

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**February 21, 2023**

Present: Lisa Virkler, Chair (via phone); Jessica Moser and Jeffrey Nellenback.

Others: Legislators Larry Dolhof, Josh Leviker, Phil Hathway, Thomas Osborne and Ian Gilbert; County Manager, Ryan Piche; County Treasurer, Eric Virkler; Human Resources Director, Caitlyn Smith; and County Attorney, Joan McNichol.

Committee member, Legislator Moser called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m. and explained that due to not having a majority of the members present on the Health & Human Services committee, the agenda would be gone through but any item requiring action would be put forward to the full board on March 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Temporary and Permanent Housing Feasibility Study results – GYMO Representatives**

Social Services Commissioner, Jenny Jones began by explaining why housing was being looked at through envisioning a future where all people have access to safe, affordable housing and the social supports to remain housed. The Ad Hoc work group that was created to investigate housing is Lisa Virkler, Chairperson of the Health & Human Services Committee; Jaylyn Heames, Executive Director of Snow Belt Housing Co.; Maureen Cean, Executive Director of Transitional Living Services, Inc.; Scott Mathys, Executive Director of Lewis County Opportunities; Ryan Piche, Lewis County Manager; Monica McCullough, Esq. MM Development Advisors Consultant; and Jenny Jones, herself.

The Point In Time Count that is done every year around January 26<sup>th</sup> is a snapshot of the sheltered and unsheltered populations. The 2022 results are for Jefferson, St. Lawrence and Lewis County combined. The 2023 results aren't published yet. It clearly shows that there are quite a few individuals who are in Emergency and Transitional housing with more being male than female and most being over the age of 24. It is the responsibility of DSS to compete Homeless Services Plan Outcome reports. The report shown is from October 1, 2021, through September 30, 2022 and breakdowns the data into singles versus families tracked in categories such as Outreach Services - none; Prevention Services – 48 singles, 6 families; Shelter – 35 singles, 6 families; Transitional – 6 singles, 2 families; Permanent Housing – 65 singles, 7 families; and Permanent Supportive Housing - none.

In 2022 DSS sheltered people in the following categories: Code Blue – 18 consumers for a total of 140 nights; Warming Center – 3 consumers for a total of 4 nights; and Temporary Housing – 44 consumers for a total of 843 nights. Snow Belt Housing also tracked data in 2022. They had 127 individuals that were assisted through their Rapid Housing program, 71 had mental health disorders, 25 had substance use disorders, and 21 were youth under the age of 25. The Lewis County

Housing Needs and Market Analysis was completed by LaBella Associates and presented to the Lewis County Board of Legislators on May 17, 2022, which identified a lack of Supportive Housing Options. The North Country HOME Consortium ARP Allocation Plan identifies a lack of permanent supportive housing and a general lack of capacity for housing.

The Fair Market Rent in Lewis County a month for an Efficiency was \$647 in 2022 and went up to \$685 in 2023; a One-Bedroom was \$658 in 2022 and now \$692 in 2023; a Two-Bedroom was \$838 in 2022 and is now \$899 in 2023; a Three-Bedroom was \$1,052 in 2022 and is now \$1,111 in 2023; and a Four-Bedroom was \$1,266 in 2022 and now up to \$1,383 in 2023. Unfortunately, through DSS Temporary Assistance is only allowed \$152.00 per month towards rent which means they either wait for section 8 or other subsidized apartments. Section 8 allows them to only pay up to 30% of their income towards rent and DSS Rent Supplement Plan covers the remainder up to the fair market value for about 10 people.

What programs are currently out there to assist with housing needs: Lewis County DSS has Emergency/Code Blue/THA, and Temporary Housing Assistance which are all open ended, and Rent Supplement Program with 10 slots, 7 of which are vacant. Snow Blet Housing has CoC Funding RRH in the amount of \$32,500 per year and ESG Prevent, RRH, ESG in the amount of \$245,448 (2021 – 2023), and STEHP RRH in the amount of \$486,920 (2019 – 2024). TLS Gateway Supportive Housing has 7 units with 1 vacancy; Credo Supportive Housing has 7 slots pending for Jefferson/Lewis Counties; and Lewis County Opportunities, Inc. Choice Vouchers, which are 320 vouchers and there is a 79-person waitlist currently.

In the beginning the Ad Hoc work group looked at eight different locations: 5311 Dayan Street, Lowville – 5 apt. building for sale; 5450 Shady Ave, Lowville – 4-5 apt. building for sale; 7707 N. State Street, Lowville – AKA Andover House; Rudd Road Property – Not listed for sale; 5520 Jackson Street, Lowville – Current NRCIL site; 5960 Main Street, Glenfield – AKA Old Glenfield School; and 5272 Stowe Street, Lowville – County owned vacant lot. Supportive Housing is designed to promote the development of housing AND support services to assist homeless persons transition from the streets and shelters to permanent housing and self-sufficiency. Homelessness looks different in Lewis County because some of them just use tents and other shelter objects, they are also people we know who were born and raised in Lewis County, not bussed up here from NYC. The ideal number that was agreed upon was 16 units of Supportive Housing; 4 units for person with mental health issues; 4 units for person with substance use disorders; and 8 units for youth 18 to 25.

