



**COLUMBIA TASK FORCE TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS MEETING
AGENDA
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 29, 2022**

The Columbia Task Force to Prevent and End Homelessness will conduct a meeting on Wednesday, June 29, 2022 at 4:00 p.m. at the Busby Street Community Center, 1735 Busby Street, Columbia, SC 29203. Members of the public may view the meeting online at www.columbiasc.gov. For questions regarding the meeting, please contact the City Clerk at (803)545-3045 or cityclerk@columbiasc.gov.

The Honorable Aditi Bussells, Chair
The Honorable William Brennan, District III ▪ The Honorable Edward H. McDowell, Jr., District II

Prior to entering the meeting please turn all electronic communication devices to the silent, vibrate or off position. All presenters are asked to speak directly into the microphone for recording purposes.

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

INVOCATION

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approval of the May 18, 2022 Task Force Meeting Minutes - The Honorable Aditi Bussells

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

2. Welcome - The Honorable Aditi Bussells and The Honorable Edward H. McDowell
3. Task Force Goals and Outcomes - The Honorable Aditi Bussells
4. Review of Reading Materials - The Honorable Aditi Bussells
5. Social Service Network Catalogue Presentation - Mr. Treacy Dobbins, Inspire Real Change
6. Task Force Discussion
7. Next Steps and Closing - The Honorable Edward H. McDowell, Jr

ADJOURNMENT



**COLUMBIA TASK FORCE TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS
MEETING MINUTES - WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 2022**

The Columbia Task Force to Prevent and End Homelessness conducted a meeting on Tuesday, May 18, 2022 at the Busby Street Community Center, 1735 Busby Street, Columbia, SC 29203. The Honorable Aditi Bussells, Chair called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. and the following members were present:

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Aditi Bussells	Chair	Present
Edward H. McDowell, Jr.	Council Member	Present
Will Brennan	Council Member	Present
Skip Holbrook	Columbia Police Chief	Present
Matt Kennell	City Center Partnership	Present
Steve Cook	Five Points Association	Present
George Whitehead	Department of Probations, Pardon, and Parole	Present
Allison Farrell	SC Department of Mental Health	Present
John Wilkerson	Downtown Coalition of Neighborhoods	Present
Brett Kloos	University of South Carolina	Present
Amy McCulloch	Probate Court Judge	Absent
Matthew Brock	Associate Probate Judge	Present
Jean Burns	Magistrate Court Judge	Absent
Treacy Dobbins	Inspire Real Change	Present
Kieley Sutton	Assistant Public Defender	Present
Antonio Flores, Jr.	Wal-Mart Market Manager	Present

PRESENTATIONS

1. Welcome and Introductions - The Honorable Aditi Bussells - *Received as information.*

Councilor Bussells introduced the task force and discussed some of the concerns that the City would like to tackle with the formation of the task force. This diverse group of advocates and business owners speaks to the complexities of people experiencing homelessness. The City is excited to have these voices at the table to help us in developing solutions. Today, we will set the foundation to understand the state of homelessness. We will hear from City staff on ways we have invested in homelessness services and other initiatives regarding mental health and public safety.



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2. Overview and History of the Taskforce - The Honorable Aditi Bussells - *Received as information.*

Councilor Bussells said this task force was established on February 15, 2022 at the request of the mayor in response to the growing number of homeless, a trend that can be seen all across the country. Columbia is known to be a compassionate city. We have many services available to those experiencing homelessness. Tackling this issue in a way that is compassionate but again addresses the multi-faceted issue of homelessness is something this task force will be dedicated to over the next six months. This is a temporary task force with the goal of releasing a report with concrete strategies that we can implement with our partners both in the short-term and in the long-term. According to the 2020 South Carolina State of Homelessness Report, Richland County has the second highest rate of homelessness in South Carolina. There has also been an increase in criminal activity and drug related offenses associated with people that are experiencing homelessness. There is not a direct correlation between homelessness and crime, but we do know that there is an indirect correlation that stems from things like poverty and drug addictions. The City of Columbia has at least 14 providers assisting populations facing homelessness in Richland County and Lexington County. We may not have a real grasp of the scope of services, the number of services, and the types of providers available in South Carolina. We have commissioned a study with Inspire Real Change to understand the state of our providers and to catalogue services.

