



Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission
Thursday, February 13, 2025
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM
Virtual

Minutes

Attending Commission Members:

Peter Koutoujian, Sheriff, Middlesex Sheriff's Office, Co-Chair
Danna Mauch, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, Co-Chair
Roy Frost, Chief of Police, Billerica Police Department
Deirdre Calvert, DPH Bureau of Substance Addiction Services
Paula M. Carey, former Chief Justice of the Trial Court
Lydia Conley, Association for Behavioral Healthcare
Audrey Shelto, Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation
Scott Taberner, Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Staff:

Kevin Maccioli, Middlesex Sheriff's Office
Jacqueline Hubbard, National Alliance for Mental Illness of Massachusetts
Matthew Broderick, Department of Mental Health
Michael Kane, ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School
Chelsea Thomson, ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School
Jacqueline Richards, ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School

Invited Attendees:

Jean Yang, Vinfen
Myra Sessions, Vinfen
Kim Shellenberger, Vinfen
Joshua Nye, Vinfen
Sophie Hansen, Vinfen
David Brown, Vinfen
T.J. Winick, Essex Strategies

Welcome and Roll Call

- Co-Chair Danna Mauch welcomed attendees and opened the meeting. Chelsea Thomson completed a roll call of Commission members.

Approval of Minutes from Last Meeting

- Danna Mauch accepted a motion made by Audrey Shelto and seconded by Scott Taberner to approve the meeting minutes from the last meeting held on October 28, 2024. Chelsea Thomson conducted a vote of the yeas and nays. All those present and voting voted in the affirmative. The Commission approved the meeting minutes.

Vinfen Implementation Updates

- Kim Shellenberger shared the significant progress made on the Center since the Commission last met.
 - **Facility update**
 - The City of Lowell Planning Board approved the building design in December 2024.
 - Spectrum, who is purchasing the building and leasing a floor to Vinfen, finalized the purchase in December. The floor plan was completed and Vinfen is working with an architect and engineer to finalize construction plans.
 - Vinfen plans to solicit bids for general contractors in March and simultaneously pull all necessary permits from the city, with the goal to start construction in April 2025.
 - **Respite update**
 - The Department of Mental Health (DMH) awarded Vinfen the contract for mobile and site-based respite services in January 2025. Mobile respite will launch in Spring 2025 and work with people to help develop coping and symptom management skills while in the community. Josh Nye confirmed there will be 10 beds at the Center and 10 mobile beds so Vinfen can serve 20 individuals at a time for up to 30 days.
 - As one of the first Restoration Center programmatic pieces to launch, mobile respite will integrate with existing services such as the CBHC and crisis management/mobile crisis to help individuals avoid the emergency department or interaction with law enforcement.
 - Scott Taberner and Danna Mauch acknowledged the Department of Mental Health's commitment to these beds, expressing gratitude to Commissioner Brooke Doyle, Regional Director Sue Wing, Nancy Connolly, and Matthew Broderick.
 - Chief Frost expressed interest in understanding how mobile respite will work, who will identify people who might need the service, and how individuals will be referred to it, specifically as it relates to coordination with local law enforcement. The respite service at the Restoration Center allows for "street referrals", rather than requiring individuals to be DMH

clients, to connect people seeking support at the CBHC, mobile crisis intervention, and those stepping down from other treatments such as hospitals or detox.

- Josh Nye will work with Chief Frost and other law enforcement leaders to better understand how to coordinate both respite services.
- Paula Carey sought clarification on how individuals will be connected/transported to respite care when they are in crisis. The Restoration Center will provide transportation and pick up people in the community if they meet service criteria.
- **Care Coordination**
 - Recognizing that some community members seeking Vinfen care coordination services don't have the "right" insurance yet have similar needs to those who receive support covered by insurance, Vinfen will leverage Restoration Center funds to support a full-time case worker. This staff member will provide care coordination for people who have behavioral health needs and/or social determinants of health barriers but are not eligible for or engaged in existing longer-term coordination programs, often due to not meeting insurance requirements.
 - The community health worker will support approximately 20 people per month and assist with housing applications, cash assistance, behavioral health appointments, and/or recovery change support.

