



Minutes - Final

Human Resources, Administration and Appointments Committee

Wednesday, January 22, 2020

5:30 PM

Roll Call: Chairperson Gerlach, Mota, Zucal

Discussion: Draft Bill Establishing a Commission to deal with the issues relating to homelessness.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated that they had their previous night residents. In Allentown, the majority of the folks that are experiencing homelessness. It is incumbent upon the city to take the lead. They have in the back a draft form of the proposed bill. She asked if there were any comments. The idea of this Commission is not for a bunch of people to get together and talk about the problems and nothing gets done. The idea is to get people that can make decisions and make changes actually make those changes.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated well said. We already know what the issues are. She is hear to listen and support. This is the time.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated if anyone had any comments, questions or anything that needs to be taken into consideration, please come up.

Ms. Erin Keller, 1934 W. Tilghman Street, stated that she is intimately familiar with the Mayor's Commission on Homelessness formed in 2007 and the recommendations that were never put into place. She stated that she participated with people that are here o other discussions about homelessness. She stated that she wants to talk about the NIZ and the ANIZDA board. She stated that she was extremely distressed to read an article from Andrew Wagaman from The Morning Call where Pastor Edwards ended his seat on the ANIZDA.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated that you have to talk about the homeless issue.

Ms. Erin Keller stated that the NIZ is a perfect opportunity not only to have affordable housing that would help with people not being homeless. It would be a place you can have a homeless shelter and services provided and people can get tax credits. She asked for Representative Schweyer and Senator Browne to resign. They tried to use their influence to keep people running for office and keep someone like Pastor Edwards who has constantly advocated for the homeless and opened his church numerous times for numerous events. She asked that the federal government be

brought in and an investigation made for both the Senator and the representative and the member of the ANIZDA board.

Mr. Charles Underwood, 2511 W. Washington Street - Member of First Presbyterian Church, stated that he and his wife are co-chairs for the Mission Team for Ripple Community, Warming Station, Jubilee Breakfast at Zion Liberty Church and Community Church for mini micro housing. The biggest holdup is finding properties that can be used for this purpose. At one time, there were 220 Silk Mills in the Lehigh Valley. He stated that he was in a meeting with Leonard Lightner and was told that the city doesn't have any of the properties in its inventory. He asked what kind of properties does the city have to re-purpose. The problem is not in my backyard. He said that his backyard is kind of small, but he will welcome it. He stated what they need to do is find out if there is a property suitable, that can be re-purposed and turned into something like this. He stated that he is grateful to the city for their support of the YMCA Warming Station and all the other things that they have done for them. He stated let's find a place where this can happen.

Mr. Russell "Rooster" Valentini, Homeless Education Liaison in the Allentown School District, stated that one of the biggest things is the HUD definition and the Educational definition of homelessness. He stated that the HUD definition would not include folks that are doubled up and paying for their own hotels. He identified roughly 470 students only that are in the Allentown School District. The Educational definition is when an event happens and forcing someone from their home, they would be considered homeless. The shelters are very limited and full. The backup for getting into a shelter can run for easily several months. To miss out on the families that are doubled up. We have people sneaking into high rises at night and tried to sneak out in the morning. We have families that have to remain in their cars. We are very fortunate for the Warming Centers and programs, but we have to look into the preventable items and preventable measures to help folks. He stated that he had a family earlier in the year that was behind on their rent partial and was able to come up with donation money to come up with \$300 and mom came up with the rest of it. Gave the money directly to the Allentown Housing Authority. This family still resides in their place and did not get the stink of eviction on their records, did not lose all their furniture, and the children did not have to change schools. Another one when a family came to him, he put them in touch with North Penn Legal Service. North Penn Legal Service represented them at the hearing and they won. The family did not get put out. He asked the city to Ombudsman to make sure the families can get represented. Allentown has a great setup for Lead Remediation and he is getting them notice. The families go into hotels, they have busing setup, and they make their way into school. He asked for any opportunities for set asides for families. He

read a poem called Just In Case, luxury flats, townhouses, lofts and such. All those signs didn't bother me much, except every one of those 2,000 new doors will never be mines, will never be yours. Full blocks of houses came down by the score. What you see now, you can not ignore. Beautiful tall buildings maximum use of the space. However, families cannot find an affordable place. Having your own address is the American dream. Finding your own address is an American scheme. A voucher, rental assistance or heard earned pay won't get you much closer to somewhere to stay. People paying for a hotel room week after week. People begging friends to take them in as we speak. People sneaking into different places at night. People staying in their cars from dusk to daylight. Was it ever considered or given a thought. Families can't live on a vacant lot. But, just in case it slips someone's mind. I think there is still time for answers to find.

Ms. Jody Perry Petrozak, Branch Executive Director of YMCA - Warming Station, stated that there are seven of them in the room and weekly or twice a week they are together trying to address this issue. Tonight's meeting is on the eve of the pick count. They are in year two of the Warming Station. She thanked the people that helps. She stated that they should not have the numbers walking in the doors that they do. She asked for an Action Commission.

