

MEETING MINUTES

**Town of Waynesville
Task Force on Homelessness**

Thursday, September 2, 2021

5:30 PM—7:30 PM EST

**Location:
Town of Waynesville Meeting
Room
16 South Main Street**

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| Meeting Facilitator: | Amy Murphy-Nugen | |
| TOW TFH Members Roster | | |
| ✓ Police Chief David Adams Proxy: Lt. Tyler Trantham Both attended | ✓ Patsy Davis | ✓ Amy Murphy-Nugen (Chair) |
| ✓ Juleah Berliner | ✓ Commissioner Kevin Ensley | ✓ Bob Cummings |
| ✓ Wanda Brooks | ✓ Keri Guidry | ✓ Joslyn Schaefer |
| ✓ Dale Burris | ✓ Mandy Haithcox | ✓ Alderman Anthony Sutton |
| ✓ Nathan Cartwright | ✓ Jon Lynn McDermott | ✓ Brandon Wilson |
| ✓ Sheriff Greg Christopher or appointee | | |

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Amy Murphy-Nugen opened the meeting at approximately 5:40 p.m., welcoming everyone. The agenda for the meeting was reviewed. Chair Murphy-Nugen reminded TF members of the scheduled presentation of its recommendations to Town leadership on Tuesday, September 28, 6:00 PM at the Town Board Meeting.

Chair Murphy-Nugen highlighted the significant gaps that were identified through the homelessness needs assessment—including, the need to increase outreach and service connection among people who are homeless, experiencing substance use issues, and, also involved with the criminal justice system. She noted the data finding that 80 percent of the survey participants who are homeless had never encountered an outreach worker while they were unsheltered. Chair Murphy-Nugen also noted the disparities in service access identified by people

who are homeless and members of the LGBTQ community. Like the rest of the nation, she also highlighted challenges with chronic homelessness in Waynesville.

The complete draft results and findings are included in the TOW's TF on Homelessness Needs Assessment and Community Action Plan, which is posted on the town's website at:

<https://www.waynesvillenc.gov/task-force-homelessness>

TF Members: Reason for Participating, Solutions for Identified Gaps

Chair Murphy-Nugen provided each member of the TF with a few minutes to share what motivated them to serve as well as to consider everything we have learned from the past year (TF meeting discussions, work groups, community feedback survey, comprehensive survey with people who are homeless, business survey, listening sessions, socio-economic data profile of Waynesville) and what they would recommend the TF should propose as solutions. A summary of each TF member response follows:

Jon: To find a positive solution for the impact of homelessness and drug use on residents and business owners

Patsy: Serving at the Mayor's request; wants to incorporate community input and TF member suggestions

Wanda: Resident affected by homelessness in Waynesville; she does not agree with action plan, and, does not support 3 positions in the TOW; wants more emphasis on mental health, substance abuse, and criminal activity; more money coming in for opioid settlements; drug (i.e. recovery) courts; work with Judge Letts; no enabling, help people who want to have help; need more affordable housing, especially in Cruso; more room for rehab; nonprofits keep doing what they're doing

Keri: joined because she works at Pathways; agrees with Wanda; wants to strengthen existing services—using rapid rehousing and PSH (i.e. Permanent Supportive Housing); more mental health; she is not fully on board with the draft plan

Mandy: Joined TF because she works at Pathways; would like to see increased mental health treatment, affordable housing, prevent for homelessness; integrate community and TF feedback

Brandon: Representing veteran services on the TF; interested in building capacity for existing nonprofits and helping nonprofits continue their work; believes the answers are in the community and not in the government

Dale: Chosen by the Board of Aldermen to be on TF; considers himself to represent all of Haywood County not just Waynesville; want to help homeless

people who want help; thinks substance addiction is a large problem; wanted to help homeless veterans, reduce criminality/theft; does not agree the plan is comprehensive

Chief Adams: Got involved when he was hired by the TOW; he has noticed improvement in Frog Level and also at Pathways; he has learned a lot—including that we do not have as many homeless people as we thought; thinks mental health is the biggest issue, along with substance abuse

Sheriff Christopher: Mayor asked him to serve on TF; discussed ongoing problems with people exiting jail and not having a place to go; wants a plan to reduce recidivism and post-incarceration homelessness, substance abuse/mental health; thinks the “service-resistant” population needs more attention; drug (i.e. recovery) court is imperative for accountability—thinks the opioid settlement money could be used to support

