

Downtown Street Outreach Task Force Minutes from the November 10, 2010 meeting

Members present: Ray Detter, Brian Durrance, Maggie Ladd, Charles Coleman, Peter Ludt, Paul Sher, Maura Thomson, Sabra Briere, Mary Jo Callan, Doug Martelle (representing the AAPolice)

Members absent:, Mary Campbell, Susan Pollay

Guests present: Leslie Stambaugh, Daniel Chae (Office of Community Development), Deb Pipans (PORT), Chris Tabaczka (Michigan Theatre), Shannon Ellis (Home of New Vision), Colleen O'Brien (Ozone House)

Members of the committee and guests briefly introduced themselves and identified the groups and organizations they represented.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved with minor corrections. Leslie Stambaugh pointed out that she offered to help conduct a survey, not do one by herself. Doug Martelle (dmartelle@a2gov.org) asked to be added to the distribution list, to ensure he gets meeting notices.

Outreach Strategies of various organizations

Deb Pipans from Project OutReach Team (PORT) began the discussion by describing the services available through PORT. Their focus is people who need mental health care but who are not receiving it. They subscribe to the housing first model; get them housing, then care. The team members go to St. Andrews' breakfast service, the tent communities and other areas that attract the homeless, and work with those who need services. They have a good success rate, and many have received housing in the last seven (7) years. Merchants in Ann Arbor have become familiar with PORT and call if they believe there's someone who needs their services. They work closely with the Ann Arbor police Department to help keep those in need of mental health care both off the street and out of jail.

75% of those with substance abuse problems have mental health problems.

The SOAR programs helps PORT and other organizations get services for clients quickly, although providing the necessary documentation is still difficult. The problems of the mentally ill/substance abuser are more visible than they used to be, as there is less of a family safety net. Resources of families are stretched too thin in many cases, and more people end up on the streets as a result. While some people do come to the Ann Arbor area from other parts of Michigan looking for services, the best result is to get them closer to their homes, where they know others and have a natural support system. PORT, Delonis and other organizations help do this.

Charles Coleman commented that panhandlers aren't homeless. Panhandlers see their job as panhandling; there are instructions on the internet on how to panhandle, and "crispy punks" – middle class kids who don't want to work – have seen panhandling as a 'lifestyle choice'.

Shannon Ellis from Home of New Vision pointed out the New Vision works with the homeless or precariously housed drug and substance abuser. They also subscribe to the housing first model; helping people find housing, then providing services. Long term engagement is needed in order to break down resistance to treatment for substance abuse. The Engagement Center in Ypsilanti is available to help people sober up prior to treatment; the Ann Arbor police and service providers often help get people to the Engagement Center rather than taking them to the

Emergency Room. This alternative to conventional medical treatment has only eight (8) beds, and is often full in the winter. To access the Engagement Center, merchants and others would need to go through the police or an outreach program like Home of New Vision.

Ms. Ellis said that prison release is contributing to panhandling, as there are barriers to both employment and housing for former felons.

Sabra Briere reminded everyone that there was consensus about panhandling. Panhandling is not about being homeless. She asked about services being provided to panhandlers and the implications panhandling brings to demands for each organization's services.

Colleen O'Brien of Ozone House described an economic reality that included fewer social supports, and those more tenuous for teens. Teens used to 'couch surf' at friends' houses more; now their friends' parents cannot afford to let them stay. Ozone House fields more requests for food, housing, and even just the bathroom. Living on the street isn't always a 'choice', she pointed out. Ozone doesn't see folks with choices.

Mary Jo Callan from the Office of Community Development interjected that Ann Arbor will always have relative wealth. There need to be options for merchants, students and permanent residents to make certain that options are available and known. It's important to be realistic about available resources.

Enforcement and education

Peter Ludt encouraged increased educational outreach. The opportunity and financial resources necessary to hire additional police to routinely patrol downtown just won't be available in the next few years. The best way to tackle panhandling is to focus on educating the public that panhandling is not about being homeless, but usually about substance abuse. There are services available in the community to help with substance abuse problems and finding people meals and housing; that message needs to be told over and over to merchants, students, residents and the people on the street.

The committee discussed this educational process, and suggested that there should be a protocol established, including the creation of a standing committee, so the City doesn't have to reinvent things every few years.

Doug Martelle provided a copy of a three-fold brochure from 2003 that contained the Solicitation ordinance, a list of Community Resources and services, and some frequently called City numbers and services. He also brought copies of the loitering ordinance, for those who had not recently read it.

Next Steps:

Mary Jo Callan offered to draft language for a prototype (and very simple) card that could be distributed to merchants, residents, students, and police.

A representative from the University of Michigan and the VA Hospital will attend the December 1st meeting. .

New Idea

Old parking meter heads could be repainted and mounted downtown; people could put their spare change in these meters as a way to collect for services for the homeless and panhandlers. Sabra agreed to contact Susan Pollay to see if any meter heads were available.

Next Meeting

Agenda:

Discussion will focus on outreach to veterans and students.

Old business: draft hand out card (to review)

New business: Maura Thomson met with AnnArbor.com to discuss outreach

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30 pm, Wednesday, December 1, 3rd Floor Conference Room.

Subsequent meeting: 3:30 pm, Wednesday, December 15, 4th Floor Conference Room

(Feel free to bring something festive to share on the 15th!)