

Allegheny County Homeless Advisory Board

CoC Bi-Monthly Meeting

January 31, 2023; 10:00AM to 12:00PM

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting *and*

1 Smithfield St, Pittsburgh, 15222 (HSB, Lower Level)

Purpose: The Homeless Advisory Board (HAB) is a public/private partnership formed to assist and recommend to Allegheny County, the City of Pittsburgh, the City of McKeesport and the Municipality of Penn Hills on public policy, programs, activities, data and all other efforts that will eliminate homelessness and improve the wellbeing of persons and families who are homeless.

HAB Members¹

Nicole Anderson

Andy Halfhill (P)

Susie Puskar (P)

Breanna Benjamin (P)

Shawlane Heffernan

Gale Schwartz

Damian Butler-Buccilli (P)

Brian Knight (P)

Katie Stohlberg (P)

Kwabena Danso-Ayesu (P)

Dave Lettrich (P)

Pam Turner (P)

Laura Drogowski

Dan Palka

LaVerne Wagner (P)

Chase Archer Evans (P)

Amy Plant (P)

Michael Yonas (P)

Melissa Ferraro (P)

Raymond Prushnok (P)

In addition to the below notes, the [meeting recording can be accessed here](#).

Minutes

- **Welcome and Introductions—Ray Prushnok**

Ray Prushnok, HAB Vice-Chair, welcomed meeting participants, and provided an update on HAB membership since the January meeting. Two members had stepped down from the HAB—Devon Goetze, a Provider Representative who is transitioning out of her role at Auberle, and Sargent Jeffrey Upson of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police. Amy Plant of Bethlehem Haven has been appointed as the Provider Representative, and Dave Lettrich of Bridge Outreach has been appointed to complete the remaining 2 years of Sargent Upson’s term. Dave has also graciously agreed to serve as the HAB Co-Chair of the HOCC, along with Ben Talik as the CoC Co-Chair. Additionally, LaVerne Wagner of the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh has been appointed, bringing HAB membership to the full 21. Finally, Nicole Anderson has agreed to serve as the HAB Co-Chair of the CoC Analysis and Planning Committee, a position opened when Pete Giacalone’s term with the HAB ended in January.

HAB members then introduced themselves.

- **HAB Updates—Ray Prushnok**

November and January Meeting Minutes

The November and January Meeting Minutes were shared with meeting materials. No revisions to the minutes were raised. The minutes were approved by the HAB, with one present member abstaining and all other present members voting in favor.

Encampment Closure Debrief

Mr. Prushnok provided a brief overview of the HAB’s encampment decommissioning debrief. He

¹ (P) indicates HAB members who were present for the meeting.

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cited the City's development of their policy in coordination with ACLU and CJP and suggested that any concrete recommendations from the HAB wait until the policy can be reviewed. That said, HAB members provided the following input and reflection:

- Interested in timeline for availability of the City policy to the HAB
 - Concerns that the policy will reflect much of the same. In particular, interest in seeing what procedures will be in place for when encampment residents do not accept the housing option(s) offered. Requiring people to move when they don't accept the housing option is ineffective for a number of reasons, including: (1) Forced displacement is never a good thing; (2) Moving people around makes things hard for the individuals residing in the camps and for the outreach workers serving them; (3) Slows time it takes to get resolution on housing
 - Need for camp residents to have a voice in the plans and processes
 - Recommendation for the HAB to be voting on if encampments should be closed and on the closure plan if closing an encampment. Plans need to include what is being offered, but most importantly residents need a voice in what is offered and what the processes are
 - Focus has been on relocation as the solution, without conversation about mitigating other factors contributing to the perception of the problem. In particular, cleaning up remnants rather than focusing on relocating encampment residents—a concerted effort to help maintain and help keep clean would greatly reduce the visibility and greatly reduce health concerns. Kicking people around contributes to the problem as they leave things behind when being forced to move. An approach that supports clean-up and deemphasizes relocation is part of helping people where they are.
- **IO Update—Andy Halfhill**
Andy Halfhill provided the following updated from Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS):