Councilor Brennan said we are here to figure out the root cause of homelessness in the City. We need to find approaches to really help the individuals as best as we can.

Councilor McDowell asked if it is about the data or about human lives. We have to take the data and turn it into actual resources. The homeless are always going to be with us. How do we take what we are doing here today and turn it into a critical balance to give us ideas that will help our brothers and sisters?

3. Overview of Current Policy Efforts - Ms. Teresa Knox, Esq., City Attorney - *Received as information.*

Ms. Teresa Knox, Esq., City Attorney said our ordinances are not focused on the prevention of homelessness. These ordinances are ordinances that most cities have. These include ordinances on begging, prohibited acts in City facilities, unlawful urination and defecation, and urban camping. Over the years, everyone has wanted us to toughen these ordinances up. We have to be careful because the U.S. Supreme Court and Federal Courts have looked at these issues because they deal with constitutional rights. Mainly the Eighth Amendment and First Amendment. The Eighth



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Amendment deals with cruel and unusual punishment. Courts have held that fining or arresting the homeless for sleeping outdoors amounts to an Eighth Amendment violation. There are caveats to that like safety issues and time and place issues. The First Amendment has to do with asking for food and falls under the right of free speech. There are caveats for that, too. You cannot be aggressively begging. Cities have tried to create buffer zones like restricting their downtown areas but you can't do that. What we have on the books is constitutionally okay. We have to make sure we stay that way.

4. Public Safety and Homelessness Initiatives - Mr. William "Skip" Holbrook, Columbia Police Chief - *Received as information.*

Mr. William "Skip" Holbrook, Columbia Police Chief said our expectations are professionalism, policing with respect and compassion, and constitutional policing. We are in a challenging time. Being in a southern city, we have seen consistent growth of our homeless population over the last five years. Last year, we made 366 arrests. I would argue that arrests are failures in this situation. Most of these individuals are in some type of distress, mental health or substance abuse. Most services are Monday through Friday during business hours. This causes police to often needed to solve the problem. Oftentimes, jail is not the best place for them but those are our options. The 366 arrests are what we consider quality of life arrests. Our officers over the past winter made 172 inclement weather transports. This is afterhours when there is no available transportation. CPD has taken measures to consolidate our transport times; however, it still causes a police officer to focus on transporting and not on police functions. Officers are tasked with completing zone watch requests each shift. These include businesses, cemeteries, parks, and parking garages that have complaints or patterns of disruptive behavior perpetrated by the homeless. With the help of Council, we have established the Pathways Unit (TPU), which provides an opportunity to reach individuals that may have mental illness perpetuating their homeless status. We have a mental health clinician embedded with the department. TPU reaches out to community stakeholders and groups to coordinate and strengthen the focus of actions when addressing a common cause by attending community meetings, building relationships of support with non-profit organizations, and initiating involvement in existing outreach initiatives. We have seen tremendous success and we are excited to add four additional clinicians. Parks are an area of focus for us and I am anxious to hear suggestions from this task force on how we can strike a balance. I hope that we have action items on how we can transition law enforcement from being the tool for solving our homeless problems so we can better focus on life safety issues.



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5. Current City of Columbia Funding for Homelessness Services - Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget, Program Management and Grants Director - *Received as information.*

Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget, Program Management and Grants Director said the City has four homeless services contracts. The contracts vary between three providers. The contract with United Way is for the operation of the city's Inclement Weather Center (IWC). The IWC has been open since 2014. Prior to the city operating the shelter, it was a volunteer led service when certain weather conditions were met. Currently, the IWC is operated from November 1st through March 31st. They still provide outreach services throughout the year. Transitions provides the actual operations of the IWC. There are two facilities: one for men and one for women. Transportation is provided to the shelter. The Salvation Army provides meals at night and in the morning. This is the largest part of the city's funding. The City's allocations for homeless services are around \$1 million a year from our general fund. We have a smaller contract with United Way for service coordination. The homeless service coordinator focuses on the coordination of meal share programs. It has been successful in redirecting folks who have generous ideas and have a desire to help the less fortunate. They also help coordinate services and outreach for the repeat offenders that are often reengaging with the police. This funding also goes towards the Homeless Management Information System, a nationwide management system where United Way is the point of contact for South Carolina. We also have a contract with USC Supportive Housing. That is a national model providing supportive housing services for chronic and hard to place individuals. The City funds the supportive services of the contract and the Housing Authority provides the housing component of the program. The city also funds the Midlands Housing Alliance, which is Transitions. The funding supports security services. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides allocations from the Community Development Block Grant, which is an entitlement, grant that cities receive across the country to address areas of interest to HUD. In the current fiscal year, we have funded Homeless No More in the amount of \$40,000 and Mental Illness Recovery Center, Inc. (MIRCI) in the amount of \$40,000. The City also receives funding from HUD for the HOME Program to assist with affordable housing and housing services and Housing of Persons With Aids (HOPWA). The funding is utilized to help prevent homelessness for that specific population.

