The City of
WORCESTER
City Manager Edward M. Augustus, Jr.

Office of the City Manager
City Hall, 455 Main Street, Worcester MA 01608
P | 508-799-1175 **F** | 508-799-1208
citymanager@worcesterma.gov
www.worcesterma.gov

Task Force for Sustaining Housing First Solutions
Public Forum and Listening Session #1

Public input was provided on March 26, 2018 at the Worcester Senior Center. The event was well-publicized and well-attended, with voices ranging from representatives of service agencies; the business community; former and current members of the homeless community, and concerned residents. Approximately 60 individuals attended the public meeting; 35 signed up to speak, and 27 actually commented. Each speaker was allotted up to 4 minutes to make comments to the Task Force.

In the following summary, comments have been coded and categorized by subject-area, and prioritized by the number of times a particular issue was mentioned. The numbers referenced are associated with participants' statements.

Outreach & Case Management
- Access to behavioral and physical health services, "step-down" options, trauma-informed (3, 5, 19, 24, 29, 30)
- Peer advocacy / mentorship, wellness groups is needed (3, 11, 22, 23, 29)
- On-site, 24-hr staff, or secondary managers, in lodging houses is critical, but challenging to assure (4, 13, 24)
- Importance of need for staff training & understanding of "no barrier human services" (10, 13, 22, 24)
- Reliable bus service is critically important (6, 7, 17)
- Securing employment and having sufficient income to afford housing is difficult (10, 29, 31)
- Day services, "day care," community centers are needed(16, 17, 18)
- Place to store belongings is needed (11, 12, 23)
- Panhandling should be decreased though enhanced outreach for homelessness (1, 15)
- Offer volunteer opportunities to people in homelessness, strength-based (29, 30)
- Coordinated Entry System actually slows access to housing (8)
- Help with housing search is needed(10)
- Library needs social worker or referral specialist on-site (16)

Housing
- High Demand for affordable housing, lack of extremely low income housing (4, 8, 19, 23, 24, 31)

(Housing, continued)

- Lodging or Rooming Houses
    - Amend lodging house requirements (2, 4, 24, 33)
    - Rooming houses not safe or clean (7, 11)
    - Review Police-call data to target more support services
    - "If you have a rooming house, we would be glad to manage it for you" (4)
    - "I have empty rooms, I would like to help out" (14)
    - Better with fewer units; Must have support services (13)
- Establish housing w/ public/private partnership; include members of local development & construction companies (5, 15)
- Create "insurance" fund to guarantee rent and repairs to incentivize landlords (6)
- Need female-only rooming houses (7)

Regulatory Requirements
- Code enforcement, unsafe, unsanitary, absentee landlords (7, 17)
- Amend lodging house requirements regarding the number of unrelated individuals allowed in a single dwelling (2, 4, 24)
- Zoning restrictions and expense of land acquisition difficult (24)
- Panhandling permits should be explored for legality and feasibility (1)
- The "process" is a barrier, long waitlists for public housing, having to wait 2 weeks to review a case in Coordinated Entry System, meeting certain definitions (3, 8, 31)
- Improve monitoring & evaluation to ensure agencies are appropriately serving population (15)

Funding / Resources
- Responsibility of the City Council to identify funding to address this problem, particularly target funds for emergency shelter (5)
- Gap - Homeless prevention resources for single adult population (7)
- Peer model can address gap in staffing resources (22)
- Greater expense of public services when homeless vs. when housed (23)
- Restrictions & high construction costs → prohibit development of housing for extremely low income population. Microunits at $90,000 per unit would work if land could be provided (24)
- Homeless prevention $ not available for single adults (7)

Stigma / Public Perception
- Not In My Back Yard - 'NIMBY' (24, 34)
- Stigma holds people back, become stuck in a cycle with low self-worth (3, 10)
- Encourage "strength-based" activities and programs (29, 30)

- Public perception that homeless = addiction, mental illness, or criminal (7)
- Worcester Property Owners' Association attitude has become more positive on this issue (2)
- Police at Union Station / Hub are threatening to arrest loiterers (17)

Shelter
- 25 Queen St, people are exploited or taken advantage of, and staff lack training (7, 10, 12, 23, 30)
- Shelter needed in every district to provide help in short-term emergency situation (17, 23)
- "Temporary" Shelters in church basements: inadequate, City Council should target funds to develop 150-bed shelter by July 2018 (5)
- Need for day shelter or day services (18)

Data
- Look at expense of public services of when homeless vs. housed (23)
- Review Police-call data to specific locations (13)

CORI
- It is expensive for housing providers to run CORIs, and then may not be able to accept the potential tenant (4, 24)
- Create "insurance" policies for landlords to incentivize their accepting "difficult" populations or those with CORIs (6)
- CORI barriers → employment barriers → poverty (7)

Specific Populations
- Young adults aging out of DCF (6)
- Need female-only rooming houses (7)
- Homeless prevention $ not available for single adults (7)
- Excellent services available for Veterans (8)
- People suffering from mental illness (19)
- Couples (23)
- Elder Population (34)
- Race and Class inequality (34)