

Department of Human Service Programs



sharing resources...building community

Date: January 29, 2003,

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

Jill Herold
Assistant City Manager

From: Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Services and Harold Cox, Chief
Public Health Officer

Ellen Semoroff
Deputy Director

Subject: Council Order #14, dated 1/13/023 RE: Homelessness Efforts

Severe weather and reverberations from the recent state budget cuts have worsened the plight of homeless individuals in Massachusetts this winter.

Childcare & Family
Support Services

In 2002, the Commonwealth faced a \$2.5 billion loss in tax revenue. In a matter of months, the legislature cut state aid for 328 shelter beds, eliminated the state's emergency financial aid program to families facing eviction, and lowered the income threshold to qualify for shelter. Meanwhile, state public health agencies were forced to slash funding for substance abuse programs and mental health services, both of which have a significant homeless clientele.

Commission for
Persons with Disabilities

Community Schools

These funding cuts are now visibly affecting communities in Greater Boston, where most of the state's homeless population resides. Although most Cambridge shelters sustained significant state funding cuts last fall, none to date have chosen to reduce their numbers of emergency beds. In harsh winter weather, many overnight shelters make particular efforts not to turn anyone away. Some do not close in the daytime under these circumstances.

Community
Learning Center

Coordinating Council for
Children, Youth and Families
(Kids' Council)

The Salvation Army has been particularly accommodating to both daytime and overnight guests this winter. At night, CASPAR's FirstStep van transports people to the CASPAR Emergency Service Center and other shelters, and recently has added coverage for one shift on Saturdays and Sundays. Professional Ambulance has expressed willingness to transport people to local shelters. The Cambridge Police Department also brings people to the CASPAR Emergency Service Center. The Department of Human Service Programs contracts with Bread & Jams to provide nightly van transportation to the overflow shelter in Boston.

Council on Aging;
Elderly Services

Low Income
Fuel Assistance

Multi-Service Center;
Homeless Services

Through an infusion of \$85,986 in City and Cambridge Health Alliance funding, CASPAR was able to reopen the Emergency Service Center beginning November 1, 2002, during daytime hours for a limited clientele needing medical respite. Substance-abusing individuals whose health would be medically compromised on the streets during the day due to temporary medical conditions may be referred or brought into 240 Albany Street by the CASPAR FirstStep van, Healthcare for the Homeless, the Cambridge Hospital, the Cambridge Police or Pro Ambulance. Up to 40 individuals per day may be served in this way.

Office of Workforce
Development

Planning & Development

Recreation

For homeless people who are sober, daytime resources include the Salvation Army, the Women's Day Program at Shelter, Inc., Bread & Jams Drop-In Center at Old Cambridge Baptist Church and the On the Rise Safe Haven for women receiving services there.

Youth



Despite the many shelter resources in Cambridge, some homeless individuals do not use them, even in the harshest of weather. Some people, particularly those with mental illness, are extremely reluctant to leave their possessions, including bulky shopping carts, behind to enter a shelter. Others may be barred from a particular local shelter because of past behavior. Young people continue to spend the night in below-grade retail shop entrances around Harvard Square. Some of them may be under the age of 18 and therefore ineligible to use adult shelters, but unwilling to use structured programs available to youth in surrounding cities. Even many who are over 18 are fearful of mixing with the long-term homeless adult population in the shelters. Others do not want to conform to shelter rules and curfews, or are simply unable to tolerate other aspects of the shelter environment including noise and close confinement. Some couples refuse to be separated, and there are few accommodations for couples. Some people spend nights at South Station or Logan airport, or hiding in various facilities that are open long hours.

Community meals take place at various locations on different nights of the week. After the meal, the Bread & Jams van transports those who cannot stay in Cambridge shelters for some reason to Boston shelters. Under a new procedure, FirstStep is offering after the meal to transport people to the Harvard Square Shelter or to the Salvation Army.

On January 23-26, at the initiation of the Reverend Irv Cummings, the Old Cambridge Baptist Church in Harvard Square opened its basement space used by Bread & Jams in the daytime for overnight shelter. Each night, the shelter was staffed by volunteers from the church, Bread & Jams, Spare Change, Solutions at Work, and FirstStep. Individual homeless persons provided supplemental staffing support. Members of the congregation and trustees from Spare Change donated money for food, and Au Bon Pain, Bread & Circus, and Food Not Bombs donated additional food. The American Red Cross donated cots, and blankets were contributed by Food Not Bombs and through a blanket drive conducted by a Boston College student. Guests were sheltered on a walk-in basis and by referral from FirstStep vans. The Cambridge Police offered ongoing support, although there were no incidents requiring their response. From 19 to 23 adults utilized these resources each of the four nights, all men except for one woman who was part of a couple. Anecdotally some guests indicated that the extreme cold was the only reason they agreed to spend the night in a shelter, and even the low threshold requirements for utilizing this shelter posed difficulties for some. Although clearly this resource was needed and appreciated, shelters cannot be sustained with purely volunteer support and there are no plans to open this facility on an ongoing basis.

Primary care and mental health services are available to homeless individuals in Cambridge at multiple venues. Health Care for the Homeless, a program of the Cambridge Health Alliance, operates walk-in clinics at the Salvation Army shelter, the CASPAR Emergency Service Center, and Bread & Jams. This multidisciplinary team of physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, and social workers also provides medical care to homeless individuals on the streets of Cambridge and Somerville.

