to be the main consideration.
- This is their home, they have been left there, and many have been there as long as 5 years.
- Potee and Patapsco encampment has been there for at least 10-15 years. Unaddressed for years.

Brian Zimmerman comments

- The Transformation center offers direct services, but more on the lines of relief, and things that provide dignity, like showers. They work to bring a level of resolution to those who would be open to transitioning from homelessness to being housed.

- There are resources, but nothing centralized in Brooklyn. Having centralized resources would be helpful.
- Idea: Homeless Fair/Event – homeless individuals can be exposed to everything that would be a resource for them. There are international models of this.

Delegate Lewis wrap up/summary

- Generous spirit of willingness to work together to find a way forward.
- This group has expressed a shared goal for this Task Force, and that is to effectively address residents' concerns about quality of life and public safety while also affirming the dignity and humanity of people experiencing homelessness. There is also hope that Brooklyn can be a model for community based problem solving around the issue of homelessness. It would also be very good to include people who have lived experience with homelessness, and/or reside in the Poster Street encampment.
- Build systems of coordination across organizations and departments (ex: bring DHCD to the table).
- Focus on housing and community development, rather than an exclusive focus on law enforcement.
- Build on the community based efforts that are underway, while also changing policies and other obstacles that deny Brooklyn the support that it needs.

Next steps

- The Task Force has invited residents of the Brooklyn neighborhood to join, but more participation is needed. Please recommend residents to Delegate Lewis who are committed to working collaboratively on holistic solutions.
- Mayor's Office of Government Relations will bring DHCD on board as a partner in the work of this Task Force.
- The Mayor's Office of Government Relations has prepared a summary activity report for the coordinated agency response team. This report was shared by Matt Stegman of the Mayor's Office of Government Affairs, and will be shared by Delegate Lewis's office to the Task Force participants.
- Delegate Lewis's office will schedule next meeting for early September

Wrap up - 1:35PM