

HOMELESS AND CRISIS SHELTERS – COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS

Following a resolution by the Louisville Metro Council, research presentation to the Planning and Zoning Committee of Council, and a conversation with service providers, the Office of Planning hosted five (5) community listening sessions at public libraries across Louisville Metro:

- Northeast Library on August 26th
- Bon Air Library on August 27th
- Shively-Newman Library on August 29th
- Main Library on September 3rd
- Shawnee Library on September 4th

The objective of these sessions was to gather information and gain a deeper understanding of community needs by listening to experiences, opinions, and ideas to inform land use regulations to permit more homeless shelters with special standards and create options for crisis shelters. Each session was opened with a brief presentation by planning staff. The following is a collection of notes taken from the discussions at each session.

Northeast Library

- Lack of shelter space in relation to the location of the homeless population – a decentralizing of the population while services remain centralized, which does not meet needs
- Panhandling and Homelessness are separate issues
- Visible mental illness and medical need of individuals along Westport Road - ‘Society is not doing the compassionate thing by leaving people with addiction and mental illnesses out on the streets.’
- There needs to be a better way to connect people with resources and services for specific needs
- An individual representing the St. Johns Center discussed outreach and access to serve individuals outside of the downtown area. The Center has volunteers that can reach people in all areas.
- Shelter services should be near bus lines and services - areas of possibility might include Old Brownsboro Crossing – Norton hospital with access to food and jobs
- Alternative places could be the Shelbyville Road commercial center and malls
- Employment is critical and overlooked in thinking about sheltering
- Explore the creation of satellite locations of existing service organizations. Could associate or attach them to religious institutions. They (institutions) are distributed throughout the city, and many are already offering or would like to offer assistance to those in need.
- A better scope/plan is needed. Before changing zoning for these uses, we first need a strategic plan for transit of people to services. Example: Have 4 service centers, (Downtown, East End, West End, South End) All located on bus lines. These centers would determine needs, distribute resources, and potentially send individuals to locations that provide the specific services they need.
- Need more shelters for domestic abuse survivors and human trafficking. We only have Center for Women and Families and Up. Both are limited on space.
- Should have satellite offices connected to a centralized office, a better system of services and resources.

- More shelter beds, but what is really needed is actual affordable housing
- Reuse of vacant buildings and spaces as shelters
- Need to consider there is a homeless population that isn't on the streets or in shelters. They are living in temporary situations with friends or family and need services too.
- Churches could have resources to help. Housing funds, reuse vacant church owned land, (reduce barriers and exhaustive processes) already providing housing for missionaries and church elders. Could expand but need to make it possible to allow 3rd party management or possible sell off.
- Need more mental health facilities. The days of the Central State are over, we need residential mental health services integrated throughout the communities.
- Zoning is probably the last step in this process. What is needed is a strategic vision for what we want accomplished in the next 10 or 15 years. Zoning would be a part of that plan.
- Need to make mental health services more available for both homeless and housed.
- Community land trusts could be a way to help maintain affordable housing.
- 'Shocked that we don't have more services for trafficked people.' Also need to take residents of communities into account, for example poorly maintained "section 8" housing could create problems for creating more housing
- Include infrastructure to support any population. Need wrap-around services to help unhoused people learn how to stay housed. Learn skills like maintaining property, budgeting, life skills not necessarily learned when in survival mode.
- Don't make people feel like they must earn the right to have housing or help
- There are several churches that own vacant land. They could already be in a place to use this land to develop affordable housing.

Bon Air Library

- Encampments are a serious problem
- Examples from Clarksville, IN were discussed, including the availability of services for the known 35-40 chronically homeless individuals
- Consider efficiency units and reuse of hotels/motels or single room occupancy (SROs) for housing solutions
- Alternative housing arrangements need more allowances, such as oxford houses
- Is the homeless person the problem? – "I don't want to see it"
- Conversion cost, building cost were discussed as limitations for reuse of certain buildings
- Community character – introducing services without interruption to the neighborhood
- What is the relationship between homeless shelters and property value?
- RCS staff discussed encampment runs, outreach staff, and field questionnaire
- Related issues of access to transit, reuse of structures, Short term rentals and non-residential conversions were discussed related to housing first solutions and shelter access
- A ballfield maintenance building has been rehabbed for a day shelter
- Inclement weather and "white flag" days were considered
 - Days of white flag need to be expanded before and after the event
 - Air Quality, temperature ranges, tornado, flash flooding, wind, and other natural disasters should be considered for "white flag" status

- Licensing shelters needs to be considered moving through the process
- Emergency shelters need non-congregant arrangements as well
- Red Cross in the event of a loss pays for 1 night only
- Routinely fewer beds than homeless population
- Specific needs of the population served needs consideration
 - Emergency, accessory, and types
- Sanctioned safe parking lots could be considered for those with vehicles – 1/3 of homeless population has a vehicle
- On shelters, we don't need to use hotels that don't have services. If there are no services than we are not meeting needs and addressing the problem
- Fair distribution of shelters not an overconcentration
- Concerns were taken related to an increase in crime related to an expansion of shelters
- Homeless people create a sense of fear and lack of safety in the neighborhood