Last year, Health Care for the Homeless lost \$40,000 in funding from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. On January 31, 2003, the program will lose another \$65,000 when its Somerville HUD grant expires. At present, the Cambridge Health Alliance is covering the funding loss from the state, and intends to cover the pending loss from HUD.

Homeless individuals can also receive medical care at The Cambridge Hospital or at the Alliance's six neighborhood health centers in Cambridge. Homeless elders can receive health care at the Alliance's Senior Health Center.

Homeless youth and young adults in Cambridge primarily access health care at the Sidney Borum Jr. Health Center in Boston and from the Bridge Over Troubled Waters mobile medical van in Harvard Square. It is believed that few homeless or runaway youth (ages 13 to 17) seek care at the Alliance's Teen Health Center or The Cambridge Hospital emergency room for fear of being questioned and possibly turned into the Department of Social Services or the Department of Youth Services.

The Department of Human Service Programs convenes a monthly meeting of homeless service providers and current or former consumers of homeless services. These Homeless Planning meetings are a vehicle for service coordination and improvement as well planning for future initiatives.



Ronnie Watson
Police Commissioner

City of Cambridge *Police Department*

TELEPHONE
(617) 349-3300

FAX
(617) 349-3320

WEB
www.cambridgepolice.org

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RECEIVED
2003 JAN 28 PM 1:12
OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

Cristina Beamud, Esq.
Legal Advisor

David J. Degou
Superintendent

Michael D. Giacoppo
Deputy Superintendent

Timothy F. McCusker
Deputy Superintendent

Thomas F. O'Connor
Deputy Superintendent

Garfield Morrison, Jr.
Deputy Superintendent

Christina Giacobbe
*Director of Planning,
Budget & Personnel*

Lt. J. Michael Walsh
Community Relations

Lt. Christopher Burke
Quality Control

Officer Frank Pasquarello
Aide to the Commissioner

January 27, 2003

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

Re: Council Order # 14

Sir:

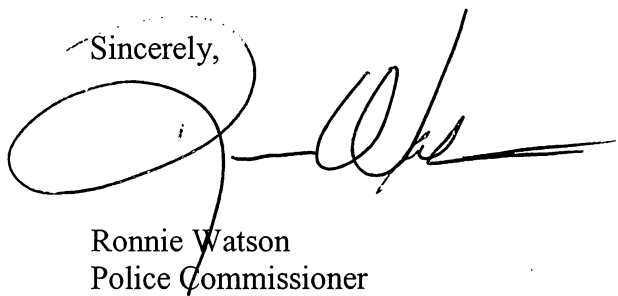
The Cambridge Police has been active in trying to care for the homeless population and are aware of the dangers associated with the bitter cold weather and the vulnerability of the homeless population during the winter. We continue to remind our officers at roll calls to check on those individuals whom they know are homeless and to offer assistance in obtaining shelter. In addition, the department will allow individuals to sit in the lobby to get warm if they maintain themselves accordingly. Bread and Jams reached out to the police, reminding them that they are available to shelter sober homeless persons. This has been a valuable resource. Many homeless persons avoid shelters and are resistant to the offers made to them to provide shelter. However, police officers make every attempt to persuade the homeless to enter a shelter during the cold weather.

Additionally, M.G.L. c. 111B, §8 allows police officers to take into custody any person who is incapacitated by alcohol. The Cambridge Police Department detained persons pursuant to this statute twelve times since January 1, 2003. One of these people was in custody three times during this month. This person was barred from the CASPAR shelter at 240 Albany Street. This remedy is available only when the person is incapacitated by alcohol.

The Cambridge Police Department employs walking beats twenty-four hours per day in Harvard and Central Squares. The officers are familiar with the problem and the homeless persons who frequent their assigned patrol areas. Every effort is made to check on the well being of the homeless during the cold weather and to provide medical transportation, assistance to get to shelters, and to detain the person, if appropriate, in order to avoid exacerbating any mental or physical health problems

Please feel free to call me if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ronnie Watson', written over a large, loopy initial 'R'.

Ronnie Watson
Police Commissioner



3.

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Robert W. Healy, City Manager

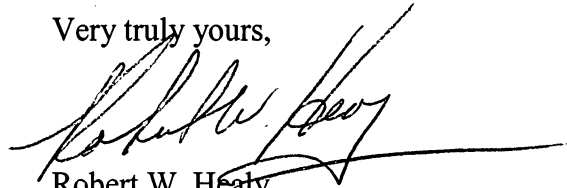
Richard C. Rossi, Deputy City Manager

February 3, 2003

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find attached a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 03-11, regarding a report on coordinated efforts to prevent and deal with Cambridge homelessness problems, received from Assistant City Manager for Human Services Jill Herold, Chief Public Health Officer Harold Cox and Police Commissioner Ronnie Watson.

Very truly yours,



Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec
Attachments

S-40

Consent Agenda #3

Awaiting Report Item Number

03-11, regarding a report on coordinated efforts to prevent and deal with Cambridge homelessness problems.

In City Council February 3, 2003

**REFERRED TO HOUSING
COMMITTEE ON MOTION OF
COUNCILLOR GALLUCCIO.**

2-5-03
copy sent
mc