Lt. Trantham: Here because he was born and raised here; thinks information and data from the draft plan give insight into the homeless population; wants to address recidivism; wants us to be data-driven not opinion-driven; thinks there are lots of resources travelling in separate lanes to the same destination—would like to come up with a solution to strengthen the lanes and assist/build capacity; believes we must unify and not criticize each other, thinks everyone should get a seat at the table to make the community stronger; thinks we should be leader and work together to build a system that benefits everyone

Joslyn: Serves as a member of the faith community; sees her role as listening and bridge-building; recognizes that we all have good intentions; thinks there is a fine line between enabling and empowering; noticed that there were lots of comments about needing drug (i.e. recovery) court, rehab, affordable housing, mental health, and strengthening capacity—which is all in the draft plan; thinks CARES Director needs to be outside of the nonprofit realm for accountability; wants us to keep our eye on elderly folks and families who are experiencing homelessness

Bob: Fled Asheville for Waynesville and became involved in service with Pathways; he thinks the TF should listen to the community—especially those against the draft plan; he wants to support local entities/nonprofits doing the work by giving them more staff and resources; he is against low-barrier shelters and adding extra services that he thinks will draw more chronic homelessness to Waynesville

Juleah: Joined the TF to make sure mental health and substance use challenges did not get overlooked; wanted to bring a humanistic perspective to how the community sees people who are homeless; thinks we must address affordable housing; thinks street outreach is missing; thinks services exist but without outreach and connection, that they are not fully accessed

Commissioner Ensley: Asked by the Mayor to join TF and has a history of helping to start Pathways; shared that homelessness is everywhere, not just Waynesville; thinks we should use faith-based solutions as much as we can; thinks we should address “service-resistant” folks and help them when they are ready—and help as many people as we can

TF Discussion: Homelessness Needs Assessment & Recommendations

Chair Murphy-Nugen reviewed the charge given to the TF by Town leadership, the decision-making process the TF agreed on early in its formation, and referenced the guiding principles developed by the TF. **The TF charges include:**

1. **Completed:** Research the demographics of persons who are homeless in Waynesville and the causes of homelessness;
2. **Completed:** Examine stigmatization, criminalization and discrimination associated with homelessness;
3. **Completed:** Conduct a gap analysis to identify needs, existing community capacity, and additional resources necessary to prevent and respond to temporary and chronic homelessness; and,
4. **Remaining in Draft:** Developing a collaborative community action plan to fill system gaps and improve existing programs.

As the TF began its discussion on the draft plan and recommendations, Chair Murphy-Nugen encouraged members to reflect on the following questions:

- What data in the homelessness needs assessment support the action item?
- What service or community gap identified in the homeless needs assessment does the action item address? Or, what capacity does the action item build?
- Is the action item feasible (i.e. can it be done)? And, will it measurably improve the needs identified in the homelessness needs assessment?

Before the TF started its discussion of the recommendations submitted by its members, a question was raised by Brandon asking if there could be consideration to extend the deadline for finalization of the plan and recommendations. Chair Murphy-Nugen explained that along with the charges given to the TF, the Town Board also expected the work to be completed within a year. Due to the pandemic and other unexpected delays, the TF is currently into 15 months. She reminded TF members that we have also shared for several months with the community that we would be presenting a final plan and recommendations at their September 28 meeting. In addition, she noted that people are currently unsheltered and other neighbors have expressed being significantly impacted by homelessness in our community. Some members of the TF indicated their interest in

also extending work beyond September 2, while a few others communicated they thought the work should be finished. Discussion was considered on whether to extend the TF's deadline or adhere to the request of Town Leadership. TF members in favor the extension expressed wanting more time to consider the data and proposed recommendations both in the draft plan as well as additional recommendations submitted by members of the TF. Members in favor of adhering to the September 2 deadline expressed the need to move the data and recommendations to Town Leadership for their consideration and implementation. In addition, considerations were raised about increasing COVID-19 cases in the community and the possible inability to meet in-person again as well as the need to focus attention on the flood response in neighboring Cruso. A vote was called for extending beyond the September 2 deadline. Dale made a motion to extend the deadline by 45 days. Brandon seconded the motion. An initial roll call resulted in recording 10 votes in favor of the motion; however, the vote has been amended to 9 for the official record as both a TF member and a proxy voted for the motion and only one of those votes should be counted. *A majority vote in favor of the motion to extend the TF's deadline by 45 days was recorded.*

Chair Murphy-Nugen began the TF's review of the draft plan and recommendations by bringing forward for discussion the proposal submitted by Patsy: Proposes Town of Waynesville's financial support be increased to service providers that focus efforts on existing need instead of supporting Community CARES Director & associated action items. The following discussion considered the implications for dividing the set aside request among the 6-7 providers for 2 years and what impact the limited funds and limited timeframe might achieve. Other ideas included limiting the number of providers who would be supported by the set aside request—reducing it to 2 providers. Other ideas included getting more creative about funding and grant proposals. The discussion also noted that it may be helpful to have someone employed by the TOW leading that effort as collaborative grant proposals sometimes are more welcome than those submitted by a single not-for-profit.