Councilor Bussells said council has allocated some of the American Rescue Plan funding towards non-congregate housing. That was recognized as a need from our homeless service providers. We are looking forward to making this investment and continuing to provide housing. Many different issues that play into homelessness: housing, access to opportunities, access to healthy food, and others. It is important for us to recognize that while the City is the leader, this is something that we need other municipalities and state government to help us in solving as well.



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6. Strategies from other local governments - The Honorable Aditi Bussells - *Deferred*

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

Mr. Treacy Dobbins, Inspire Real Change said we did a research project last year in Columbia. We worked with 30 individuals that were currently experiencing homelessness. Out of the 30, we had 29 identify some form of health care issue to include physical, behavioral, or addiction. Out of the 29, 22 identified emotional trauma concerns. Both of those numbers are high and we found that there were many needs that were not being addressed. When we started the project, we were focusing on recidivism. Working with this population since 2015, I saw how people would enter into housing programs but months later, they would end back up on the streets. We quickly shifted into a bigger scope. When we talk about cost and shelters, out of the 28 individuals that have stayed at a shelter the average is 173 nights per person. We averaged the cost to be \$5,017 per individual for shelter cost. When we looked at the percentage of individuals that left the shelter as an unsuccessful outcome, we realized that the majority of those exited by choice. About 70% said their needs were not being met. We have individuals with behavior issues, addiction issues, and physical issues and we have to identify their needs. Individuals need a quality assessment to understand the full picture of their needs and from that integrate it into a service. With our partnership with the City, we are looking at a service provider platform both internal and external. This will be something where we can plug in these resources and services because currently we do not have a collaboration effort or coordinated entry process. This will connect everything together. There will be an external source that you can plug into to get the individual connected with the right resources. The thing I like is the accountability component. Someone gets an assessment based on their needs. They are directed to a service and the clock starts when that person is assigned to a service. The person has to be contacted and at that point either their needs are filled or they are redirected to someone who can. You will have an assessment, referral, case management, accountability, and a public connection component to it as well.

Councilor Bussells said I want to challenge us to think about what we can do in the short term. A lot of these strategies to make a systemic change are going to be long term and things we all have to invest in. What can we do to address the issues we are experiencing right now?



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7. Reflections - The Honorable Edward H. McDowell, Jr. and The Honorable Will Brennan
- *Received as information.*

Councilor Brennan said thank you all. This is a wonderful way to get to know each other and the caring community and professionals. Everybody in the room right now has a higher calling for being here. You are very compassionate, you care about the citizens of our wonderful city, and I thank you for that. I look forward to the next month and getting to know your knowledge to help us understand the gaps in the services. I believe that the state has a big role to play in the ultimate solution.

Councilor McDowell said we can't play the blame game. This is not the Police Department's sole responsibility. This needs to be a collaborative effort. Nothing is going to get done until the whole community addresses our brothers and sisters. This is just the beginning of what needs to take place in these next six months. We have a gap in services. Every community has to play a part as we look at this critical issue in our city. I am appreciative of those who spoke up. Thank you Dr. Bussells for bringing us together.

8. Closing Remarks - The Honorable Aditi Bussells - *Received as information.*

Councilor Bussells said I recently joined the Affordable Housing Task Force in hopes of both committees working together to build some holistic solutions to address the problem. You will be receiving our future task force meetings and we will be having a meeting with providers that have been funded by the city.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Erika D. Moore Hammond, CMC
City Clerk

“What should we do about the homeless problem in the City of Columbia?”

