

**CoC Governing Board  
Meeting Minutes  
March 25, 2021, 2:00pm-4:00pm**

The meeting of the CoC Governing Board was held on March 25, 2021 via Zoom. Kathryn Firmin-Sellers, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:02pm. The meeting was recorded. Branden Lewis took minutes.

**Board members in attendance:** Alesha Eaves, Deronda Metz, Dennis LaCaria, Lashieka Hardin, Victor Nicholson, Kathryn Firmin-Sellers, Stephen McQueen, Stacy Lowry, Anthony Ryback, Warren Wooten, Hope Marshall, Sonia Jenkins, Gerard Littlejohn, Timica Melvin, Trish Hobson, Anna London, Pamela Malatestinic

**Board members absent:** Maya Marshall

**CoC Staff in attendance:** Branden Lewis, Kim Sanders, Mary Ann Priester, Courtney LaCaria

**Guests in attendance:** Tara Peele (Social Serve), Stacey Bergeron (Meck County CSS), Kecia Robinson (Salisbury VAMC), Breanna McGowan (The Salvation Army), Karen Pelletier (Meck County CSS), Laura Gorecki (Project Outpour), Lashonda Hart (Mecklenburg County), Anita Brown (Roof Above), Brittany Cunningham (Socialserve), Hannah Marie Warfle (The Salvation Army), Scott Garlow (Meck County Veteran Services), Valerie Townsend

**Welcome (Kathryn Firmin-Sellers) & Attendance (Branden Lewis):** Quorum present; Members of the public introduced themselves in the chat with name and organization.

**Public Comment: General Remarks (Branden Lewis):** None

**Vote:** Approve meeting minutes—February 25, 2021 (Motion: Stephen McQueen, Second: Stacy Lowry)  
--Meeting minutes approved.

**Vote:** Vice Chair (3 nominees: Gerard Littlejohn, Hope Marshall, Warren Wooten) and Secretary (1 nominee: Lashieka Hardin). Vote conducted anonymously via Zoom poll. Gerard Littlejohn voted as Vice Chair and Lashieka Hardin voted as Secretary.

**Presentation: Data/System Performance Measures (Courtney LaCaria)**

Focus: Average Length of Time Homeless and Length of Time to Housing

System Overview: Temporary housing, diversion & prevention, permanent housing (including affordable housing) includes HUD definition & McKinney Vento---types of interventions in our homelessness and housing ecosystem. Circumstances for housing status: unstably housed, homeless and stably housed.

Length of Time Homeless (Emergency Shelter): Average and median length of time homeless. Average and median increased from 2019 to 2020. Deeper look at Salvation Army and Roof Above, by gender and household composition, average and median increased from 2019-2020.

Length from Project Entry to Housing Move-In Date: This measure provides the average length of time it takes for households (adult only and families with kids) by project type to move into permanent housing in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. RRH and PSH/OPH by adult only and by families.

Resources: Housing Data Snapshot which includes One Number which was released today. Homelessness is continuing to increase. Also includes in depth data on inflow and outflow and data by race and ethnicity and Coordinated Entry data. Progress Webpage—all System Performance Measures. SoHIH Report and Monthly Data Update is also available.

Discussion:

TH: On the average and median LOTH, counting time from they enter shelter until we've known they've gotten into housing. Courtney---we're only looking at LOT in shelter. Do we count all episodes of homelessness? The multiple experiences of homelessness are aggregated into the total. Do we have any way to measure unsheltered time homeless? Yes, we do, just not included in this presentation.

KFS: Did we say we wanted to see data disaggregated by race? Yes, but not a part of this presentation. Will include going forward. Will provide update on One Number and new addition added by race and ethnicity.

KFS: Are there specific strategies that we want to think about in order to decrease the length of time between homelessness into housing?

DM: We've learned a lot this past year. As a community we may want to decide do we want to have time limits in shelter. What we've done at TSA is that we really don't have time limits. Have been criticized by the National Alliance that we don't have time frames. Some communities you can only be in shelters 60-90 days. Having the discussion internally. Are we all ok with people staying in the shelter until things are resolved?

KFS: What is the argument from the Alliance? Deronda---learning about low-barrier shelters so she was surprised to hear some of their comments. Discussion about creating a comfort level if you don't have time limits. If you don't have time limits people won't work toward a plan quicker.

SL: Deronda, what problem are you trying to solve if you were to create time limits? Increasing some urgency for people that we have in the shelter to move out. We've had more housing resources than ever, and it's been interesting getting people to move from hotels into housing resources. They've housed over 50 people since January in RRH. Giving people letters to help them move quicker. Stacy—Concern would be if you create a time limit and there's no housing on the back end, what issue would you be solving. Is it about time limits vs. having a housing plan and working towards it? Deronda—It is both, we would not give someone 30 days with no where to go. Looking at time limits and having those resources.