The discussion also raised one of the gap needs identified in the draft plan—support for an outreach worker to connect people who are homeless with not-for-profit providers. Included in this discussion was the potential benefit of having a “by-name” list to help more effectively make the connections between individuals needing services and the not-for-profits most effectively situated to respond to those needs. Concerns were raised regarding confidentiality of this information. When working within the Continuum of Care system disallows the sharing of private information outside of the entities involved in the CoC. Chair Murphy-Nugen asked what the TF thought was more effective to prioritize--participating in the CoC (with less than \$200,000 distributed to Region 1, which is a seven-county region) or developing a database that still maintains confidentiality but may be more responsive to the specific needs in Waynesville.

The TF also discussed the challenges with attracting financial support to rural regions. Patsy noted the particular barriers with distributing Section 8 vouchers in the region—which does not just include a gap in available rental units but also limitations associated with HUD’s fair market rent calculation.

A question was raised about who would financially support a CARES Director to attract additional funding to Waynesville. Chair Murphy-Nugen indicated that could be a potential use of the ARP set-aside; however, the CARES Director would be expected to do more than grant writing—their proposed role would be to implement the full draft action plan. A concern was raised about what type of funding might be sought. Chair Murphy-Nugen shared a recent notice of funding availability from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that would assist older adults (62 years of age and older) in remediating health and safety issues so they could remain in their home. The award floor for the grant is \$1 million and the award ceiling is \$2 million, which would allow an investment of up to \$10,000 in each older adult home—possibly preventing homelessness. These large grants often require collaboration across community partners and units of government. Patsy proposed that we include in the plan an action item that encourages a partnership among local municipalities and the county.

Discussion also occurred about other communities and plans to address homelessness that have fallen short or failed. Lt. Trantham shared that in Los Angeles, which is known to have one of the largest homeless populations in our nation, the absence of a point person and organizations working independently are considered key factors in the community’s failed response. Bob discussed his organization and how it works like an umbrella to effectively work together—the key factor being that the organization is well-resourced. Brandon also indicated that was his experience—one entity—everyone on the same page, working together.

Discussion also included the role of faith-based organizations—with a mix of perspectives. Some TF members think the faith-based community should play a larger role in addressing homelessness—while others pointed out the criticism some faith-based organizations have received for attempting to fulfill that role.

At the end of the discussion, there appeared to be agreement that a CARES Director is needed—noting the need for an exceptionally skilled person; however, there was still some question among TF members where the Director would be most effectively situated—with the Town or with one not-for-profit provider. Currently, there is not a not-for-profit provider who has indicated a willingness or interest in assuming this role. Some alternative options were recommended to situate the outreach workers with private entities. A question was raised about who would supervise the outreach workers if they were not situated at the town.

The TF's next discussion will begin with this issue—where is the most effective place to situate the CARES Director and two outreach workers (this includes both outreach to people who are homeless and to neighbors & businesses impacted by homelessness).

Noting the tremendous misinformation circulating in the community regarding additional emergency shelter and low-barrier shelters, Chair Murphy-Nugen suggested the TF decide on whether to include option 3 (develop additional emergency shelter) as part of its recommendations to the Town. *Joslyn made a motion to remove option 3 as a possible recommendation to the Town of Waynesville, Brandon seconded the motion and there was a unanimous vote in favor of the motion.*

Actions Between Now & Next Meeting

Review homeless needs assessment & draft recommendations for final discussion and recommendations to Town Board

Having exceeded the scheduled time for the meeting, Chair Murphy-Nugen moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:45 PM. Minutes will be reviewed and approved at our next meeting.

Additional Information:

The Task Force on Homelessness is committed to providing opportunities for community feedback.

Community members: Please feel welcome to provide feedback here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TFHSept3Feedback>



Minutes respectfully submitted by Amy Murphy-Nugen on September 9, 2021.