That is the question that everyone is asking. And it seems like everyone also has an opinion on how to solve the problem. And we agree; it is a problem. Private downtown businesses say it is impacting their ability to conduct business. Local downtown neighborhoods say their quality of life is suffering because of the homeless traffic and destruction of property. Non-profit agencies are saying their numbers have increased. Downtown churches say their services and programs are being negatively affected, but at the same time they want a compassionate and Christian solution to the problem. Government agencies are asked to provide more with less available resources. So what should we do?

In October 2012, former City Manager Steve Gantt, with direction from Columbia City Council, asked David Parker, former staff member at USC School of Medicine, to bring together a group of people in Columbia to ask this very simple but complicated question. Dr. Parker asked a diverse group of people to include representatives from government, non-profits, religious congregations, police, and neighborhood representatives to come together to talk about the problems affecting the homeless. The group decided a three prong approach: 1. Determine the issues, 2. Research and discuss each issue, and 3. Develop recommendations in regards to the future direction for the community. **The goal was to reduce the impact of homelessness on all citizens in the City of Columbia and to objectively look at the money the City of Columbia was currently spending on homeless issues.**

At the first meeting of this experienced and involved group of people, there was a conclusion that all of the questions and problems at this particular time revolved around four major areas:

1. Winter Shelter
2. Calhoun Street Corridor
3. Meals and Feeding of the Homeless
4. Sanitation

A preliminary report was provided to City Council on February 15, 2013. Each of the committees met extensively and then brought their ideas and solutions back to the large group. What follows this introduction is the summary of what we have determined is Phase I of this Committee’s progress.

Last month in the State newspaper, the new retailer on Main Street, Mast General, said the homeless are a problem and an obstacle to doing business in Columbia. **THE TIME IS NOW TO TAKE ACTION** and Council must take the lead. We are giving you the beginning of the plan. We are not saying this will be a definitive solution and the homeless will go away. We are also not saying build more shelters and create more programs with a ten year goal. The eighteen of us are collectively saying let’s do these things. We want to keep working on this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to City of Columbia Council. We will look to you for guidance.

The City of Columbia Homeless Committee

City of Columbia Homeless Committee

Neighborhood Representatives

Ellen Cooper – Cottontown Neighborhood Association

Elizabeth Mills – Historic Mills Neighborhood Association

Rick Rowe – Arsenal Hill Neighborhood Association

Non-Profit Organizations

Mary Trivisonno – Catholic Charities

Jeremy Laughhead – Oliver Gospel Mission

Major Roger Coulson – Salvation Army

Craig Currey - Transitions

Jennifer Moore – United Way of the Midlands

Downtown Business

Lee Mashburn – Mashburn Constructions

Matt Kennell – City Center Partnership

Religious Organizations

Rev. Mary Anderson – Midlands Interfaith Council

William Diekman – Columbia Metro Baptist Association

Government Subdivisions

Tom Bolton – USC School of Medicine, Housing First Program

Nancy Stoudenmire – Columbia Housing Authority

City of Columbia

Steve Gant – former City Manager

Deborah Livingston – Community Development

Jeff Rainwater – Community Development

Interim Chief Reuben Santiago – Police Department

Winter Shelter Subcommittee

ISSUE: This subcommittee was tasked with developing a plan to assist the City of Columbia in having an exit strategy in their yearly operation, subcontracting, and oversight of the winter shelter. Although the efficiency of its operations has constantly improved from its inception at the current location, the Winter Shelter has been and continues to be an expensive operation to fund. This subcommittee examined the winter shelter through an analysis of the past several years and utilized that information to develop a three year downsizing plan while responsibly addressing the needs of the homeless in our community. This subcommittee promotes the idea that a large emergency shelter should not be a component in the overall solution of homelessness in Columbia. The following proposal was derived with consideration to the homeless, surrounding neighborhoods and businesses, as well as the City itself. It sought to find a compromise that would benefit all of the aforementioned parties.

