

To: City Council
From: Debbie Laurie
Date: January 20, 2023
RE: HUD Technical Assistance Initiative

In September, representatives from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Senator Collins' office convened in Bangor to assess, discuss, and ultimately provide assistance in developing a plan based on best practices, as it relates to our unhoused populace. Attendees included: Deputy Assistant Secretary for Special Needs, the Director of Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs, Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Housing and Services, Representative of HUDs budget office, staff from Senator Collins Office and representatives from the City, Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, Community Cares, Community Health and Counseling, Maine State Housing, Penobscot Community Health Care, and Penquis.

This group participated in a discussion at the start of the day, a tour of Bangor, including several encampments, and concluded with a round table discussion. The end result was a promise of shared evidence-based procedural documents, connections to financial resources, and collaboration suggestions. The immediate recommendation is a need for an emergency management approach to solve the problem as encampments differ from housing others. It was determined the city needed a 'win' in the community by closing one highly visible encampment by housing all the folks at once and then re-claiming the space so a new encampment wouldn't return.

The September meeting resulted in the deployment of a HUD Technical Assistance (TA) team to engage all stakeholders to focus on housing individuals who are currently unsheltered, with an emphasis on the two larger encampments. The deployment of a HUD TA team is an incredible opportunity to access national resources, with in-depth knowledge, to assist us in addressing our identified issue of encampments and to build capacity by improving the design and delivery of programs or services funded by HUD. The HUD team committed to working with the City of Bangor until March 31, 2023.

In mid-December, all stakeholders participated in a Technical Assistance kickoff meeting. Both stakeholders, and the TA team, shared their experiences and we discussed our initiative –to close encampments se encampments by working together to set up a new community structure and process to house unsheltered people. Since that time, we have met weekly as a group setting goals and assigning tasks, smaller sub groups also meet during the week to accomplish new goals and to problem solve.

The overarching principals to this work are 1) identify the people 2) identify the units 3) move people into the units and 4) return the property for public use. Our work is modeling an emergency management response, which is very intensive, time-consuming and challenging at times. This process is an intensive three month effort that requires us all to identify what we are doing, any barriers, and to redirect efforts to focus on individuals within the encampments, which is a very different approach than has been used for decades. These efforts have been supported by all partner organizations listed above as well as others.

Our first task, was enhanced outreach efforts within the encampments, so that we are able to identify the individuals and ensure they are enrolled in HMIS (homeless management information system – which is a requirement of HUD to address homelessness) and coordinated entry. Concurrently, we are working with landlords to identify available units. We are nearing completion of this first phase and are now able to begin to the process of making the connection with people who have units.

The significant assignment of HUD resources has been invaluable. While agencies within our community have always worked collaboratively, the willingness and ability to bring together the City, Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, Bangor Housing Authority, Community Cares (Shaw House), Community Health and Counseling, Partners for Peace, Penobscot Community Health Center, and Penquis to achieve a shared goal has been paramount to our ability in addressing the needs of unsheltered individuals within our community. To the public, it may appear that no efforts are underway, but like a duck on a pond, while it may appear there is no movement, beneath the water there is a lot of activity taking place.