Communication Plan Discussion

- Vinfen formed a communications workgroup to ensure the entities supporting the Restoration Center are aligned on messaging and coordinating efforts. The workgroup involves staff from Vinfen, Spectrum, the Middlesex Sheriff's Office, Executive Office of Health and Human Services, ForHealth Consulting, and Senator Friedman's Office.
- The communications workgroup created a workplan that outlines the following objectives:
 - Promote new services
 - Educate the public about the Restoration Center
 - Engage provider stakeholders across the continuum
 - Promote accessibility and awareness of services among individuals living with behavioral health challenges
 - Inform and update state appointed and elected officials
 - Stay apprised of philanthropic/development opportunities
- The workplan includes a timeline of goals by month and considerations for program branding.
- Vinfen finalized a job posting for a community relations specialist role, to be posted in March 2025, to build and foster new and existing relationships in Lowell. This role will support the Restoration Center and CBHC directors in their respective work.
- To recognize Mental Health awareness month in May, the communications working group is developing a plan to host an event to announce 10 Technology Drive as the location for the Center.

- The communications group discussed a proposed branding title of “Restoration Center of Middlesex County, a Vinfen Program”. This title reflects that it is not a program operated by the state or county and lends itself to future replication in other parts of the Commonwealth. Spectrum expressed interest in co-branding.
- Sheriff Peter Koutoujian requested that leadership meet to discuss co-branding before further discussion.
- Audrey Shelto posed a question regarding whether the name “Restoration Center” would appropriately reflect the available services and be meaningful to the public. Leadership will also discuss this question before the next Commission meeting.

Contract Extension Update

- To reflect the work to date, evolving program design, and facility opening delay, Vinfen revised their budget and provided projected budgets for a 6-month and 12-month extension.
- Vinfen and Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) leadership discussed budget projections and agreed to extend the contract for a year, through June 30, 2028, and increase the contract budget by approximately \$250,000. This extended period will provide additional time to provide services and demonstrate the efficacy of the program.

Funding Update and Discussion of Potential Grant Opportunity

- Scott Taberner reiterated that the involved entities continue to ensure there is appropriate funding for the pilot and opportunities to sustain the model and/or significant pieces of it. Senator Friedman has served as the legislative champion, allocating annual appropriations, in addition to the SAMHSA earmark that Representative Trahan secured and the APRA funding.
- After demonstrating how the Restoration Center’s services aligned with the Opioid Recovery and Remediation Fund’s (ORRF) priorities, Secretary Walsh and Undersecretary Mahaniah allocated \$1 million in each FY26 and FY27. An ISA is forthcoming.
- Sophie Hansen emailed Senators Warren and Markey’s offices for an update on the congressionally directed spending request but given the uncertainty at the federal level, there are no updates at this time.
- The Department of Mental Health will reimburse Vinfen for respite bed costs, starting in Spring 2025 with mobile respite and transitioning into a blended model once the residential beds open in February 2026.
- Scott Taberner presented the budget forecast, including FY28 costs. The amount needed to secure, approximately \$7.5M, did not significantly change with the additional year of service and reflects a marginal increase of approximately \$250,000.
- Chelsea Thomson provided an overview of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Connect and Protect Solicitation that aligned with the goals of the Restoration Center. The opportunity was posted in January but taken down prior to the Commission meeting. As solicitations are reposted, they will be shared with the Commission.

Working Group Updates and Next Steps

- Vinfen and ForHealth Consulting teams have met bi-weekly for the past several months to discuss the research and evaluation plan. Upon finalizing a draft plan and metrics, the Commission members who expressed interest in participating in the working group will convene.
- The Sober Support Services working group, comprised of Danna Mauch, Dee Calvert, and Jonna Hopwood of ABH, met in January to discuss the program description and design. The group will continue to meet on this topic.
- Scott Taberner proposed a third working group, Funding/Sustainability Working Group. The working group will help the Commission address the \$7.5 million needed to fund the remainder of the contract and brainstorm sustainability pathways. The working group is seeking 3-4 Commission members for a 4-hour time commitment.

Next Steps

- Discuss Vinfen's branding proposal during the next leadership meeting.
- Chelsea Thomson will monitor the BJA grant solicitations and notify the Commission of appropriate opportunities.
- Chelsea Thomson will reach out to those who indicated their interest in joining the Research and Evaluation Working Group in the coming weeks to schedule a meeting.
- Chelsea Thomson and Scott Taberner will send an email with more information on the proposed Funding/Sustainability Working Group.
- The next Commission meeting will be scheduled in May and an invite is forthcoming.

Adjournment

- Co-Chair Danna Mauch accepted a motion made by Lydia Conley and seconded by Scott Taberner to adjourn the meeting. Danna Mauch conducted a vote of the yeas and nays. All those present and voting voted in the affirmative. The meeting was adjourned.