DISCUSSION: Initially, this subcommittee examined problems associated with the winter shelter so it could make informed recommendations as to its future. The committee identified reoccurring issues such as increased foot traffic from the evening meal location to the van pickup site, trash accumulation while shelter guests wait on transportation, and increased personal items stored in parks, businesses, and neighborhoods. The subcommittee met multiple times, each one developing a more refined and educated vision for the winter shelter's future. In one such meeting held at the winter shelter, during a staff guided tour, subcommittee members learned that the shelter averaged 60 people less than its 240 person capacity. Knowing that the number of homeless individuals, at least that were staying at the winter shelter, was considerably down from previous years since the arrival of Transitions, the subcommittee decided to propose a plan for a gradual downsizing of the winter shelter that would provide a three - five year plan in which the City of Columbia would be left with a smaller, far less expensive, bare bones emergency winter shelter.

This subcommittee advocates for money saved to be "reinvested" back into homeless services to fund aftercare case managers. These case managers would monitor guests that leave the winter shelter for housing opportunities and ensure that barriers to maintaining housing are addressed, results are efficiently tracked, and recidivism is reduced. Two winter shelter case managers are already charged with taking people out of homelessness. Post placement case management can work together with the existing case managers to ensure that these people that are successfully transitioned to housing do not return to homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS :

Year One

1. Work with the fire marshal to incorporate an overflow shelter within the existing facility. Mats could accommodate the overflow guests, just as they do at MLK Park, but the change would eliminate the need for an offsite overflow shelter.
2. Serve a meal on site at the shelter. The Salvation Army would provide this service. This will eliminate the need for an evening meal at an outside location. The meal will be served for shelter guests only.
3. Allow guests to leave one bag at shelter. This would cut down on items stored in the community.
4. Change the transportation time to 5-7 p.m. Meal service starts at 7:30 p.m.. This approach is more considerate to the homeless who have to wait outside during cold weather.
5. Reduce the time that the shelter is open and save one month of operational cost. Instead of opening from Nov.1st-Mar. 31st, open from Nov. 15th to March 15th. *Potential for significant savings right away by cutting shelter operations by one month and a possible immediate funding source for aftercare case management*
5. Communicate next year's plan to the homeless staying at the shelter throughout the season.

Year Two

1. Analyze last year's changes during the off season and make minor adjustments as needed. Continue the previous year's changes that prove to be effective.
2. Remove 60 Men's Beds in Building A for regular use. Remove beds and convert to mats in that area. This area will only open when the temperature is at or below 36 degrees and when the shelter is at capacity. This will essentially become the new overflow shelter and prevent overflow at MLK Park if that change cannot be made in year one. The total number of regular use beds will change from 240 to 180 - (40 women and 140 men). The fire marshal should be contacted to adjust the fire code. The average number of guests, according to Winter Shelter Meetings and director report was been 180 people for the 2012-2013 season.
3. Communicate next year's plan to the homeless staying at the shelter throughout the season.

Year Three

1. Analyze last year's changes during the off season and make minor adjustments as needed. Continue the previous year's changes that prove to be effective.
2. Close Entire Building B for regular use. If overflow is needed, Building B can be used with mats on the floor. The new adjusted bed count utilizes 40 beds for women and 60 for men – all with beds. This step will reduce the need for staff and security and in turn save money. An entire building can be shut down except during an overflow situation. The additional space can also be used for onsite case management with privacy if necessary or additional storage for guest items.
3. Shorten the hours of pick up and drop off to one hour only. This will reduce total cost. Transporting less people in a shorter amount of time will reduce the time that people gather at the transit station.
4. Cut existing laundry service contracts. With a reduced need for laundry services, high volume vendors will no longer be needed. Examine the possibility of the Catholic Charities contracting with the winter shelter through Clean of Heart to provide a cheaper alternative for reduced volume laundry services on Tuesdays and Thursdays when their facility is normally not in operation.
5. Communicate next year's plan to the homeless staying at the shelter throughout the season.

Year Four

1. Remove all beds. Use mats on floor. Only Building A in regular use. Overflow as needed in building B.
2. Reduce total number of beds from 100 to 80. (30 women and 50 men).
3. Continue to service a low demand, bare bones, and true emergency shelter. At this time the City should determine need for continued use and if a fifth year plan if needed.