Shelter

The Winter Shelter at Smithfield United in Downtown Pittsburgh opened on November 15, 2022. The original plan for this past winter as not to have a separate winter shelter, but there were delays in opening Second Avenue Commons that prompted the opening of shelter space at Smithfield. Second Avenue Commons then opening on November 22nd, with 90 year-round beds and 40 winter shelter beds. The shelter at Smithfield United remained open through winter, and 8 beds were also opened through East End Cooperative Ministry (EECM) in January. Through the last 2 weeks of March, the winter beds at Second Avenue Commons have been phasing out, but the shelter at Smithfield United, with operations by Team PGSB, will continue for the near term.

A new shelter will be added to the continuum in Homewood. This 36-bed SRO style facility will be piloted for one year, with operations through a new provider in the CoC, Unity Recovery.

Permanent Supportive Housing Vacancies

A key component of supporting households to stable housing in the CoC are the system's Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs. DHS has been working closing with contracted providers to discuss and understand the challenges that they are facing and how they are contributing to a number of vacancies across the CoC. Providers are universally struggling with staffing and that is impacting the ability to maintain effective clients to staff ratios, and the enrollment of new households. Additional challenges cited include an increase in mental and behavioral health needs, as well as matching clients with housing. Providers have voiced optimizing about new staff coming on and that impact on vacancy rates, but DHS will continue to review work and collaborate to support improvements. Regarding staffing issues, Susie Puskar

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asked about which levers are available to help address the issues—inquiring about the ability to seek wage increases or if the CoC is more locked into other factors related to job quality. Mr. Halfhill indicated that there is variation across the different providers as to what key challenges exist and thus what the more effective supports or levers would be.

- **Committees**

With the transition of members and updates to Committees, the HAB took a moment to review the Committees and their schedules, and encouraged participation from both the HAB and broader CoC.

CoC Analysis and Planning Committee (COCAPC)

- Provide ongoing analysis to support the planning of the CoC, at both the provider and system level
- 2nd Monday, 2:00-3:00pm
- IO Contact: Ciara Stehley (ciara.stehley@alleghenycounty.us)

Communication and Education Committee (CEC)

- Develop and distribute messaging regarding the needs and experiences of people experiencing homelessness and the homelessness system, and facilitate avenues for community engagement
- 4th Monday, 3:00-4:00pm
- IO Contact: Remy Harris (remy.harris@alleghenycounty.us)

Homeless Outreach Coordinating Committee (HOCC)

- Address the issues and challenges faced by people who are unsheltered
- 1st Monday, 5:00-6:30pm
- IO Contact: Gabe Krivosh (gabriel.krivosh@alleghenycounty.us)

Provider Committee

- Capture the experiences and perspectives of providers in order to inform CoC planning and processes
- 2nd Wednesday, 2:00-4:00pm
- IO Contact: Rob Eamigh (robert.eamigh@alleghenycounty.us)

Lived Experience and Community Voice

Last year, the Consortium of Recognizing Experience (CORE) was started as an initiative to help center those who are utilizing or have utilized homeless services in CoC planning, administration, and evaluation processes. CORE was set up as a regular, open forum immediately following each bi-monthly CoC/HAB meeting, and a document was maintained outlining the input and ideas shared by CORE participants. While fruitful input was gathered in the first year of the effort, there were challenges in establishing effective mechanisms for meaningful collaboration within the CoC structure and consistently maintaining participation from people with lived experience. At least one CoC member also raised concern regarding equitable access to CoC decision making by people with lived experience compared to homeless system professionals and other stakeholders. HAB member, and CORE Co-Lead, recommended that the role of incorporating lived experiencing voice be put into the efforts of the HOCC, acknowledging that Street Outreach teams are already established in the space of engaging people experiencing homelessness and connecting with them daily. HOCC Co-Chair, Dave Lettrich, said this would be discussed with the HOCC.