Transitional Housing is designed to provide housing and appropriate supportive services to homeless persons to facilitate movement to independent living. This is short term, typically less than 24 months. The ideal number of units would be 4 to 6.

A funding opportunity that is available is the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP) which provides capital grants and loans to not-for-profit corporations, charitable and religious organizations, municipalities and public corporations to acquire, construct or rehabilitate housing for persons who are homeless and are unable to secure adequate housing without special assistance. Projects eligible for HHAP funding may serve families, single persons, youth, the elderly, as well as a range of special needs groups such as the homeless, mentally disabled, victims of domestic violence, veterans and persons with AIDS. This provides the capital money to build the facility.

Another opportunity is Empire State Supported Housing Initiative (ESSHI) which is to advance New York's five-year goal of developing more than 6,000 units of supportive housing for persons identified as homeless with special needs. ESSHI is an interagency program solicitation administered by the NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) that provides supportive service and operating funds to sustain newly developed permanent supportive housing units. It offers \$25,000 per unit per year towards operating expenses attributable to maintaining the supportive housing units, to help clients remain stably housed, and to provide case management and other supportive services. This is the funding to run the facility.

At the end of December 2022, Maureen Cean, Executive Director of North County Transitional Living Services, Inc received a letter from ESSHI on their application to the 2022 ESSHI RFP's and was informed that the application achieved a passing score and therefore qualifies for a conditional award to support 16 permanent supportive housing units. The Lewis County vision is to have a location with 16 units of Supported Housing, 4 to 6 units of Transitional Housing, Onsite office space, flex space to accommodate a warming or emergency center, and also consideration for location, social activities, quality of life, and site considerations.

The Ad Hoc work group is asking the Board of Legislators for support of the project, payment of the Engineering Study, which is being accomplished, sale of County Owned property or 99-year lease to Snow Belt Housing (contingent on funding approval), assistance with upfront costs until funding is received (if needed), and ongoing funding to support Transitional Housing units. The RFP for the Engineering Feasibility Study was awarded to GYMO Architecture, Engineering and Land Surveying. The team consists of Scott Soules, AIA Director of Architecture; McKenzie Fisk-Kamide, Architectural Designer; Peter Clough, Director of Construction Management; and Mark Crandall, Site Developer Manager.

The top three sites that were investigated were Andover House, Old Glenfield School, and vacant lot on Stowe Steet. Each site was graded on several factors in categories of Location, Social, Quality of Life, and Site Considerations. Vacant lot on Stowe Street scored 9.5 which was close to the top of the scale, Andover House scored 4.6 which wasn't quite halfway on the scale, and Glenfield School building scored 7.06.

The Andover House could not meet the number of units required by the scope of work. Although it does have good bones and many other strengths to create apartments for different end users. The Glenfield School building is a former elementary school, and it already has accessibility in place for the first floor, but it would require quite a bit of renovation/upgrades and the location is not ideal as it would require public transportation to get to Lowville. The vacant lot on Stowe Street would need to have new parking and drainage designed as part of the overall design project but could accommodate all the units requested. The vacant lot is in Lowville and is conveniently located adjacent to the Lewis County Department of Social Services and the Public Safety Building. It is within walking distance to many businesses in the village and public transportation is also provided to this site. There was further discussion on the Stowe Street site and all the benefits.

The estimated rough pricing would be \$13,733,620.00. Legislator Dolhof questioned the maintenance and utilities of this type of facility, Ryan explained that DSS funding could be used but also the ESSHI would cover \$25,000 per unit per year. Snow Belt would take care of the day-to-day operations. Legislator Moser questioned if the solar was included in this estimated cost, it likely was not. There was further discussion on costs.

The following dockets were reviewed:

1. Authorizing transfer of funds from Legislative special contingency to DSS miscellaneous expense account in the amount of \$30,700.00 for the special engineering study for Temporary and Permanent Housing Feasibility Study.
2. Authorizing agreement between Department of Public Health and Volunteer Transportation Center of Jefferson County, Inc. to provide transportation services to pre-school for special needs children of Lewis County.
3. Authorizing inter-municipal agreements with Jefferson County to share services and the positions of director of Weights & Measures and Veteran Services.
4. Authorizing agreement between the Lewis County Department of Social Services and Pratt Northam Foundation to serve as administrator of the Pratt Northam – Careers Here Program.
5. Awarding bids and authorizing agreements between the County of Lewis and Credo Community Center for the Treatment of Addictions to provide counseling and prescribing services, and an agreement with Lawrence J. Palinski, FNP to provide medical assessments, prescribing and oversight services under the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) Plan for incarcerated individuals suffering from substance abuse disorders.

All the above draft resolutions will move forward to the full board on March 7<sup>th</sup> and be introduced by Health & Human Services Chair Legislator Virkler.

There being no other business to come before the committee, Legislator Moser moved to adjourn at 2:58 p.m., seconded by Legislator Nellenback and carried.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board