



**Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission**  
**Monday, January 29, 2024**  
**1:00 PM – 2:00 PM**  
**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 – 4<sup>th</sup> District  
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:

David Ryan, Middlesex Sheriff's Office  
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

Invited speakers:

Jean Yang, Vinfen  
Annette Kovamees, Vinfen  
Myra Sessions, Vinfen  
Kim Shellenberger, Vinfen  
David Brown, Vinfen  
Peggy Johnson, Vinfen

Jeanne Russo, Vinfen

**Additional attendees:**

Lisa Braude, (Health Management Associates) HMA  
Amanda Maynard, HMA  
Raisa Alam, HMA  
Liz Ganz, Association for Behavioral Healthcare  
Norma Wassel, MSW, LICSW

1:00 PM – 1:10 PM

**Welcome and Introductions**

*Co-Chairs, Sheriff Koutoujian and Danna Mauch*

- Co-Chair Danna Mauch welcomed attendees and opened the meeting. Sheriff Koutoujian greeted the Vinfen team and completed a roll call of Commission members.
- Sheriff Koutoujian introduced the newest member of the Commission, Chief Roy Frost of the Billerica Police Department. With a proven record of success in diversion efforts, Chief Frost joined the Commission in October 2023 following Chief Lester Baker's appointment to the Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Commission.

**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 Audrey Shelto to approve the meeting minutes from the last meeting held on August 30, 2023. 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.

1:10 PM – 1:15 PM

**East Boston Neighborhood Health Center Discussion**

*Senator Cindy Friedman*

- Senator Friedman provided insight into a conversation she had with staff from the [East Boston Neighborhood Health Center](#). The Center is operating an urgent behavioral health care unit that is open 24 hours a day and supports police and EMS drop-offs. People experiencing a behavioral health emergency can access treatment and the Center can administer medications.
- Senator Friedman and Chelsea Thomson will work to schedule a visit for Commission members. Audrey Shelto, Danna Mauch, and Dee Calvert expressed interest in joining the visit.

1:15 PM – 1:40 PM

**Presentation from Selected Vendor to Operate the Restoration Center**

*Vinfen*

- Scott Taberner, Jean Yang, and Kim Shellenberger recognized the impactful and thoughtful work that each of the partners and the Commission has undertaken to reach this milestone.
- Kim Shellenberger provided an overview of Vinfen. Founded in 1977, it is the largest community mental health provider in Massachusetts, with a \$270 million annual operating budget. Vinfen has four core services:
  - Outpatient behavioral health services, including the Community Behavioral Health Centers (CBHCs) in Lowell,
  - Day programs and drop-in centers, including clubhouses and peer-led recovery centers,
  - Community supports and care coordination, such as Adult Community Clinical Services (ACCS) teams and Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) teams, and
  - Residential programs.
- Vinfen has operated in Lowell for over a decade, serving over 2,500 people across 21 locations. Primary services in the Lowell community include residential, behavioral health, and community support. These, among other services, reflect the continuum of care that Vinfen provides to the Merrimack Valley, ranging from preventative to longer term care.
- Vinfen leveraged the research the Commission undertook and existing service capacity to develop a framework for Restoration Center services that will create new pathways to serve the anticipated population. By balancing existing services and the concern of potentially duplicating services, Restoration Center services will be provided across three locations:
  - Restoration Center location (to be determined)
  - Community Behavioral Health Center located at 391 Varnum Ave, and
  - Casa Esperanza at Tewksbury Hospital for Acute Treatment Services (ATS) and Clinical Stabilization Services (CSS).
- The CBHC accepts first responder drop-offs and offers crisis intervention services, adult/youth community crisis stabilization, urgent outpatient visits, medication management, MOUD initiation, and care coordination. Under this model, ATS/CSS services at Casa Esperanza will be expanded to operate 24/7 and beds will be reserved to offer guaranteed access to Restoration Center clients.
- Vinfen will also apply to the Department of Mental Health to create 10 respite beds at the Restoration Center location. This location will also include space for law enforcement drop-offs, a living room, and sober support beds.
- Supporting this framework is a strong, integrated care coordination model across locations as well as peer support to help individuals navigate their care.
- Over the past few months, Vinfen conducted a search for a potential site for the Restoration Center in the greater Lowell area and identified one that meets the requirements for the Center. The building is approximately 60,000 square feet, which exceeds the necessary space for the Center after developing a draft floor plan. Vinfen is in active conversations with other organizations who could sub-lease the space.
- Implementation will be completed in three phases, depending on factors such as the timing of the facility lease and service requirements, following this timeline:
  - Initial implementation and program planning (approximately month 5)

- Program development period (approximately month 6-12)
  - Readiness and final preparations (approximately month 12-16)
- Vinfen anticipates rolling out services according to the timeline below:
  - Available now: care coordination for people with behavioral health conditions and justice involvement
  - In development: referral pathway from CBHC to Casa Esperanza's ATS and CSS
  - 15 months after facility lease: triage and medical clearance, sober support beds, respite beds, and living room (contingent on funding)
- EOHHS, Commission members, HMA, and ForHealth are working with Vinfen to identify areas for collaboration, including understanding best practices, clarification of regulatory issues, siting and tenants, defining evaluation specifications and metrics, and sustainability planning.

