

**Metropolitan Homelessness Commission Task Force Committee on Governance**  
**Monday, October 24, 3 pm**  
**Minutes**

**Present:** Freddie O’Connell (task force co-chair), Kirby Davis (task force co-chair), Liz Allen Fey (Homelessness Commission chair), Jim Harbison (MDHA executive Director), Renee Pratt (MSS executive director)

**Staff:** Will Connelly, Judith Tackett, Josh Lee (Metro Legal)

**Absent:** Steven Samra, Erik Cole

**Focus Strategy Recommendation 1, which was adopted by the Homelessness Commission on July 8, 2016, reads as follows:**

*Establish New Unified Governance and Decision-Making Structure and Entity*

*“The single most important initial step for Nashville is for the community leadership to come together and identify or create a single structure and lead entity that will be tasked with moving forward in transforming the current collection of programs into a Housing Crisis Resolution System.” – Focus Strategies*

**Minutes**

**Understanding the goal**

Freddie O’Connell read the goal, “To present a set of needed actions to the Commission on how we move ahead with the recommendations for a governance structure in the Focus Strategies report.”

Liz Allen Fey clarified during the meeting that the Commission already adopted the recommendation of moving to a unified governance structure. Thus, this task force is charged with figuring out how that should be done.

**Framing the work**

- **Introductions – why you said yes?**

Mr. O’Connell asked each person around the table to answer this question.

Mr. O’Connell said he has been a volunteer and advocate in homelessness going back to high school. He specifically wanted to be a Council representative on the Commission to learn more about the issues of homelessness. He said he believed the city can do better. Further, he wanted to honor all the work that has come before and wanted to help understand why Focus Strategies came to make this governance recommendation. Mr. O’Connell said he wanted to help move the city forward in its response to homelessness.

Liz Allen Fey said the governance issue was important because when we look at where we are, and Focus Strategy’s comments are around Housing First, we need to figure out how we, as a city, get people into housing. “I don’t think we have an organized way of doing that.” Ms. Fey also talked about the urgency around the issue, an urgency that the Mayor sees. She said the

question was what is acceptable to us in our community and how do we care for people who struggle with homelessness.

Mr. O'Connell said in his opinion there were 3 options in regard to the Focus Strategies report: 1. Take a pass and fail and acknowledge the failure; 2. Defend the status quo, say we're sorry, we got your recommendation, but ignore it; and 3. We got your recommendation and are taking a serious look at it.

Renee Pratt said the Homelessness Commission was created under MSS, then moved to MDHA, then moved back. She said it was the appropriate time to work on the governance question. She said the question was past due and she applauded having a report that provided a starting point for the discussions and outlined potential next steps. She said Social Services wants to support the Homelessness Commission wherever it is housed since MSS and the Homelessness Commission share the same customer base.

Kirby Davis said he agreed to serving on this task force because of his history with the CoC. He helped the CoC draft their initial by-laws and the unified structure issue came up back then already. He felt having that background was why he can contribute to the discussion.

Jim Harbison said MDHA has a huge stake in this work by federal law. He said he was happy to be here and open to any ideas. The CoC was governed by the HEARTH Act. MDHA serves as the CoC lead. Mr. Harbison said unless we want to take on Congress, you're going to have some constraints from HUD. I'm here to help with what we can.

Will Connelly said he was excited about Focus Strategies coming in and taking a look at what Nashville is up to. They were funded by the Commission, by MDHA and the Frist Foundation. We wanted their recommendation. They were definitely bold in their recommendation and Mr. Connelly indicated that boldness and urgency that were expressed in the report have made people question the report. Mr. Connelly said he saw the recommendation as a path to functional zero. He also acknowledged that this past few months he has been frustrated by the lack of movement in the governance conversation. But he was really happy that we are finally talking about it. He said he wants to have an open mind. He said he thought a lot of Focus Strategies, but in the end for him it was all about getting people into housing as quickly as possible. "It's all about building a high performing system."

Judy Tackett was present as staff and taking notes. She spoke about the role of the Commission and that this conversation is about that. In her mind, there is a need to serve people on a daily basis. However, when looking at the function of the Homelessness Commission, she believes it should all be about housing people and implementing solutions to homelessness and that should be the Commission's role and function.

Josh Lee said he was here to help and try to figure out from a Metro Legal perspective what process forms would be affected by any decision. He said he was willing to learn and was looking forward to making a unified governance structure happen.

- **What questions do we have going into this task force?**

Mr. O’Connell’s main question was about where the Commission should be housed.

Mr. Harbison said he didn’t know if MDHA had the local overview of implementing federal statutes in Nashville. His question was what is required for the CoC? He wondered what the baseline commitment was to follow through on the federal level. He further said that he didn’t know who was actually on the CoC roster and what roles they served in. Mr. Harbison said that MDHA has been participating in talks about workforce and envisioning process, but it hasn’t talked as much about its own capacity of housing the homeless. “It’d like more insight into that.”

Mr. Harbison further said that years ago he participated in leadership training through My Leadership Academy and thinking through the responsibilities, this could be a gigantic mission. He said that MSS has its own commission and then there is the Homelessness Commission. “As an agency, how does MSS fit into the overall approach to homelessness? How does the budget align with that?”

