



Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission

Monday, October 28, 2024

10:30 AM – 11:30 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
Cindy Friedman, Senator – 4th Middlesex
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
Nancy Connolly, Department of Mental Health

Staff:

Kevin Maccioli, Middlesex Sheriff's Office
Liz Berman, Senator Friedman's Office
Meaghan Dupuis, ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School
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
Liz Ganz, Association for Behavioral Healthcare

Invited Attendees:

Jean Yang, Vinfen
Myra Sessions, Vinfen
Kim Shellenberger, Vinfen
Joshua Nye, Vinfen
Sophie Hansen, Vinfen

Welcome and Roll Call

Co-Chairs, Sheriff Koutoujian and Danna Mauch

- Co-Chair Sheriff Koutoujian welcomed attendees and opened the meeting. Sheriff Koutoujian greeted the Commission and completed a roll call of Commission members.
- Jean Yang introduced the Vinfen team and welcomed Joshua Nye to the group as the Executive Director for the Restoration Center. Joshua joined Vinfen in April and is a licensed mental health counselor who previously served as the Director of Behavioral Health at Charles River Community Health in Brighton.

Approval of Minutes from Last Meeting

Co-Chairs, Sheriff Koutoujian and Danna Mauch

- Sheriff Koutoujian accepted a motion made by Senator Friedman and seconded by Scott Taberner to approve the meeting minutes from the last meeting held on January 29, 2024. Sheriff Koutoujian conducted a vote of the yeas and nays. All those present and voting voted in the affirmative. The Commission approved the meeting minutes.

Feedback on and Approval of Annual Commission Report

Co-Chairs, Sheriff Koutoujian and Danna Mauch

- The annual Commission report reflects the work of the Commission and accomplishments of Vinfen, HMA, and ForHealth Consulting over the past year. As required in the legislative mandate for the Commission, ForHealth Consulting will submit the report to the respective entities by November 1.
- Sheriff Koutoujian accepted a motion made by Senator Friedman and seconded by Audrey Shelto to approve the annual Commission report. Sheriff Koutoujian conducted a vote of the yeas and nays. All those present and voting voted in the affirmative. The Commission approved the Annual report.

Lessons Learned from National Sobering Collaborative Summit

Joshua Nye and Chelsea Thomson

- Chelsea Thomson and Joshua Nye attended the National Sobering Collaborative Annual Summit in Houston, TX. The National Sobering Collaborative is a national organization that represents sobering centers across the country. One of the components of the Restoration Center and a new innovative model for Massachusetts are the Sober Support Services. The space will be a place for individuals who have active substances in their system but are not yet ready for the next level of care. Individuals can access the services as frequently as they wish and will be connected to recovery specialists.
- Chelsea Thomson shared an overview of the conference, and a few unique concepts shared from other centers. Joshua Nye and Chelsea Thomson noted staffing and case management approaches from other centers and the benefits that co-locating many of the Restoration Center services will have, a model that is unique in comparison to other sobering centers.

- One innovative idea that a center in California used is an amnesty box where individuals can discard any items they do not want, with no questions asked, and is securely destroyed by law enforcement.
- Dee Calvert provided information on how amnesty boxes are currently utilized in Massachusetts. Individuals can place items they do not want on their person or are prohibited from bringing when entering a location for services. These items are locked and when the person leaves the facility, they can access the items. This model reduces the barrier to care by ensuring individuals have access to the items that keep them safe.
- Commission members discussed different models associated with storing an individual's personal belongings, such as clean needles and cigarettes, while accessing services. Sheriff Koutoujian recommended exploring options for storing and/or discarding of different types of personal items. Vinfen is actively working on a process, and will keep the Commission apprised of opportunities for input.
- During the conference, Chelsea Thomson and Joshua Nye toured the [Houston Recovery Center](#) to understand how staff welcome and engage individuals into the Center and the forms that they collect.
- Joshua Nye shared that many other centers see timely access to case management resources as a critical piece to success and the impacts of embedded case managers. Sheriff Koutoujian discussed the integral piece that navigators and embedded staff play in case management for individuals leaving a carceral facility and the challenges of external, third-party staff in these roles. For the Restoration Center, Joshua indicated that the model heavily relies on in-house staff and programs for case management support, including the Community Support Program (CSP), and emphasized that no individual will leave the Restoration Center without access to case management.