GL: When it comes to what options having after the shelter, what we're seeing now rent amounts are increasing due to landlords trying to recoup what was lost in 2020 during eviction moratorium. Subsidies aren't going up to match high rent amounts. How do we address the subsidy issue as well?

SM: Agree with both statements made. Have struggled with moving men out of the shelter after being offered several housing options. There becomes a sense that the institution becomes a comfort and now have to put your income toward something that is not optional to you. MeckLink is going very well. MeckHome has been a struggle for the shelter. Numbers are skewed by extremely long-term stayers due to MH. It's a multi-layered issue. Believe we do have to have guidelines for people who are able

and are working that this is not your permanent option. We need to work to motivate the guests in the shelters.

TM: All valid points that have been made. Inlivan does not have time limits on subsidies. It was proposed a few years ago but was not well received by the community. They cannot house additional people until someone else gives up their voucher. They have a set number of vouchers and a set number of units. People have to leave their units in order to house more families. They may get special purpose vouchers or may have to build new units. The issue now is that the price of construction is high. The market isn't good.

GL: This is another reason why rents are going up because the cost of building is going up. Owners have no choice but to rent at a higher rate so that they can make a profit.

DM: They have been doing time limits in the shelter. It's not that it's your 3-month anniversary and you must go. It's not about setting up a rigid program but for people who can with a resource, they need the motivation. They are having such a challenge with rents being over the FMR. With funding like MeckHome and A Way Home they don't have those restrictions. Is there advocacy that can be done around FMR policy change or can we look for other private dollars that can help.

SM: They've had some success with Socialserve and Housing CLT to lower rents by buying out the lease some. It's not a long-term solution but has helped people get into housing. An upfront payment that lowers the rent.

KFS: Where do we want to go with this conversation? What are the levers for decreasing the time homeless before moving into housing? What to do with those that have been given multiple options but do not accept—are they self-resolving? Do we adopt this as a policy, or do we write this as a preference when we fund agencies?

DM: Can we look at policies that already exist? We used to look at Inlivan policies and use those.

TM: Inlivan used to give people the master housing list and when a person came to the top of the list, they would offer the person what unit was vacant. They now have site-based waiting lists so that people can apply to the unit that they want to leave and get on that specific wait list. They were finding that people were turning down units.

SL: There are probably other programs out there have some time of policy already written as far as 2-3 choices as a housing slot comes open. Can we look into that? She is supportive of that. Shelter should not be your full-time housing option. As long as we can provide choice to people and match them to resources, it's their choice to take it or not.

KFS: Is that something we can discuss further? Is this something we want written into our ranking standards when we review applications.

SM: It's so not one size fits all. When you're dealing with MH and SU, how do you have exceptions? What are the solutions for the exceptions?

AL: Each unique situation has its own successful pathway. If appropriate housing options are available for an individual, if that individual refuses to take those housing options, she can see where a time limit would make sense. Programs should have more funding for multiple different pathways for each

person's unique situation. Also, if there are time limits, what if we're in a situation where there aren't any housing options? It's a lot more complicated than one specific avenue.

DM: It may be up to the shelters. They do look at things case by case. Maybe it's each shelter submit its policy to the CoC and reviewed on that level. It'll be up to the shelter provider as to what they do.

KFS: They have a moving on strategy is what we're talking about. It doesn't have to be rigid but there is a strategy to incentivize moving on. Thank you for the discussion. Are there any actions to be taken or is it in agreement that we'll support a moving on strategy?

DM: Shelters will tell the Board what the policy is, and shelters will govern those policies.

KSF: Take the recommendations to the Ranking Committee at some point.

BL: Question in the chat regarding connection to MH and shelters?

DM: It's a gap. Connect with CSS to help get those services at the shelter.

BL: Courtney also stated that it is an area of intervention for the new comprehensive plan that's being worked on. Cross-sector support.

KFS: Thank you everyone for the conversation. We have some takeaways from it. Going forward, we do want to see data disaggregated by race as a practice to make sure we're addressing any inequities.

#### **Presentation & Board Discussion: Socialserve (Tara Peele):**

Socialserve is a nonprofit that connects people to housing and provides supportive second chance employment. They recruit employees from agencies that serve people who are homeless or those that are transitioning back into the community. Train them from the ground up to help people find housing primarily over the phone and to help landlords list properties in 30 states. They have a national hotline which comprises a lot of their work. 2017 HousingCLT launched and they've been more involved in serving Charlotte-Mecklenburg. They've grown quite a bit in the last year. Staff has grown and they have positions to fill.