Ms. Kathy Cravelyhn (sp), Skyland Drive and works at Valley Youth House and member of the Steering Committee for the Regional Homeless Advisory Board, stated that kudos to Ms. Gerlach and appreciate the coordination. She called attention to the sub-population of youth. There are 100 young people on the streets right now that are literally homeless. The wait time is roughly 100 day before they can enter houses because of wait list. The role is to serve as a liaison of policymakers. She stated that is hopes it is an action team.

Mr. Chris Woods, Allentown Coalition of Economic Dignity, stated that they are in support of the formation of this. This is a great start. Hopefully, it will have some teeth and the policies recommended will be seen through by Council and the administration. One particular policy that might be interesting once this Commission starts is to look at discriminate based on the way that folks pay for housing. There is no statewide Ordinance banning landlords to discriminate against Section 8 Vouchers. Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and State College have those Ordinances.

Ms. Milagros Canales, president of Old Fairgrounds and Housing Specialist for Community Action, stated that while she sees the idea to start a Commission. It is a novelty at best. It is a taskforce, after taskforce. We are spinning wheels. To do and address concerns of Section 8. She

spends her day, 55 people a day filling out housing applications. It is not a shortage of Landlords accepting Section. We don't talk to the landlords. We don't have any landlords coming to the table addressing their needs including out needs. We have to hold the people that have these vouchers accountable. There are steps that need to be taken as well for them. She stated that they have to do training on both sides of the table. She stated that she doesn't see any landlords here and don't see anyone asking them what do they need as well.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that they are listening and it was well said. It is one of the things that she is going to work with Ms. Gerlach. We have to all be on the table.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated that what she heard overall. She 100 percent agrees with. She stated that she gets the same feelings. All she can say if you think about other groups, taskforce and Commissions they fall short because there are a lot of egos around the table. If this Commission prevents that, let's into it right now and see if this is possible and what it would take in order to get it done. She stated if you have any other particular concerns, please let her know. If there are other boards, and commissions that you served on and have downfalls, please let her know. She stated that for her it is very personal.

Ms. Carolyn Hoffman, 5632 Cart Drive -lifelong resident of Lehigh Valley and a representative Operation Address the Homeless, stated that with this formation of Commission there are actionable plans with goals. Homelessness is not a 9 to 5 Monday through Friday. It happens at 8:00 at night or get them at 7:00 at night when they are ready to close the doors. There are families that come with children. She stated that she has nowhere to send them. She contacted the police department to check on them in their cars at nighttime. We need to look at what is causing this.

Mr. Joseph Hoffman, St. John Street, reminded Council that they need citizen participation. You have to have examples of people speaking tonight or actual real-life homeless that really knows what is going on. He stated that he heard a lot of quiet frustration. Things don't get done because there is no money to do it. He offered his help.

Sherri Brokopp Binder, Ripple Community Inc, stated that they know there is a dedicated group of individuals and organizations that care about homelessness. She introduced Keith.

Mr. Keith Seamans (sp) stated that he is in tent city. It is tough down there. A lot of people come back there for a time being and then leave and leave a big mess. It is hard. it is a lot of drugs. He asked for another temporary

dumpster. He stated that they need batteries and lights. He stated that he has been in the city for 51 years of his life and has yet to see them take care of homeless people.

Mr. Julio Guridy asked Keith if he didn't get the dumpster.

Mr. Keith Seamans (sp) stated yes, one.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach thanked Keith and asked if there were any other comments. She asked if there were any members have any comments.

Mr. Julio Guridy stated that Allentown has been dealing with this for a long time. Allentown can't do it alone. We need to work with the county. He stated that he called upon Mr. Armstrong, County Executive and he said that there is a Coalition of Mayors meeting.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated that she has been taking notes about everything to make sure that this commission is productive and inclusive. She asked if anyone else wanted to speak.

Mr. Lewis Shupe, Walnut Street, stated that they mentioned County Commissioners getting involved. He intends to go to the County Commissioners meeting tonight. He stated that he remembers how this Rules, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee has never met for the past couple of years. Maybe if the Rules, Intergovernmental Relations Committee might get a meeting up in the future, that might be the place to bring this homeless meeting before that.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that she agrees with Mr. Guridy and everything that was said here. We have to be realistic. She stated that she is excited that they are doing this. They are going to do everything in their power to be active. This is not going to be like any other committee. We are going to set goals. We have to be realistic that things do not happen overnight. This issue has been going on for quite some time. This issue has been going on for quite some time. Let's be aware of that and give each other some grace. We have to be united. She stated that she hopes with this meeting it doesn't come to what she has seen in the past, an attack. Let's find solutions.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach thanked everybody for coming out this evening. She stated that we are going to need you because you are the folks on the ground who are actually working with folks who are working with affordable housing organizations. We are going to need people who are experiencing homelessness right now or who has to be part of this conversation. We are going to turn this city into one that does not judge or

look at people are disposable as if they don't belong here. And, the first thing is to call the cops and lock them up. No, that is not what this city is about. We are going to change.

[15-3392](#)

Bill 8 HR, Admin and Appts - this evening
Establishing a Homeless Commission

Sponsors: Gerlach, Guridy, Mota, Mr. Siegel and Administration

Attachments: [Bill 8 Homeless Commission](#)

Enactment No: 15596

Adjourned: 6:12 PM