

Lewiston Area Public Health Committee

November 10, 2022



MEMBERS: Stephanie Gelinias, Bill Wallace, Nina Gargan, Jeremy Hiltz, Ted Walworth

EXCUSED MEMBERS: Lynsay Henry, Corrie Brown, and Megan Parks

STAFF: Dottie Perham-Whittier

The group discussed the committee's seat opening due to John Alexander's resignation, and Dottie shared that the City Clerk's Office will be doing outreach about this slot and other open committee slots. Stephanie said we are not able to just fill his slot with someone else from CMMC. Ted said it would be good to ***have representation from both local hospitals on the committee.***

Stephanie and Ted spoke highly of the recent Chamber breakfast focusing on recovery workplaces.

Jeremy gave an update on the work of Auburn's Public Health Manager. He said that she is involved in a community health collaborative effort and also focusing on recovery friendly workplaces.

Nina said it's key that resources are brought together, and paramedics have been discussing that. They especially need Narcan, and Jeremy said to contact Maine Access Points.

Minutes – Did not have a quorum due to Stephanie abstaining since she was not at the respective 10/13/22 meeting. Minutes will be on the December agenda for voting.

Dottie and Bill shared about the 10/13/22 tour of the Androscoggin Jail.

- Positive vibe, feeling of teamwork, and compassion
- Had tremendous respect for inmates
- Programs for inmates going well
- The body scanner has been a huge plus; no overdoses since obtaining it
- Food area was pleasant with inmates doing prep; food looked very appealing
- The jail was bright and extremely clean
- Monitoring system was impressive due to immediately seeing a concern, such as the recent person who had a seizure
- Met the employees in minimum, medium, and maximum security and learned of their round protocols

Dottie gave the group an update about the Lewiston Youth Advisory Council's December 8 "Be Kind To Your Mind" Community Conversation to be held at Connors Elementary. It will consist of mental health professionals, related artwork, resources, and a Q & A. Members were very interested and want to attend. The LAPHC will meet at Connors at 5:30 p.m. to touch base for a formal meeting and then attend the community conversation. Dottie will check with the school to see where the LAPHC could meet for 30 minutes.

Stephanie asked what type of responses the group received on the Community Conversation idea for a post-Covid discussion. Dottie reported that the group received a few forms with no real consensus or interest. Ted said that people tend to regard the pandemic as "behind us." Bill and Ted agreed, however, that China is still struggling. Bill pointed out that variants "don't just get weaker" and said vaccines are still very important. The LAPHC will not proceed with a community conversation about post-Covid, reconnecting, and about what we've learned.

Nina expressed concern about hearing about the possibility of returning to remote school due to staff shortages. She has a student at Academy, LMS, and LHS. Stephanie said that recently the Lewiston School Supt. had 28 people call out in one day. Members wondered the reason. It was pointed out that RSV is going around, and Ted pointed out that it's usually experienced by children, but adults can get it. He said that with people staying away from others during Covid, natural immunities have not been built up.

Looking forward, Ted feels that we should revisit some of the group's previous concerns—tobacco use, vaping, adult-use marijuana—as well as our forthcoming winter/cold weather and homeless in our community.

Housing Committee Update

Bill Wallace said that the Housing Committee is looking at what they can do in their capacity and has surveyed its members as to the biggest priority. The items of biggest concern are:

- 1) Housing production goals: single family, young professionals, workforce, affordable, senior, accessible, supportive
- 2) Creation of temporary or permanent homeless shelter
- 3) Zoning to promote housing production
- 4) Creating housing scorecard for reporting to Council each year
- 5) Review and advise staff and Council on housing programs funded through federal CDBG program and other federal and state funding sources: CDBG, CDBG-Lead, HOME, General Assistance

Points noted:

- State goal established a minimum of 10% of housing stock affordable in each community.
- Goals should align with Comprehensive Plan goals.
- The shelter moratorium in Lewiston has ended.
- Zoning does have some restrictions.

- County is providing funding towards a wintertime housing village to get people out of the winter weather, with dismantling in the spring.
- The village would have a bathhouse and toilets.
- The village would also hopefully have a place for connection to services.
- The village would need to be situated where resources are nearby.
- Jeremy wondered why the village can't be placed near where other shelters are currently located. Stephanie said that sometimes land is owned by someone else, and there are buffers and restrictions in some areas.

Jeremy said that we have hundreds of homeless people which the county effort wouldn't be able to fully serve.

Some individuals in encampments hesitate to respond to help when visited, which includes some veterans. In that respect, Tri-County's Dave Bilodeau formerly told the group that when approached in an encampment, homeless people are far less apt to respond versus when they are in a place where they've had a meal, showered, and have clean clothes on.