Shively-Newman Library

- Reuse existing warehouses for shelter
- Reuse vacant hotels for shelters
- Shelter approvals should not be an administrative process
- Shelters should be dispersed
- The root causes need to be addressed first before this process
- We need to consider climate refuges and resettlement
- Family definition for HUD was discussed. local Land Development Code definition was discussed. Neither require a biological relationship.
- The range of services needs to be broadened to serve an increasingly diverse population
- Transgender specific services should be considered; meaning grouping by male or female might not meet all needs and we need to considered transgender people
- It was discussed that some homeless women may find shelter with a man for the winter instead of using shelters. This is less of a choice and more of a necessity that can lead to abuse.
- Issues surrounding the cleanliness of areas surrounding shelters was raised as a concern. The example of the Franciscan kitchen was provided, which is not a shelter, but a location that serves those in need. The cleanliness of the surrounding area was concerning.
- Shelters and their operators must have accountability to be “good neighbors”. Being a good neighbor mitigates side effects
- Shelters and services should have minimal visibility in the community – trash clean up and landscapes. In doing so it not only shows the community that they care but the individuals using the service that they are worth the investment.
- The cause needs to be fixed first
- What about “almost homeless shelters”?
- Emergency eviction funding and connection to services

- Special regulations for seniors and aid to seniors and the elderly was noted. An individual in the group stated that they recently encountered an 81 year old man who was homeless. HUD housing for seniors (62 & over)
- Shelters are a band-aid approach; We need a housing first approach
- Drug and alcohol addiction fueling the issue of homelessness
- Satellite shelters for reputable organization was introduced
- Emergency shelters should stay open for at least 3 days
- Can religious uses providing temporary, or emergency service have relaxed licensing standards?
 - Pre-approved temporary crisis shelters
- Language access to homeless population
- Job training as part of shelter services
- Treat people with dignity and compassion
- Religious institutions need allowances to partner with organization to provide services
- Misconceptions about the homeless population
 - What you see on the street is not the whole picture
 - What is most often seen is the most chronically homeless and hardest to serve – individuals with severe mental illness and drug addiction
 - Those that use facilities are just regular folks like everyone else
- Shelters are needed for women and families, specifically permanent supportive housing

Main Library

- A rotating shelters program idea was discussed where different shelter locations would rotate throughout the year in order to create dispersion and mitigate any impacts of a more permanent location on the surrounding community. A program in Bowling Green (Room in the Inn) and Chicago (PADS) were noted.
- Warming centers needed
- 2nd/3rd shift shelter needs
- Where is the evidence that shelters lower value and quality of life?
- Homeless are being discharged from hospital without medical respite services – there is a need to heal in safety and with dignity
- Crisis shelters are needed near schools – 3.5% of JCPD population is facing homelessness
- Public locker space – shelters do not always allow your belongings
- Post-encampment clearing crisis shelters needed
- ‘It should be easier to open a shelter than a short term rental’
- How do we resolve the fear of change and the fear of the homeless population? Individual mind sets about humans and how we live needs to change
- ‘It is too hard to live in the world right now since there is a cost to exist’
- Satellite homeless services needed to meet the needs in all locations
- Crisis shelters should provide for shelter during hot/cold; snow (if buses can’t run people should be let inside); flash floods; school closings; air quality alerts (asthma and poor health exacerbated); and during overflow or when shelter beds are full that should be an emergency.

- Evictions are a crisis that needs temporary accommodations
 - Exempt religious institutions to provide shelters and crisis space
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Shawnee Library

- Hope Village and the zoning and community facility review process was discussed
 - Arthur Street Hotel was discussed as well with respect to zoning –supportive housing
 - Conditional Use permit is an option to open a shelter in all districts – direction is to expand access by looking at special standards through administrative review process
 - Respite centers and day shelters needed
 - Religious institutions can provide day shelters – is there a pre-approval process specific for religious institutions?
 - Public access to cleanliness discussed – public showers, garbage facilities, and sanitation issues
 - Hotels and motels need to be reused for non-congregant living / SROs (single room occupancy)
 - Prevent an overconcentration in one area. Shelters should be dispersed and not concentrated.
 - Public Transportation is needed
 - Refugee resettlement should be considered in this evaluation of shelter choices
 - Crisis that needs to be covered – tenant protection; domestic violence; major weather events; air quality; human trafficking
 - Safe parking spaces and camping
 - Services are needed in conjunction with shelters. It is a bad practice to require they be separated.
 - “Community standards” for shelters
 - If you shouldn’t leave a pet outside, no human should be left outside
 - Management and grounds plan to ensure compatibility with surrounding area
 - Services
 - Grounds
 - staffing
 - Zoning is limited in what it can accomplish but is necessary to consider and revise in addressing homelessness
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Key Takeaways

- Shelters services should be dispersed across Louisville Metro
- Religious institutions and other facilities with adequate space should be able to open temporary crisis shelters with a more flexible licensing process
- Religious institutions and other non-profits should be able to provide accessory shelter services, including overnight, day shelters, warming centers, and wrap-around services. This may be a service that is provided in partnership with a non-profit or other established organization.
- Non-congregant living arrangements for women and families should be expanded and made accessible across Louisville Metro

- Shelters should have management plans, including a plan for the maintenance of the grounds surrounding the facility
- “White flag” occupancy or temporary crisis shelters should be available for a wider range of events
- Services (food, medical, job, etc.) should be an allowed component of shelters and not excluded