1:40 PM – 1:55 PM

### **Discussion with Vinfen**

- Following the presentation, Chief Frost and Senator Friedman both posed questions about the feasibility and regulatory pieces of ambulance drop-off at the Restoration Center.
- Senator Friedman also expressed interest in learning more about the ways in which Vinfen intends to coordinate services across the CBHC and Restoration Center to ensure individuals and first responders understand where to access support and how to reduce overlap across services.
- Jeanne Russo discussed Vinfen's framework that leverages the services and capabilities that currently exist to ensure resources aren't unnecessarily duplicated. The model will advance a "no wrong door" approach to connect individuals to care regardless of the location they arrive at, and the locations will work closely together. Both locations will assess individuals upon entry to ensure the CBHC and Restoration Center are appropriate levels of care. If appropriate, staff will provide support that addresses an individual's needs at the location they entered or transport them to the other location.
- Building on the framework, Peggy Johnson shared that the two locations represent a continuum of care for individuals who may present with mental health, substance use, or co-occurring diagnoses. Staff at both the Restoration Center and CBHC will be trained in supporting dual diagnoses while recognizing the unique capacity of each location. The Restoration Center builds upon the capabilities of the CBHC to provide more access to substance use services and support individuals impacted by the criminal legal system as a diversion option from the ED or jail. Currently, if an individual presents at the CBHC with criminal justice involvement and under the influence of substances that manifests as psychiatric conditions, the CBHC cannot appropriately manage this need and would transfer an individual to the emergency department.
- Co-Chair Danna Mauch reflected on the work the Commission undertook to prevent a duplication of capacity. Some of the elements of the Restoration Center, including community crisis stabilization (CCS) beds, are currently provided in the CBHC, which has a smaller geographic service area than the Restoration Center. Danna expressed interest in understanding any potential plans Vinfen have developed if volume exceeds current capacity.

- Jeanne Russo shared, and Lydia Conley confirmed, the demand for CCS beds has not exceeded capacity and utilization is low, less than 60%. Vinfen is hesitant to build more beds in the initial design but has space to expand and will add more beds if the volume supports an increase.
- While recognizing that CBHCs did not exist when the Commission developed the Restoration Center model as a “one-stop shop” and now will be implemented slightly differently to accommodate the CBHC services, Senator Friedman expressed some concern about any bifurcation of services between substance use disorder and mental health conditions. The two locations pose a challenge as it may cause confusion for first responders and individuals on the appropriate location to visit and if individuals must be transported between locations, people may decide to decline treatment.
  - Peggy Johnson agreed that information on which site to visit must be clear and that, regardless of which location individuals arrive at first, staff at both locations will immediately respond to their need. Neither location has absolute capacity to meet the total spectrum of behavioral health needs and will therefore complement one another to better serve more individuals.
- Chief Justice Paula Carey echoed Senator Friedman and indicated interest in learning about the assessment process upon arrival and how the decision will be made to serve someone at the CBHC or Restoration Center depending on their substance use, mental health, or co-occurring conditions. Additionally, Chief Justice Carey requested clarity on the diversion aspects of the Center and how to prevent individuals from becoming further embedded in the criminal legal system.
  - Peggy Johnson confirmed that individuals who have criminal legal system involvement can access services at the Restoration Center and CBHC. Peggy indicated that Vinfen is preparing for a new capacity to manage individuals who are dropped off by police and acutely intoxicated as that capability is not currently provided.
  - Myra Sessions shared that Vinfen sees the Restoration Center and CBHC as two front doors to the larger continuum of care that Vinfen offers, where people can arrive and police can drop-off at either location. Regardless of the location on arrival, staff will conduct the medical clearance and triage process for all individuals and use that information to determine needs and develop a treatment plan.

1:55PM – 2:00PM

### **Next Steps**

- As Vinfen searches for sub-tenants for the potential Center site, Commission members are encouraged to consider and share any organizations that may be well-suited for the space.
- Chelsea Thomson will work with Senator Friedman to schedule a visit to [East Boston Neighborhood Health Center](#) and share the invite with Commission members who expressed interest in attending.
- Commission members are invited to tour the potential Center location on February 14. Chelsea Thomson will share a calendar invite with the details.

**Adjournment**

*Co-Chairs, Sheriff Koutoujian and Danna Mauch*

- Co-Chair Sheriff Koutoujian accepted a motion made by Paula Carey and seconded by Lydia Conley 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.