Recognizing the importance of lived expertise in CoC planning, administration, and evaluation, the CoC signed up to participate in a HUD Community Workshop on partnering with people with lived

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experience with homelessness. HAB members Chase Archer Evans, Amy Plant and Andy Halfhill, along with CoC member Aubrey Plesh, each committed to the workshop series and will share back with the CoC on lessons learned.

- **Point in Time (PIT)—Andy Halfhill**

Mr. Halfhill provided an overview of what the annual Point In Time (PIT) county is, the CoC's methodology for the most recent PIT, and the 2023 PIT results for the CoC. This information can be found in the slides in Appendix A.

Hilary Scherer then shared additional data and analysis efforts forthcoming, to further inform homeless system planning and evaluation. This includes:

- Dashboard: People active in emergency shelter (per night)—will display the number of, and basic demographic information for, people who were active in an emergency shelter program each night.
- Dashboard: People known to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness (per week)—will display the number of people known to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness based on their engagement with street outreach teams. The data comes from a document used to facilitate coordination between local street outreach teams and is updated weekly.
- Data Brief: Cohort of individuals engaged with street outreach—a point-in-time cohort of 156 individuals who were on the street outreach list on a single day in October 2022. The brief speaks to the demographics, veteran status, public benefit receipt, employment, and recent service and criminal justice involvement of the cohort to inform programs and policies to better support these individuals.
- Upcoming analysis: assessment and trend analysis of the inflow (returns and new households), active, and outflow of households across the homeless response system; assessment and trends of shelter use patterns (e.g., single short-term use, long-term use, episodic, etc)

Mr. Evans voiced strong disapproval of the use of the data presented, stating that the unsheltered and emergency shelter data is a gross underrepresentation. Mr. Lettrich proposed further discussion through the HOCC on methods for capturing and reporting on the number of people experiencing homelessness, and Mr. Halfhill added that DHS has evolved in terms of the language used around PIT counts, aiming to be very specific about what the data in the PIT is and isn't, and continuing to work with stakeholders on data within the PIT, and well beyond the PIT.

Mr. Lettrich highlighted the growth in the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and noting that those increases are in a context when a significant number of shelter beds were also added to the system. He characterized the growth as a massive shift and influx on the back end of COVID.

- **Landlord Incentive Program—Chuck Keenan**

Chuck Keenan, Administrator in DHS's Office of Community Services and lead of the Housing Navigation Unit (HNU) provided meeting participants with an overview of the Landlord Incentive Program. Mr. Keenan reminded participants that the CoC depends on the private rental market (landlords who have apartments in the community), and the HNU was established to recruit landlords who will rent to households served by the CoC. Over the years, there have been a number of efforts to incentivize landlords to work with CoC households, recognizing service participants often have poor credit scores, low income, lack recommendations, etc. Examples of incentives are the involvement of service providers supporting the households and maintaining timely rental payments, and the Landlord Risk Mitigation Fund, which landlords can sign up for and receive up to

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\$3,000 to repair damages incurred to a property while renting to a CoC client.

In February 2023 the newest incentive program began, which provides bonuses to landlords-- \$2,000 for a new landlord who rents to a CoC household, and \$1,000 retention bonus for continuing to rent to a CoC household. At the beginning of February, the HNU had 24 apartments in its portfolio of landlord contracts, and within 2 weeks of the incentive program and additional 20 apartments were added.

- **Public Comments/Announcements**

Mr. Prushnok thanked meeting participants and applauded the high engagement in the meeting. To continue to support active and meaningful planning, the HAB is encouraging in-person participation, particularly for HAB members, for future HAB meetings.