Reading the recommendation, Mr. Harbison said, with the federal requirements around the CoC, the Homelessness Commission, and Social Services, getting to a single entity seems like a daunting mission.

Mr. Harbison continued that the biggest challenge was that the CoC does not provide a top-down approach. He spoke about the attempt of MDHA a couple years ago to get designated as a Unified Funding Agency (UFA). That did not happen. MDHA is the designated CoC Lead agency. Some of this involves exclusively administrative tasks because MDHA has the computer system to handle those federal funds. “We do not control these funds, we just move them through,” Mr. Harbison said. “I think we need to let HUD TA (The Cloudburst Group) to come in, let them take a look at the CoC, at the funding stream, and do a deep dive.”

Liz Allen Fey said discussions get hung up on the role of the CoC. She believes that is a part of the conversation but not all of it and that the governance task force can examine what a unified system could look like and then consider a path to move forward toward that goal.

Will Connelly said he was aware of the UFA conversations, which he said was a different process than the unified governance recommendation that Focus Strategies is talking about. He said Focus Strategies was talking about the Commission’s 22-member body and the CoC governance body. He explained that the CoC is a local planning body that coordinates federal housing and services funding for homeless individuals and families. “So when I look at it at face value, we have two bodies that are trying to do the same thing.” The three duties of the CoC are administrative, HMIS, and CoC planning. All that is not a top-down approach. “And I don’t think we’re looking at a top down approach. I think we would fail.” He said Focus Strategies did not look at a contract question like a Unified Funding Agency approach. Mr. Connelly said this recommendation was about dissolving one governing body and giving the CoC full membership the opportunity to vote to make the Homelessness the governing body of the CoC.

Josh Lee explained that there was the CoC membership and the CoC governing body. The CoC are everyone who deals with homelessness in a geographic area (in this instance Davidson County). Some of these stakeholders receive funding through the CoC, but not all do. Then you have a governing board that is required by federal regulation. The full membership delegates clear powers to the governing board in its by-laws. So the question becomes, can the Homelessness Commission serve as that governing board?

Freddie O'Connell asked, "Can they?"

Josh Lee said that if the CoC general membership wants that, yes – as a general concept it appears that it could happen. But he said some questions that needed to be answered include looking at the set-up of the Homelessness Commission as the board of another entity.

Ms. Fey said the CoC could always vote to have a different CoC lead.

Further questions focused on the details of how the CoC functions and these questions will need to be answered further. They include: Who makes up the membership of the CoC? What currently defines that membership? Who is on the governing board? How many federal dollars are exactly received and have been received in past years through the CoC?

Further discussion honed in on how Nashville as a community performs from the CoC perspective and from the Homelessness Commission perspective. The general tone was that we are not a high performing community from either perspective. In comparison to other CoCs in the nation, Nashville does not perform well on a systems level. And the Commission does not have any authority, except to oversee the work of the director. Mr. O'Connell said he could understand why Focus Strategies or anyone else looking at our community's structure questions how we can have a meaningful approach to tackling homelessness.

- **What are our beliefs about how Nashville should approach homelessness?**

The group discussed their beliefs and ended up with the following four beliefs they all agree with:

1. Everyone has an opportunity to housing.
2. Services need to be aligned and moving people toward housing.
3. Leadership should be operating out of best practices.
4. Decisions need to be data-driven.

- **How do Focus Strategies recommendations sync with these beliefs?**

The group did not have a long discussion around this question, but agreed that the five beliefs they listed align with the Focus Strategies recommendations. In addition, these five beliefs, Liz Allen Fey said, are also aligned with the Commission's set of beliefs (which are: 1) housing focused; 2) person centered; 3) data driven; 4) effective use of resources).

- **Which of the recommendations do we all agree with?**

Freddie O'Connell moved to the next question, but turned it around asking, whether there were any specific implementation steps in the Focus Strategies report that someone does specifically not agree with.

Mr. Harbison had issues with the second recommendation, going back to his point of waiting for HUD TA to get more input.

Mr. O'Connell asked about implementation step one, which reads, "Transition homeless system planning and policy setting functions from MDHA to MHC."

Will Connelly said #1 to him read that the planning efforts to end homelessness should be at the Homelessness Commission. He said to him that meant the CoC lead should move from MDHA to the Commission. He said other CoCs have nonprofits, government agencies, homeless coalitions who fill the roles of CoC lead. For example, Denver has a nonprofit that serves as the CoC lead. In Philadelphia a government agency runs the CoC, which is not their PHA.

Jim Harbison pointed out that Nashville was unique. He talked about the MDHA financial system that existed to meet HUD/federal compliance.

Liz Allen Fey asked whether we think that the governance of the local homeless system was clunky? Mr. Harbison said it was horrible, referring to the dual governance approach we currently have around addressing homelessness.

Most around the table spoke up that the current approach to governance (or lack of a unified governance structure) does not work. The Homelessness Commission is not empowered to do its job effectively.