HousingCLT started as a CoC Planning grant in 2017 and is a program of Socialserve. It sits at Socialserve because of their access to landlords. They have about 5,000 landlords that use the online housing locator in Mecklenburg County. It is a landlord consortium or landlord relationship manager. Helps streamline the approach to landlords so that they aren't being approached to dozens of agencies at the same time but to have a streamlined approach to the negotiation with landlords that happens upfront. Also, the relationship management that is ongoing to retain landlords by mitigating their risks. When the Planning Grant funds ended, the City of Charlotte was able to continue to fund Housing CLT. The County also was able to help out last year with funding as well.

Went from 60 household moved in the last year to about 200 households moved. They are able to pay for a good bit of the upfront housing costs and incentives which has definitely helped. They've also been involved with DreamKey. Paying \$15-\$17 million of rent and utility assistance to landlords in 2020. This has opened the door to other landlords. More recently they've become a partner with a few agencies with the ESG program, State and City. The organizations are working with the clients for case management and Socialserve takes on locating housing for the households and pay upfront costs, signing bonuses and ongoing payment of rental assistance.

*What does the housing stock currently look like?* There is housing available but there's a mismatch of what's available and what people need. The FMR does not keep up with the actual rent (general affordability). Rent buy-downs on a case by case basis help as well. They work with about 50 landlords. Landlord partnerships have increased. They continue to have a hard time finding 3-5-bedroom units. Larger families tend to wait longer for housing and are also more likely to turn down housing. There is a mismatch between where housing is available and access to transportation.

*Are landlord incentives proven to be effective?* Absolutely yes. Signing bonuses definitely greases the wheels. Helps people feel like they're being appreciated for taking a risk. Makes it more likely they'll process the application faster and makes it more likely for them to tell them when they have vacancies. They like to present signing bonuses as separate checks and hand deliver to the leasing staff, not giving bribes, but handing them checks so that they can give them to their managers. Absolutely makes it more likely to tell them when they have vacant units. Also do holding fees because sometimes it takes longer to get a unit inspected or paperwork involved. Signing bonuses eligible under ESG but holding fees are not.

*Other barriers:* multiple felonies (anything around a pattern of violence makes it difficult—often have to pay double security deposit and signing bonus); eviction debt (1 out of every 4 have some type of eviction debt; they can pay but you can still see on people's records, patterns of eviction or high balance); documentation (having state issued ID and SSN are often non-negotiable; properties see this as a red flag); multiple pets; the unofficial or additional members of households.

Rent buy-downs to get rent below the FMR- paying a bit of money up front to get the monthly rent down to FMR. Concerned about using too often. Will there be funds to buy down rent again once lease ends, will the person have income to pay the rent.

Rent assistance is less of a barrier right now. Landlords like the guarantee of rent.

All of the documentation (ESG) that needs to be in place is a barrier also. Onboarding of staff to do this work takes a little time.

Properties requiring that income be 3x the rent is also a barrier.

*Are landlord forums effective?* Yes and no. They can be but really work better in small groups. Landlords want to be able to express their concern on a smaller scale. They don't like to ask questions among their peers since their peers are their competition.

*What does the HousingCLT program need?* A ready to rent program that is more uniform, helping people to prepare for independent living could be useful to prevent some of the programs that come up immediately. They need to do better about educating tenants about who to call for what. Telling them to reach out to their landlords immediately when issues arrive. HousingCLT could do better with helping people get the things they need before moving in so that moving in is not delayed. HousingCLT must adjust to the volume and making sure the people are continuously being moved in. Being properly staffed is what they need to work on. The flexible funds have been helpful. They keep growing out of their shoes. They must make sure they have enough capacity to meet the need in accessing landlords, bringing more landlords into the fold

Discussion:

DM: Socialserve does an amazing job. It's because of the partnership they've been able to get people housed. Question for Warren—Did we get a waiver to increase FMRs? If we didn't, could we?

WW: Was researching the status of FMRs here in Charlotte. There are two rent standards: overall FMR standard which is basically one per bedroom size for the whole city and segmented rent standard, which is different rent standard by zip code, which is what the vouchers use when determining rent. Do we have the flexibility of choosing the better number for the area, can we flip back and forth between rent standard? Some communities are getting waivers but will need to research. Part of the problem is that the housing authority and the City must be on the same page. What can happen is if the City raises rent standards so people can get into units, the housing authority may be compelled to follow the same numbers, which would then jump up the cost of their vouchers and have an impact on voucher availability. He is willing to do more research. If it's just a matter of the City for applying for a waiver or emergency waiver for a short period of time, he is all for getting it approved. He's afraid it may be a little more complicated than just a waiver put out for the pandemic. Will submit an AAQ to HUD. You can get away with doing rent buy downs with local funds but not with federal funds.

