

## **City Commission Workshop - Homelessness in NSB June 23, 2020 at 5:00 PM**

All Commissioners were present.

### **Public Participation:**

Eight residents, including merchants and those in the health care/faith community, spoke about the homeless problem in NSB particularly on Canal St. and the surrounding Mixed Use (MU) areas ie. Tabby House. All residents wanted to help the homeless in a safe and humane way, and not have a "knee jerk" reaction; however, an increase in crime, begging, and aggressive behavior has become alarming, and with COVID 19, it is doubly hard to try and corral it. Also, since the homeless think of NSB as their home, it was thought that perhaps providing interim residency would be preferable to shipping them out. All who spoke agreed that something must be done NOW perhaps with an ordinance that will address this problem as well as looking at it as a mental health issue.

### **Workshop:**

The workshop mainly centered around presentations by the NSB Police Chief, Michael Coffin; the executive director of Daytona Beach's First Step Homeless Shelter, Victoria Fahlbery; and a telephone conference with Atty Michael Kahn, who drafted Daytona Beach's 2019 panhandling ordinance.

Chief Coffin gave a [presentation](#) that included the causes of homelessness. Only two are enforcement related: domestic abuse and drugs/substance abuse. Because this is such a complex problem, there are many challenges such as a lack affordable housing and space in shelters, poor communication, cuts in social services and laws and court rulings that tie the hands of government. Since the police are available 24/7/365 they become the "default provider".

There are two types of homelessness:

- Episodic homelessness, which is temporary due to job loss or persistent poverty. These people can be helped, but it would be better and easier if we prevented them from becoming homeless in the first place via funding initiatives.
- Chronically homeless, which is hard to solve. Homelessness is a way of life for these people, often due to mentally illness, be drug/alcohol addiction, lack of financial resources or that they like the way they live.

To end this, we need to work together, for NSB law enforcement cannot "arrest our way out of the problem". Chief. Coffin thinks organizations like the Homeless Outreach Team, which began in February, where police, working with case managers, can act as advocates for the homeless and bridge social services do work. Defunding the police to put money into places that can help these people is the way to go.

Next, Victoria Fahlbery, gave an overview of the early successes at The First Step Shelter which opened December 16, 2019. Her presentation was made to the Commissioners with an invitation for the City (like other Volusia County cities) to participate.

Ms. Fahlbery stressed that they are not enablers but are committed to helping the homeless transition out of homelessness. They help coordinate the efforts to provide:

- Case Management
- Health Care Services (via Medicare, Medicaid or regular insurance)
- Behavioral Health (routine and crisis-based) services
- Life Skills (dealing with change, daily life experiences, feelings, relationships)
- Employment
- Housing

They are also in contract with health and security organizations and community organizations. Residents are referred by social services/churches, law enforcement, and hospitals. The referral process is in-depth and thorough as law enforcement is involved. The person must be at least 18 years of age, a Volusia County resident, have no open warrants, not a sexual predator/offender, never Baker-acted or have medical issues, and must be ambulatory. Currently, the shelter has 45 spaces with 24 safe zone areas but will increase to 100 spaces with 24 safe zones. The cost of incarcerating a homeless person in jail is \$31,755 annually compared to \$19,317/year at the 1<sup>st</sup> Step Shelter.

Attorney Michael Kahn has drafted a panhandling ordinance for many Florida cities (Daytona Beach is closest). He warned that panhandling will not cure homelessness, for not all panhandlers are homeless, but ordinances do help with both problems. He also states that panhandling is protected by the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment, so it is tricky to write an ordinance that will not be challenged. The ordinance does not ban panhandling, nor does it mention homelessness, but it regulates panhandling by time and place. He crafts each ordinance to address each community. An ordinance in NSB would directly address the historic and commercial areas.

Commissioner Hartman felt we should concentrate on the episodic homeless with faith-based organizations and the community working together, especially the Housing Authority. But he also wondered whom we should we really address, panhandlers or the homeless?

Commissioner McGuirk felt that we need resources and money, but too, cannot look at this holistically as we need to drill down asking HOW did we get here? And what do we do with the 40% who are mentally ill?

Commissioner Sachs felt we were failing the homeless, but they feel safe here; however, how do we stop them from crime and vagrancy? He liked the First Step Shelter but had some reservations besides it being far away.

Commissioner Kolody felt we need to help those who haven't made homelessness a choice and felt First Step had its fingers on the pulse of this problem.

All agreed that the issue is complex, but we need to help those who want to be helped even though it will take time, resources, and money.