Update of Restoration Center Progress and Discussion

Vinfen

- Jean Yang opened the presentation, discussing the progress to date and expressed appreciation to Commission leadership and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services for ongoing collaboration.
- Kim Shellenberger provided an overview of Vinfen's work and the progress on key workstreams.
 - **Facilities**
 - Vinfen secured a location for the Restoration Center, two miles from its Community Behavioral Health Center. Spectrum will be co-located and adding significant new capacity to support community members with substance use disorder by creating 16 Acute Treatment Services (ATS) beds and 46 Clinical Stabilization Services (CSS) beds in Lowell. Spectrum and Vinfen developed respective floor plans and will work through the city approval process, including a public meeting.
 - Vinfen anticipated opening the Restoration Center in February 2026.
 - **Clinical Specifications and Operations**
 - Vinfen continued to develop clinical workflows and form set for its electronic health record and aims to complete this task by September 2025.
 - **Stakeholder Engagement**

- Vinfen participated in several calls with similar centers across the country, visited the Living Room Crisis Center in Portland, ME, and met regularly with Spectrum, Lowell General, EMS, and Homeless Outreach groups.
- Vinfen expressed gratitude for the support of Sheriff Koutoujian and Chief Frost in engaging law enforcement, including a recent presentation at the Middlesex County Chiefs of Police Association meeting.
- **Provision of Services**
 - Kim Shellenberger shared Vinfen's focus on services that can be provided ahead of the 2026 building opening date. Earlier this year, Vinfen launched care coordination services, based at the CBHC, for Restoration Center aligned populations, by providing access to care coordinators and mental health clinicians.
 - Vinfen started a situation table in May, where 20 organizations in the community meet to discuss high risk individuals and develop a community-based plan to serve them.
 - Vinfen applied and engaged in contract negotiations with DMH for 10 new respite beds/mobile respite at the CBHC, which will transfer over to the Restoration Center in 2026.
- **Financial Planning & Sustainability**
 - Kim Shellenberger expressed appreciation to Senator Friedman and other legislative leaders for the \$1.5 million annual appropriation for the Restoration Center in FY25.
 - Vinfen applied for \$1.5 million in congressional directed spending and Senators Markey and Warren subsequently submitted a request for \$544,000 in the budget that is dependent on federal budget approval.
 - Vinfen and EOHHS continued to explore the viability of Opioid Remediation Recovery funding.

Overview of Upcoming Commission Working Groups

Scott Taberner and Chelsea Thomson

- Scott Taberner discussed the importance of leveraging the expansive expertise of the Commission members to inform program design via two working groups, outlined below. Groups will work virtually with the goal to meet before the end of the year.
 - **Sober Support Services Working Group:** As a new and innovative program within Massachusetts, this working group will review and provide feedback on the draft Sober Support Services program description that Vinfen developed. The goal of this working group is to ensure that the program aligns with promising practices and the Commission's vision.
 - **Research and Evaluation Plan Working Group:** ForHealth Consulting will conduct an evaluation of the Restoration Center to understand utilization of services and impact. To ensure the plan and metrics reflect pieces that are most relevant to the narrative about the Restoration Center, this group will review and provide feedback on the plan developed by ForHealth Consulting, Vinfen, and EOHHS.

Next Steps

Co-Chairs, Sheriff Koutoujian and Danna Mauch

- Commission members interested in participating in either or both working groups should reach out to Chelsea Thomson.
- Chelsea Thomson will submit the annual Commission report to the Legislature by November 1st.
- Vinfen and Sheriff Koutoujian will connect to discuss engaging with the Lowell City Manager.

Adjournment

Co-Chairs, Sheriff Koutoujian and Danna Mauch

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