Stephanie said that with the cold weather approaching, she knows that resistance to leaving the encampments will lessen, noting that *"Maine winters are brutal."*

Nina asked if there has been any thought about purchasing the land that homeless individuals are squatting on. It doesn't appear so.

Stephanie said it's important to repeatedly *"make the ask"* to people to let them know that people do care and resources are truly available to them.

Jeremy updated the group about Recovery Center of Maine's recent effort. They will be opening a 20-bed men's program, with various levels of supports, to include a six-month transitional program and then a recovery program. They also plan to have detox. Jeremy said that the LPHC is welcome to tour the program.

Jeremy said it's tough for buildings to be together to address needed impact. Jeremy said some inmates are bed to bed; some are released with no place to go; and others have burned all bridges and end up homeless when leaving jail. He said there are many dynamics that come into play.

Stephanie said that this needs to be an ongoing discussion, to include at the City Council level.

Bill spoke more about the housing scorecard that the Housing Committee wants to develop. They want to establish social and economic indicators to measure each year regarding the local housing situation, such as:

- Eviction rates
- Rate of housing capitalization (by permits)
- Vacancy/occupancy rate
- Affordability of market rents
- Affordability of single-family homes
- Rate of condemnations/code violations

Bill said that a healthy vacancy rate should be 5%. With the scorecard, the Housing Committee wants to grade current resources and compare findings to other cities.

Future Agenda Items

- Have Auburn's Jen Edwards give an update about her work
- Visit the new 20-bed men's program that Jeremy told the group about

Guest Speaker

Amran Osman – Generational Noor

Amran **established** Generational Noor ~~was established to~~ help destigmatize Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and mental health within the immigrant community.

She saw a lot of her peers going through things and needed help, but no one was talking about issues at hand. Youth were being lost, but the reason for their passing was being swept under the rug. She said she wanted to shed light on SUD and mental health concerns so that people would talk about what they were going through and get help.

Youth Center – Amran said they are working to establish youth centers in Portland, Biddeford, and Lewiston. A center provides a place where people could open up and feel comfortable. Amran said that it's important to meet people where they are at.

Community Connections – This involves efforts within schools so that students will receive needed counseling versus suspension. She said that typically when behavior is concerning, there are underlying issues. Counseling is sometimes viewed as taboo, but it needs to be understood within the immigrant community that it's OK and that they deserve assistance. Generation Noor is also focusing on workforce development and working with banks re: financial literacy and providing supports for resume building, job searches, networking, and college trips.

Mental Health for Women – Women tend to always be taking care of everyone else but often don't take care of themselves. She said it's amazing for women to have the opportunity to sit with a group of other women, talking in their native tongue, and discuss their thoughts and feelings that aren't typically shared. Amran said that juggling culture can be difficult, and it's also important for women to have therapy to address trauma they may have experienced.

Community Roundtable Discussions – These discussions are raw focusing on SUD. About 40 people have participated in Portland, as well as 40 in Lewiston, the latter including parents who don't understand how to talk about SUD or address racial disparities and stigma.

Amran said Generational Noor wants to use evidenced-based information, but there has not been a lot of information noted about BIPOC and immigrants who have died from SUD. The need for increased cultural competency is sorely needed.

Generational Road to Recovery – Cultural competency is very important as to providers. People have a hard time relating to those who haven't walked in their shoes, nor understand their culture or how to talk with them. Language can also be a barrier. Mosques and imams also need to know how to effectively interact with those with SUD.

Amran said that Generational Noor wants to have a helpline and is currently embracing NAMI Maine hotline.

She also noted that networking and partnerships are being developed to include University of Southern Maine, Church of Safe Injection, Maine Youth Network, and Tri-County.

Amran said Generational Noor wants to restore hope in the lives of youth and help them step by step.

Stephanie said this seems very similar to how years ago, people tried to recover in secret; even the recovery groups had “anonymous” in their names. Today, we want individuals to recover loud!

Ted asked what “Noor” means, and Amran said it means “light” in Arabic. She also said she picked Noor, as a family member with the last name “Noor” had passed.

LAPHC members felt that Amran would be a good speaker at the youth council’s “Be Kind To Your Mind” community conversation about mental health. Stephanie said that we’ve learned that there is a strong connection between Substance Use Disorder and mental health.

LAPHC members were very impressed by Amran’s presentation ***and commended her for being the creator and driving force behind the organization.***

Sincerely,

Dottie Perham-Whittier

Dottie Perham-Whittier
Community Relations Coordinator