Additional Considerations

For this plan to work, the number of people staying at the shelter has to decrease. As the recent 2013 Point-In-Time Count indicated, achieving that end is not easy but it is this subcommittees' contention that with a virtual centralized intake system (MACH 2014 and 2-1-1 phone system integration), services and housing opportunities would be easier to access, which would expedite the process of taking someone out of homelessness. In addition, funding aftercare case managers with the savings would facilitate the downsizing approach because aftercare providers could help prevent reentry into homeless situations. Front end streamlining

and improved efficiency through centralized intake and post placement case management to reduce recidivism will reduce the number of people that stay at the winter shelter and make this plan possible.

Calhoun Street Subcommittee

ISSUE: The Task Force identified the “Calhoun Corridor” as a significant City issue. The Corridor, loosely defined as a block on either side of Calhoun Street (North and South of Street) and comprising a thoroughfare for homeless folks moving between Harden Street and the Elmwood Cemetery and river areas, is subject to numerous problems associated with homelessness. These issues include litter, loitering, public urination/defecation, sleeping in unauthorized areas, panhandling, jaywalking, vagrancy, poor information on homelessness, easy liquor access, vacant lots, and overall numbers for homeless on the streets.

DISCUSSION: The subcommittee focused on the Calhoun Corridor but quickly expanded in certain areas to all of the Business Improvement District because the issues had broader implications. The subcommittee met extensively and traveled the area to form recommendations and solutions. Many actions have been completed and are included in the recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To combat loitering and panhandling, Robert Anderson **put up 7 signs** (4 no panhandling and 3 no loitering) at designated locations. Chief Santiago approved the signs and locations. The police had already helped Transitions with no loitering signs. Further signs in the downtown area may be required by the City, but the subcommittee areas and locations have been accomplished. The Police can determine if anymore are needed.
2. The City must continue to **empty the five new garbage cans** that it positioned along Calhoun. The cans have already become receptacles for large amounts of trash, covering areas where there were no outside garbage cans. The recommended locations from the subcommittee were completed by Robert Anderson. He can decide any locations for future cans based on need.
3. Transitions has increased garbage pick-up to Monday to Fridays. Teams go out in force in the morning with reduced pick-ups in the afternoons. The Adopt-a-Highway sign will go up this summer for Calhoun. Transitions must **continue trash patrols**.
4. City Center Partnership distributed the anti-panhandling fish poster that the subcommittee made around the BID, and this poster is visible in various businesses. They also included the message in the CCP newsletter. The Transitions Homeless Card is now used by City Center Partnership, Lexington Police, Columbia Police, and the Columbia Housing Authority (modified version). Continue to use the **card to educate homeless and businesses** in the Midlands and **hang more posters** in the BID as CCP determines the need.
5. AgFirst has occupied one vacant building on Calhoun which dramatically improved that portion of the street. Other vacant properties remain. The subcommittee has no current plan to deal with them. The City should **pursue filling vacant properties** with the Chamber and City Center Partnership.

6. Jaywalking continues in the area. The City needs to provide **more consistent foot police presence downtown** to fight jaywalking or better enforcement of the laws. The police presence will also curb panhandling. CPD can determine how best to accomplish better enforcement.
7. There was a significant community effort to stop a new alcohol store from going in on North Main, right off the Corridor. Cheap liquor will continue. The subcommittee made no progress in eliminating single servings of alcohol. The City should decide what **approach is possible with stores that sell alcohol**, especially single serving containers.
8. Sleeping in unauthorized areas continues. There are two homeless movement patterns for the year when the Winter Shelter is open or closed. The City, in conjunction with MACH, police, neighborhoods, and the CCP, should determine the exact numbers and locations of homeless folks in the downtown area. They also should use engagement strategies such as downtown outreach workers to assist with placement of the homeless into Emergency Shelter beds when they are available. The City should focus on moving folks to these vacant shelter beds. The Winter Shelter should be full for its duration, and its average occupancy this past year was only 180 or so. Oliver Gospel Mission also had vacancies in the winter. **MACH is making a virtual entry system** for the homeless where all providers will be linked into it. All beds must be filled every night. The homeless must seek programs and **go to Transitions Day Center** to get off the street in the day if they are not seeking employment or other self-improvement activity already. Continuing to allow the homeless to camp and pursue no positive outcome is unproductive.
9. MACH must use the release of the Point in Time Count numbers to **educate and inform the community of good programs and what to do to fight homelessness**. MACH must continue to educate providers and the homeless population on what is being offered to help in Columbia. MACH should work with the Community Development website from the City to make a basic site to help the City. All providers can update their basic information on capabilities, programs, and contact information to MACH and the City simultaneously. The information must be straight forward, so clients can quickly determine if that organization can help them. The **website must be linked to 211 and the new virtual entry system**. The new MACH system will go beyond just information, but actually direct and refer clients to facilities that have openings and meet the individual's need.
10. Elizabeth Marks from the Robert Mills neighborhood has contacted the proper railroad maintenance/grounds person. Neighborhoods do not want the brush cut around the Calhoun railroad overpass down by Harden Street. They do want the railroad security to patrol the area and remove garbage as necessary. Elizabeth will contact the railroad periodically. The City should coordinate with her to ensure the **railroad security is properly patrolling railroad property and picking up garbage along the tracks**.

