

REGIONAL HOUSING COUNCIL

Wednesday, September 27th, 2023 – Meeting Minutes

PANELISTS:

Lacey: Carolyn Cox, Andy Ryder, Jennifer Adams, Ryan Andrews

Tumwater: Michael Althaus, Joan Cathey, Brad Medrud, Erika Smith-Erickson

Olympia: Dani Madrone, Darian Lightfoot, Jacinda Steltjes, Rich Hoey

Yelm: Brian Hess, Gary Cooper

Thurston County: Carolina Mejia, Robin Campbell, Tom Webster, Keylee Marineau, Elisa Sparkman, Krosbie Carter, Leah Tangeman

Affordable Housing Advisory Board: Talauna Reed, KayVin Hill

Meeting began at 4:00 pm.

Agenda Item 1: Agenda approved, motion, and second.

Agenda Item 2: Minutes from August 23rd meeting, motion and second, approved.

Agenda Item 3: Public Comment – No Public Comment

Agenda Item 4: Long-Term Funding Strategy for Quince St.

Rich Hoey presented the City of Olympia’s long-term funding strategy for Quince Street Tiny Home Village. He began by thanking Thurston County for considering the City’s request for financial support for the operating costs of Quince Street Village. At the last RHC meeting, the City was asked to present a long-term plan for sustainable funding of the site. Rich stated that they expect the site to be in operation for approximately three years and will eventually be turned into Permanent Affordable Housing. He said that the critical period to consider maintaining funding operation of the emergency shelter is from 2024 to 2026. Currently, the facility costs the city about 1.37 million to operate. With inflation, Rich figured that they would need about 1.5 million per year. The City plans to fund the operation of the site using the City’s HOME Fund operating dollars, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars for year 2024, Regional Funds through the RHC, and plans to request \$500,000 from the state in exchange for allocating up to 30 units at Quince Street to house eligible individuals under the State Right-of-Way initiative.

Carolina asked if it would be more beneficial to ask the RHC for a set-aside for the Regional HOME Fund dollars instead of requesting the funds annually. Rich responded that the City would appreciate the set aside and that this would be to address anticipated needs in 2025 and 2026. Mayor Andy Ryder asked what the process is for other jurisdictions to refer people to Quince Street. Rich responded that the current intake process is through Coordinated Entry, which is a County-wide process. Darian added that the site has been operating through the Coordinated Entry process for the past year. Robin asked what their plan is if they do not successfully obtain grants from the state. Rich responded that while they cannot guarantee that they will be successful with those funds, they are confident based on preliminary conversations with the state. Brian Hess is concerned about a “No Camping Ban” in Yelm and asked if this is something that can be used for all of Thurston County or if it is just for individuals on the Right of

Way. Keylee stated that Thurston County has an MOU with the state that once everyone has been relocated from the Right of Way, the next priority would be those on the Coordinated Entry list. Darian added that there are 100 units at Quince Street and 30 of those units are reserved for Right of Way while the rest are intended for those on the Coordinated Entry list.

Dani asked for a timeline to hear back from Commerce. Rich said October 25th is when the application is due, and Darian added that they anticipate submitting the application early and that Commerce stated a 2–3-week turnaround time. Dani suggested that this be an agenda item for the December RHC meeting to determine if there will be a set-aside awarded.

Agenda Item 5: Recommendation of Allocation Plan for CHG Inflationary Funds

The Vice Chair of the Homeless Services Advisory Board (HSAB), KayVin Hill, presented the Recommendations of Allocation Plan for the Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG) Inflationary Funds. In May 2023 the Department of Commerce Housing Assistance Unit (HAU) announced four funding buckets intended to fill gaps left by document recording fees revenue and Covid-19 specific funds. One of those buckets is the CHG Inflationary Funds. KayVin highlighted that Commerce expects the grantee to prioritize the use of these funds towards salary increases or retention stipends for their homeless service provider workforce and to extend to an extent to offset inflation costs.

The Homeless Services Advisory Board (HSAB) recommends that the agencies within our Homeless Crisis Response System that provide Homeless Services respond to a survey developed by OHHP staff to determine how many front-line Full-Time Employees (FTE) they have that make equal or less than \$28 an hour. Once survey responses are collected, OHHP staff will develop an allocation chart for the CHG Inflationary Fund distributions.

The allocation recommendations will be presented to the HSAB in October. The HSAB will then make recommendations to the RHC regarding these funds. The proposed action to the RHC is to approve the proposed allocation process of sending homeless service providers a survey to determine how many frontline workers they have making less than \$28 an hour.

Dani made a motion to approve this process as presented, Carolyn seconded, unanimously approved.

Agenda Item 6: Draft Communications Plan

Elisa presented the Draft Communications Plan for the RHC. The Draft Communications plan is for year 2024 and begins with some background on the RHC. She emphasized that this plan is the starting point for communication practices for the Council and is meant to be expanded upon in future years. The draft states that the purpose of the 2024 Communications Plan is to create a foundation of consistent, reliable communication to government partners and stakeholders to further establish the RHC in the community. Elisa said that the goal is to further establish the RHC as a hub of the community's source of information and leadership around affordable housing and homeless response. The Communication Plan includes a breakdown of the ongoing communication responsibilities like maintaining the RHC website, communications updates to the RHC, news releases and announcements, RHC informational materials, social media, and media requests. Then, it contains a breakdown of the 2024 Communications Projects which is to establish branding of the RHC, develop and implement an email newsletter, social media review, expand the RHC website, develop an RHC Communications Manual, and update the Communications Plan for 2025. Next, it includes a section on Communication Plan implementation

which details that the Communications Specialist is responsible for implementing the plan with support from the RHC Technical Team. Lastly, the bottom portion lists government partners and stakeholders and a section for resources and support.