Liz Allen Fey said the question becomes, "If we need to align the system then how do we do that? Let's say that we get another way of funding in that we need to align with homelessness. How do we make sure that we all move in the same direction?"

Discussion shifted to the data collection system, the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Mr. O'Connell said it would be good to have a few of the members get an opportunity to review the overall state of HMIS. He said it would include understanding what HMIS should be doing and what our local system is capable of doing.

The second item of importance would be to get a timeline on when HUD TA is coming to Nashville and see if they can attend a governance task force meeting or how to connect with them.

### **Next steps:**

The task force decided to present the belief statements that Liz captured to the full Commission and get their input.

Jim Harbison said he would reach out to HUD and ask them for a schedule for the TA.

Will Connelly said he definitely thinks that HUD TA will help this discussion, but he was hoping that the group could clarify where it stands, so that when HUD gets here, some decisions were made. "I think we're putting a lot on HUD TA." Mr. Connelly said it may be easier to approach

HUD TA with questions around improving a community's governance charter rather than transforming an entire governance system. That's a very complicated task. They're not going to necessarily make the decision for us.

Mr. O'Connell said it was not the HUD TA's role to make that decision for Nashville.

Further discussion focused that this conversation should not happen in isolation. Liz Allen Fey proposed to invite a few representatives from the CoC governance committee to educate task force members and have a conversation about where the alignment points are while TA is coming in. Jim Harbison pointed out that in the end it's a CoC decision to appoint a CoC lead organization.

Josh Lee said that what this task force recommends will go before the Commission. He said the Commission then needed to understand that whatever their recommendation is, it will be subject to the vote of the CoC membership. With that in mind, Mr. Lee said the questions for this task force were, does it make sense for the Homelessness Commission to be the CoC governance committee? Or what any other role would make sense for the Homelessness Commission to take? But, he pointed out that this task force has not made any recommendation yet.

The job of this group is to figure out *how* to unify governance, not whether to create a unified governance structure. The recommendation to establish a new unified governance and decision-making structure ... was already adopted by the Homelessness Commission. The task force was created to figure out how to do that.

Liz Allen Fey listed a series of questions that needed to be answered such as: Where does HMIS sit? If there are new funding sources, where do they start to come into? What is the value of the Homelessness Commission?

Other questions that were raised included: Can this [the Homelessness Commission] spin off into a nonprofit? What resources does the Homelessness Commission control?

Ms. Fey recommended that at the next meeting, this group figures out the tasks that need to happen to create a unified system. She said no one was talking about creating a separate entity. Renee Pratt said in light of these questions it would be helpful for Will Connelly to prepare a report on some of the questions that were raised.

Mr. O'Connell said it would also be helpful for the task force to come up with a timeline at the next meeting.

**Next meeting:**

**Monday, Nov. 7, 3 p.m., in the MDHA Board Room, 701 South 6<sup>th</sup> Street, 37206.**

Meeting was adjourned at 5:05 pm

# Appendix A

Governance Recommendation and Implementation Steps from Focus Strategies  
October 10, 2016

## Recommendation

- Establish New Unified Governance and Decision-Making Structure and Entity  
“The single most important initial step for Nashville is for the community leadership to come together and identify or create a single structure and lead entity that will be tasked with moving forward in transforming the current collection of programs into a Housing Crisis Resolution System.” – Focus Strategies

Key features of this new structure should include:

- a. Involvement of high-level community leadership.
- b. Strong alignment of local funders around a common set of goals.
- c. Ability to oversee a system planning process to design a Housing Crisis Resolution System.
- d. Authority to set policy and implement identified strategies to end homelessness.
- e. Data gathering and analysis capabilities.

## Recommended Implementation Steps (to Create New Governance Structure and Lead Entity)

1. Transition homeless system planning and policy setting functions from MDHA to MHC
2. Amend MHC Ordinance/Dissolve CoC Board: “The CoC Regulations require that there is a general CoC membership body, which is open to all interested agencies and individuals by invitation. There is also a Governing Board that acts on behalf of the membership and is selected based on a written process that must be updated every five years. We would propose that the MHC becomes the CoC Governing Board, and also convener of the larger CoC membership group which would be open to all interested participants. Once the Commission is named the CoC Board, the existing “Gaps Group” that serves as the CoC Board should be dissolved.
3. Revisit MHC Composition: “...the City should rethink and re-structure how seats are allocated with the goal of maximizing the Commission’s ability to make decisions, align funding, and drive implementation of identified strategies to reduce homelessness – in other words, it needs to be a group that is less advisory and more action-oriented.”
4. Create New Subcommittees/Workgroups.
5. Expand MHC Staff Roles: “The City needs to redefine roles and create new position descriptions for MHC staff, with clear articulation of their function as point person(s) for development and implementation of homeless system policy.”
6. Explore Limited Funding Shifts: “In the short term, MDHA would continue to manage CoC, ESG, and other federal sources providing funding for homeless activities, but priority setting for use of these funds would shift to the Commission. One exception might be the CoC Planning funds, which could potentially shift over to the Commission in 2016.”
7. Phase Two (2017-2018): Federal, State and Local Funding for Homeless Activities Transitions to MHC or New “Department of Homeless Solutions.”