Meals Subcommittee

ISSUE: This subcommittee was tasked with addressing the impact of meal service to the homeless in our city. If issues were found, this committee would then provide recommendations to the city to take action in an effort to diminish the impact on our community as a whole. As all members of this subcommittee agreed, serving the homeless, some without the resources to provide nourishment for themselves, is an essential component in this city's respectful and responsible effort to improve the state of homelessness in Columbia in general. Although meal service to Columbia's homeless population has been a consistent standard in our city for many years, after researching the existing resources, the subcommittee found several elements of meal service on the whole that can be adjusted to improve the efficiency of this service while respectfully addressing the needs of Columbia's homeless while still allowing those called to give in this manner the forum to do so. In making these recommendations, this subcommittee considered area businesses and neighborhoods, the homeless themselves, meal service providers, and faith based organizations. There are currently over 40 established feeding programs in downtown Columbia; this does not include the sporadic volunteer groups that organize to feed the homeless.

DISCUSSION: An examination of the current meal service locations and times revealed that it was possible for the persons receiving meal services to actually have multiple meals during the same hours of the day. For example, one meal provider could serve their lunch from 11 am – 12 pm, while another could conduct serve their meal from 12:30 to 1:30. This subcommittee acknowledges that for a person in need, having two lunches is not an absurdity, but the duplication in services does increase foot traffic in the downtown business area and throughout the neighborhoods as people traverse from one meal site to another. This subcommittee is not anti-food, or anti food events for the homeless, but it does recognize that food services habitual impact our community.

After conferring with area business leaders and local neighborhood officials, the subcommittee deduced that a reduction in foot traffic would reduce the residual litter that derives from their respective meals and a reduction in foot traffic to and from the meals would be recommended. Subcommittee members spoke to established weekday lunchtime meal providers and coordinated an effort to adjust their times of service so that the chances of duplicating meals are dramatically reduced. From continued research, this subcommittee realized that the number of providers serving meals is quite staggering. While acknowledging that it may not be feasible for city leadership to ask meal providers that serve in nontraditional, outside locations, such as parks and parking lots to discontinue their services, we do recognize that a fixed site location for meals is less likely to generate complaints from neighborhood residents and surrounding businesses. This subcommittee would like city leadership to establish a position on unregulated or unsanctioned meal service in outdoor locations. This subcommittee contends that if meals can be monitored and coordinated, positive change will result for the homeless, meal providers, the church community, area residents, and the businesses that Columbia strives to promote.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

This subcommittee recommends the following to improve aspects of large scale meal services.

1. The City will convene a Feeding Summit to gather input from the community and work to reach a consensus on these goals.
2. Lunchtime meals may only be served at fixed site locations (established lunch providers that serve indoors). Washington Street, Oliver Gospel, Transitions, Christ Central N. Main, etc. Lunchtime meals may only be served from 11:30am – 1:00 pm.
3. During the time that the winter shelter is operational, the Salvation Army will serve dinner at the shelter and the fixed site dinner meal will not operate.
4. The dinner meal at the winter shelter will be for winter shelter guests only and not open to the general public.
5. Establish an indoor dinner meal option for the time in which the winter shelter is not open.
6. Meal providers should be encouraged to police themselves and monitor trash around their location. Providers should be held accountable for their waste.
7. Discourage the continued activities of outdoor meal providers. (Lack of operational bathrooms, trash accumulation, no DHEC health standards).
8. Encourage the city to establish a position on meal provision by utilizing some or all of these recommendations and enforce according to city regulations as needed.