Dani asked about strategies to recruit an audience for the newsletter. Elisa responded that the RHC has coordination and collaboration with the jurisdictions so there is an opportunity to provide a newsletter that is holistic in terms of affordable housing and homeless response. As far as recruitment, Elisa states there is a housing newsletter that was created around the time of COVID-19 Rent Assistance that has several hundred addresses so we could offer it to that group as well as using social media and partnering with jurisdictions to spread the word. Dani also asked what type of communications documents would require RHC approval. Elisa responded that anything that is a formal release from the RHC would need approval.

Agenda Item 7: Right of Way NOFA

Keylee stated that on September 8th, 2023, Thurston County received information from the Department of Commerce of a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) released to the Right of Way communities. The NOFA has been retitled the Encampment Relocation Program and is for state fiscal year 2024 and 2025. The funds distributed to the 5 communities were formulaic based on population size and the work that was accomplished. The funds are meant to prioritize continuing moving individuals out of the encampments and into permanent housing. She adds that within the NOFA, there is a requirement from the state that the people who are removed from encampments are offered actual placements into permanent housing within 6 months. Another element of the NOFA is that 20% of the funds can be used to support people living on other public property. The application is due October 25th, 2023. The three projects highlighted in the application is to purchase a hotel or motel with a quick rehabilitation turn around, to set aside 30 beds for Quince Street Village, and to fill a 5-million-dollar gap at a site ran by Together We Grow (TWG). Darian added that they are looking to propose a phased approach – prioritize shelter beds at Quince Street, support the purchase of a hotel, and then fill some of the gap funding for TWG project.

Agenda Item 8: PRO Housing NOFO

Darian presented on the Pathways to Removing Obstacles (PRO) Housing Grant. She stated that the purpose for sharing about this funding opportunity is to present what the City of Olympia plans to do and to advertise public comment. PRO Housing is a HUD Grant that the City is in the process of submitting. The grant is fashioned after Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and awards between 1 million to 10 million dollars to be spent between 2024-2029. The application is due October 30th, 2023. Darian stated that the goal of the grant is to identify a barrier in your housing system and lay out a plan to address the barrier. The City chose to remove barriers to homeownership in four approaches: launch a down-payment assistance program, increase access to homebuyer counseling services, provide capacity building support and administrative funds to our local land trust organization, and provide capital funding to help non-profits create new homeownership housing and preserve existing owner-occupied housing. Darian broke down each approach at a high level. The City is asking for 10 million with up to 1 million in administrative support. City Staff are drafting the application now, including letters of support, October 12th-26th is the Public Comment Period, October 24th is the Public Hearing at Olympia City Council, and October 30th is when the application is due.

Agenda Item 9: Legislative Agenda

Tom led the discussion about the RHC Legislative Agenda. During the last RHC executive meeting, Commissioner Mejia proposed that the RHC come up with one legislative priority that each jurisdiction would add to their own legislative agendas while working the next year to create a more robust approach for the RHC Legislative Agenda. Two proposed priorities are to maintain funding for current projects and to incorporate the need for rental assistance funding. Carolyn added that the RHC lacks the staff support and resources to lobby for an agenda so having the support from the cities would be beneficial in supporting a common priority. Dani stated that while she cannot speak to what will be included in the City of Olympia's Legislative Agenda, if there is a common priority from the RHC that all jurisdictions support she is willing to support that. Robin mentioned that the county, cities, the port, the Economic Development Council (EDC), and South Puget Sound Community College have a shared legislative partnership and suggests that the cities and county make this a priority on the Shared Partnership Legislative Agenda. The RHC supported the idea of allocating time at the October RHC meeting to discuss high level legislative priorities and Robin will propose the RHC being included in the Shared Partnership Legislative Agenda to the partnership meeting on October 18th, 2023.

Agenda Item 10: HOME ARP Allocation Plan Update

Tom gave an update on the HOME American Rescue Plan (ARP) allocation. Early in 2023, Thurston County received a 3-million-dollar allocation under the HOME ARP Program under the Federal HOME Program. They submitted an Allocation Plan which included a public hearing, a discussion with providers, and a consultation period. Thurston County proposed to split the funds between rental assistance and affordable housing development and services activities, equaling approximately 1.5 million dollars for each. At the time, the money was allocated to services because there was a concern of a substantial funding gap with the reduction of Document Recording Fees, but that gap has been largely filled by the state. Tom detailed that after further guidance from HUD on how to implement the HOME ARP Funds, they determined that service agencies that receive HOME ARP Funds would need to make substantial changes to their Coordinated Entry System and their internal processes. After internal discussion, they decided that the cost benefits no longer make sense to use in this manner. The proposal is to shift all the HOME ARP funds to affordable housing rental development. Thurston County will go to the BoCC to set a public hearing to amend the HOME ARP Allocation Plan to allocate the full amount of funding to affordable housing development. There will be a 30-day public comment period.

Agenda Item 11: Good of the Order

Olympia: Darian announced that the City and Catholic Community Services received a 1-million-dollar grant after applying with the Department of Justice in April for additional support for the Arrest and Jail Alternatives Program to provide substance use disorder support and behavioral health services over the next three years.

Tumwater: No update.

Thurston County: Tom read a draft of the Resolution Recognizing the Contributions of Ramiro Chavez that will be presented to him on his last day of service. Michael moved to approve the proclamation, Brian seconded, unanimously approved.

Yelm: Brian shared that Yelm has plans to develop rental units for seniors 55 and older.

Lacey: No update.

Meeting Adjourned: 5:53 pm