

Seneca County Housing Coalition

Meeting Minutes

August 2, 2022

2:00 – 3:00 PM

ATTENDEES: Melissa Nesbit (Co-chair), Seneca Housing, Inc.; Sarah Anderson, Safe Harbors of the Finger Lakes; Jessica Chase, FLACRA; Amanda Forney, Seneca County Planning Department; Bob Ritter, Seneca County Community Counseling Center; Caroline Fay, Seneca Community Action Programs; Patrick Mitchell, INHS; Amy King, Lakeview Health Services

1. Introductions by Attendees

2. Seneca County Housing Coalition Updates

Landlord Night has been cancelled due to lack of participation. Eight people signed up and there needs to be a minimum of ten. Ms. Nesbit is anticipating having the event later this year.

RentWise is a program that Seneca Housing received permission to use to teach people to be good renters. The program was productive up until the COVID pandemic began. There is anticipation of bringing it into the Seneca County Law Enforcement Center for inmates. The person that will run the training is currently unavailable during the day shift at the jail.

3. Agency Updates

CAP: The food pantry is continuing to stock up and the baby pantry is fully stocked. Available diapers run up to size four as the program is for children up to 2 years of age. They have formula in stock also. CAP can always take orders and if someone is referred, items can be purchased. Housing & utilities assistance funding has still not come through and is limited. The nine-bed women's shelter is filling up but referrals are being taken. Referrals are also being taken for the Car Seat Program. The free clothing closet is popular and doing well. Clothing donations are always needed for both men and children. For the Food Recovery Program, farmers and major grocery stores have been donating a lot of vegetables and fruit. There is also a Kinship Program to aid those people (grandparents, siblings, etc.) that are caring for children that are not their own. Ms. Fay also stated that Medicaid transport is always looking for drivers. Reimbursements are paid to those who volunteer.

Safe Harbors: The Pandemic Emergency Assistance Program ended May 31, 2022. 33 families were served and total funds of \$17,600 went towards food gift cards as well as rent and utility assistance. Safe Harbors is also opening an office in Seneca County but a location is unknown at this time. The physical location for the domestic violence shelter is completed and they anticipate opening the doors and taking in clients in a few months. Positions will be added to support the shelter.

Lakeview: All 28 beds in Seneca County are currently full. They are trying to acquire vouchers so that other homeless people can be helped. Two transitional apartments are now opened on Virginia Street and Washington Street. These short term apartments are for those that are homeless and have a housing plan in place. If someone is waiting for more permanent housing, they qualify to stay in these apartments. If there are multiple people within a family, Lakeview will accommodate with additional bedding. Seneca County Mental Health pays Lakeview who then pays for rent & utilities. Clients do not have to pay. People have also been sent to Syracuse and Rochester. Ms. King stated that funding is running out. She stated that the Neighbor to Neighbor Fund has been helpful. There is an application online and their committee meets regularly to approve aid to applicants. They send funding to the agency which will then use it to meet the needs of the client. Ms. King also mentioned that there is a new building in Tompkins County with 16 apartments. The goal is to open a building in Ontario County next.

Seneca County Community Counseling Center: Mr. Ritter explained that families with housing issues very often result in children's mental health being impacted. Mr. Ritter supports children with these issues. Most of the services require youth to have a mental health diagnosis but parents can be advised to get their children evaluated, if necessary. Mr. Ritter offers support to those with housing or food issues. Mr. Ritter can be reached at 315-539-1752 or rritter@co.seneca.ny.us.

INHS: INHS serves Tompkins and the six contiguous counties. Before the COVID pandemic, INHS purchased Verona Village in Ovid with anticipation of receiving funding to renovate and update it. INHS also has a rental development in Tyre that was built a few years ago. They are hoping that it will be expanded in the future. INHS has recently completed an affordable house sale after acquiring it due to foreclosure. INHS also connects first time homebuyers with various resources. There are many subsidies and resources available that people are not aware of. INHS can look at finances without affecting credit. Mr. Mitchell also mentioned that there are current job opportunities in property maintenance in southern Seneca County consisting of doing small repair work for the elderly and disabled.

FLACRA: The Emergency Solutions Grants Program is continuing to help homeless families and individuals. This helps pay past due rent and other assistance for up to six months. If the client has needs longer than that, FLACRA always hopes to partner with DSS to pay what is remaining. HUD posted a supplemental NOFO to assist unsheltered and rural people. It is likely that unsheltered funds won't be received but the rural funding is specific to Seneca County. They are eligible to apply for over \$200,000 with a three year grant term. There are 10-12 units to provide rental assistance for people. Ms. Chase said that other agencies can still apply for it. Two safety units were also rewarded, one each in Wayne and Ontario counties, for people waiting for permanent housing. Single individuals can stay up to 12 months. They also have to be coming out of a treatment facility or jail with a substance abuse disorder.

Seneca County Planning & Community Development: A recommendation was made for the consultant selection for the Housing Needs Assessment. The County BOS will decide on August 9, 2022. Two public meetings will be scheduled in October and community participation is needed. The Housing Coalition membership is encouraged to attend. The Housing Coalition will be promoting the meetings and project. Ms. Nesbit explained that the housing plan is really old and money can be awarded to start a new plan after an assessment is complete. Mr. McGrath's update also noted that NYS will be releasing land bank grant applications this fall for 2023 projects. He is encouraging any organization in the Housing Coalition to reach out to him if they have an interest in partnering on a housing development project in Seneca County for 2023 or 2024. He anticipates having enough grant funds to acquire five vacant and condemned houses from the County after foreclosure for redevelopment in 2023. If demolished, the state may require a new build. If any organization wants to build or rehab a house, please let Joe know.

Seneca Housing: There was funding available from Seneca Meadows for veterans for security deposit assistance. With permission, the funds were used for a veteran that needed a ramp and shower renovation to make it handicap accessible. The Masquerade Ball will be held in October to raise funds for veteran's housing. Ms. Chase stated that if anyone is working with homeless veterans, there are two two-bedroom units open at the Cadence Square property.

The next meeting will be held on December 6, 2022 at 2:00 PM.

Respectfully,

Amanda Forney