Sanitation Committee

ISSUE: This committee was established to evaluate the facilities for use by the homeless population and to determine what is available in the City of Columbia as it pertains to:

1. Restroom facilities
2. Bathing facilities
3. Washing of soiled clothing

DISCUSSION: It was confirmed early on that few if any facilities in the city were available to the general public after 7 pm on a daily basis. This does not speak to the businesses that have restroom facilities. These are in most, if not all cases, available to customers and patrons, but off limits to the homeless population as well as visitors that are in town for sightseeing and are not patronizing a specific business establishment. We began looking at this issue only looking at the homeless population, but soon realized that we must consider the problem as it pertains to tourism, impacting thousands of tourists who visit the City of Columbia.

Numerous meetings have taken place with the former City Manager, two assistant managers and department heads representing Public Works, Utilities plus Parks and Recreation, The City of Columbia departments have limited and/or direct influence on placing, maintaining and oversight of bathroom, bathing, cleaning and/or maintain regulatory control of such facilities. All persons contacted said they understood the importance and significance of planning for, in addition to, installing and continuous maintenance of sanitary facilities. Interim Chief of Police Ruben Santiago has worked with the committee and has done a massive amount of homework locating portable sanitary facilities within the armed forces. As of now such items are in short supply and the military is making use of every latrine facility they can get their hands on.

The technology and equipment is currently in the market place to facilitate the disposal of human feces and urine. Prices have been confirmed and currently exist from the affordable port-a-potty to the very expensive enclosed stainless steel units. A major issue facing the city at this time is where such units should be located and who will be responsible for maintaining and providing security for sanitary facilities? Do we look to the city to provide property/ location or do we see if there are locations that could be utilized for public access outside of the property owned by the City? What about parking garages or even facilities in or near a police office or district police headquarters? Do we use city park facilities or upgrade existing facilities for 24 hour use by the public? These are not easy decisions to be made because all require on-going government funding to have a working and successful program.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Suggestions have been made to look at what other cities in the southeast are doing with the homeless population. Two cities were suggested for contacts: Asheville, NC and Savannah, GA. Contacts have been made with individuals in both cities and visits are being arranged to review

sanitation facilities installed to address public use. It has been determined in both locations there are working relationships between local governmental offices, private services, faith community and not for profit agencies. This has assisted in preventing duplication of effort as well as broadening services for the clientele. The intent of the committee is to have conversations with individuals, understand their organizational structure and to obtain information on what applications worked for their community and what problems were addressed to overcome possible failures. This compilation of information will assist the committee in making recommendations for the City of Columbia.

The visits are underway at this time. Updates and recommendations will be made in the very near future.

Contacts are as follows:

City of Asheville and Buncombe County, NC
Ms. Gibbie Harris, Buncombe County Health Director
Dr. Richard Munger, Buncombe County Human Services Support Team

Savannah, GA City Government
Ms. Earline Davis, Housing Director
Mr. Larry Lee, Savannah Homeless Authority
Mr. Peter Doliver, Director, YMCA

Conclusion

The four subcommittees have presented to you their ideas and recommendations to solve some of the social and economic issues of the homeless crisis that are critical to the sustained development of the City Center, USC, the surrounding economic clusters like Five Points and the Vista, and most importantly, the surrounding neighborhoods.

The recommendations were based on problems and activities that occurred during the period October, 2012 to June, 2013. In the scheme of things, that is a very short period of time.

The first Homeless Meeting in Columbia was called in February, 1981 in response to a perceived problem of the homeless in the downtown area and the need for more affordable housing. With Columbia's growth in the last thirty-five years, the homeless problem has now, for lack of a better word, exploded. Whether the City wants to or not, it has to continue to assume the lead role in making this work for all involved: business, non-profits, and neighborhoods.

We have completed Phase I of this project based on what we believe were the tasks assigned to us by Mr. Gantt at Council's directives. We feel like our work has just begun but to this point, we have been very successful. The Committee wants to expand to problem solve several other issues like mental illness and the exit of the prison population into the downtown area.

The Committee is here to serve the Mayor and City Council of Columbia.

The Committee wants to continue to serve in this capacity.