Next CoC Meeting

May 30, 2023 from 10:00am to 12:00pm
1 Smithfield St, Pittsburgh, 15222 (HSB, Lower Level) and
Microsoft Teams

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Appendix A Allegheny County 2023 PIT Slides

ALLEGHENY COUNTY JANUARY 2023 POINT IN TIME (PIT) COUNT

Andy Halfhill

Administrator, Homeless Services Program

Allegheny County Department of Human Services

WHAT IS THE PIT COUNT?

- An unduplicated count of the people in a community that are experiencing homelessness on a single night, including both sheltered and unsheltered populations.
- HUD requirement for each CoC, conducted within the last 10 days of January every year. Follows narrower HUD definition of homelessness (sheltered/unsheltered).
- While the count does not necessarily identify every single person in the CoC that is experiencing homelessness, it is typically the best information that communities have about how many people are experiencing homelessness “on a given day”.
- DHS is finalizing a public dashboard that will show daily sheltered and weekly unsheltered counts, year-round.

PIT METHODOLOGY

- Sheltered count = HMIS data from emergency shelters + aggregate information provided by domestic violence shelters
- Unsheltered count:
 - Leverage weekly street outreach case conferencing by -name list
 - Surveying by teams (approximately 30 total people) led by professional street outreach staff on the night of 1/24 and afterward, utilizing a Qualtrics survey. Teams surveyed known locations and canvassed outlying areas across the county.
 - Deduplication of names across datasets to ensure deduplication

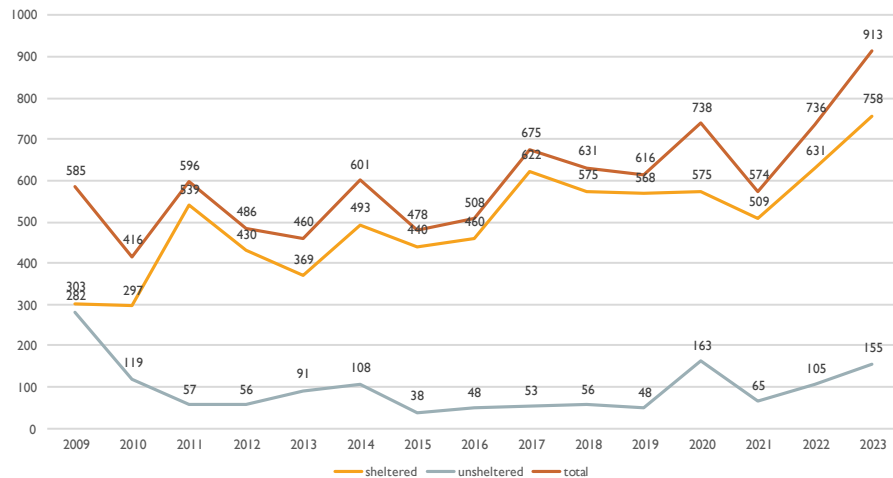
JANUARY 2023 PIT COUNT RESULTS

On the night of January 24, 2023:

- 913 people identified as experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County, including:
 - 758 persons in emergency shelters (83% of total)
 - 155 persons staying in unsheltered locations (17% of total)
- Increase of 177 persons over January 2022 count, including +127 persons in emergency shelter and +50 in unsheltered locations
- Additionally, 105 people were staying in bridge/transitional housing and 12 people were staying in a safe haven program

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SHELTERED AND UNSHELTERED PIT COUNT RESULTS, 2009 - 2023



HOUSEHOLD TYPE AND AGE BREAKDOWN

Among those identified as staying in emergency shelters or unsheltered on January 24 (n=913):

- 676 (74%) were part of **adult-only** households
- 52 (6%) were **transition age (18-24) youth**
- 157 (17%) were children (**under age 18**); no children were unsheltered

NEXT STEPS

- Submit data to HUD before 4/28 deadline
- DHS to release data brief and updated PIT dashboard
- Summer 2023 PIT
- Release of additional sheltered and unsheltered resources