KFS: What can the Board do to be supportive?

TP: Being patient has been very helpful as they grow to meet the need. Grateful for the agencies involved in the collective ESG effort. They hope to get fully staffed. Make sure they are connected with landlords the Board members have worked with in the past. Readiness to rent and communications with the tenants---more conversations around this. Funding for upfront housing costs in the future—signing bonuses. Socialserve was awarded funds through Housing Connections Initiatives through BCBS--\$250,000, of that \$237,000 going toward upfront housing costs.

### **Board Strategic Plan Adoption, Implementation and Discussion (Kathryn Firmin-Sellers):**

Thank you to Board members for participating in the Strategic Planning Sessions.

Any final discussions from Board members about the draft plan that was shared? None.

Public Comment regarding the plan: None

Motion to adopt: Moved by Trish Hobson, second by Stephen McQueen

**Vote:** No objections to adopt this as the strategic work plan for the coming year and beyond. Plan adopted.

How to implement the strategic plan? Some will fall naturally with existing committees. Other pieces of the plan don't really fit anywhere. How should we approach?

TH: Can someone take some type to group things together to see what does fit with committees/workgroups?

DM: Likes Trish's idea to see how the items can fit into existing groups. If not, can we create something to address that specific strategy.

TH: If we go that route, can committees give timelines to the Board.

KFS: Branden, does that feel doable?

BL: Yes, it does.

KFS: Branden will come back with a structure and assign committees different pieces to work on. Do we need an ad hoc workgroup to oversee the whole thing?

TH: Yes, one person or one small committee would be her vote.

DM: Hear from Branden or Erin what it would look like to oversee it.

BL: It's part of our work at CA staff. We can look at what already exists and provide support as needed.

KFS: Would the small group connect with the work that's being done with CCP and Evaluate Upstream.

BL: Yes, that makes sense.

KFS: We could look to Board members that are already involved to form the group.

KFS: Do we feel any urgency about the planning on how to spend the American Rescue Plan money? Do we have time?

SL: I would suggest the CoC make their voices heard to help inform when the City and County are looking at the dollars coming in.

WW: I would agree. There is a lot of money coming down and conversations about planning are happening. If you need an overview, watch the last City Council meeting (3.22.21) at minute 31. There was a presentation given about the money that is coming in and how they are working diligently to coordinate with one another (County, City, CMS).

KFS: Do we have a sense already about what we want to advocate for? I know we mentioned hotels being purchased for housing. Would it be PSH, workforce housing, etc.? Are there other items beyond that?

BL: Courtney also provided recommendations in a document shared with the Board.

DM: What is the name of the funding?

American Rescue Plan is the name of the Act. Inside the Act there are several buckets of funding.

WW: Recommendation that all Board members watch the presentation from the City Council meeting. We want them to be clear, concise, and thought through, not vague. Work needs to be done almost to the program level. Describe priorities to help City Council get their head around what's being asked. (Link to video in the chat)

KFS: We need to map the Strategic Plan against the elements of the American Rescue Plan. From that, discern what our recommendations might be that drive forward the goals we set for ourselves.

SL: It would be good that everyone reviews the recommendations made by Courtney. She attended a webinar specifically on American Rescue Plan and homelessness. She can send the PowerPoint recording once it is out. This would be helpful for everyone to review as well.

KFS: We have resources as a Board. Everyone look at the resources that will be shared. She will work with Branden to pull things together. If anyone else is interested let her know. Stacy also interested. They will pull things together to bring to the group.

**Collaborative Applicant Updates (Branden Lewis):**

**Conflict of Interest Form:** The CoC Governing Charter states that Board members must sign the Conflict of Interest form annually. The form will be sent to each Board member via DocuSign on Monday.

**CoC Charter:** Staff continue to update the CoC Governing Charter. An open public meeting held March 11, 2021. The open public comment period will be March 12-April 12. On April 13 there will be a meeting to review the public comments received. The full membership will vote to approve the charter updates at the April 14<sup>th</sup> full membership meeting.

**Written Standards:** Staff continue to update the CoC Written Standards. Multiple community feedback sessions will begin in April. Board members are encouraged to attend the feedback sessions.

**CoC 101:** There will be a CoC 101 Information Session held on April 7<sup>th</sup> from 10am-12pm. The goal of the session will be to provide education around purpose, activities, and components of the CoC including funding opportunities. The audience will be new Board members and the general public.

**Call for April Board meeting agenda items:** Board members should send suggested agenda items by April 5, 2021 or enter suggestions in the chat. No suggestions received in the chat.

**Motion:** Adjourn the meeting (Warren Wooten; seconded by Deronda Metz)

Meeting adjourned at 3:32pm.