



**Middlesex County Restoration Center
Tuesday, April 28, 2020
3 – 5 pm
Zoom**

MINUTES

Attendees: Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian, co-chair; Danna Mauch, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, co-chair; Senator Cindy Friedman; Representative Kenneth Gordon; Judge Rosemary Minehan; Nancy Connolly, Department of Mental Health; Jim Cremer (representing Jennifer Barrelle), Department of Public Health; Deirdre Calvert, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services; Mandy Gilman, Association for Behavioral Health; Eliza Williamson, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Massachusetts; Tim Burton, NAMI Massachusetts; David Ryan, Middlesex Sheriff's Office (MSO); Catia Sharp, MSO.

3:00 PM: WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Sheriff Koutoujian called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda.

3:05 PM: LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Representative Gordon gave a legislative update. The first formal session is coming up on Thursday. People who want to go in person can, but it is discouraged. Otherwise, formal session will vote by phone relay. The budget from the House won't happen until July, with budget amendments happening after that. Sessions will be streamed internally among members.

3:15 PM: APPROVING THE MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING

Sheriff Koutoujian motioned to approve the minutes from the last meeting.

Representative Gordon seconded.

Sheriff Koutoujian asked for all of those in favor, and then all of those opposed. The vote was unanimous in favor of approving the minutes from the last meeting.

3:20 PM: DISCUSSION OF CONSULTANT REPORT

Mandy Gilman asked whether the costs will ramp up, and over what period of time, given the likelihood of a challenging state budget year.

Danna Mauch said that the task was to create an annual operational budget. We can assume a startup budget that is phased in from there.

Catia gave a refresher on the overview of the considerations around geographic regions of the state included in the report.

Danna Mauch talked about putting the restoration center into a region that doesn't have robust resources.

Sheriff Koutoujian asked the group if they might narrow it down to 2 regions as options.

Danna Mauch thought the group could eliminate one region.

Jim Cremer added that potential bidders will help to pick a specific site – you want the procurement to be more general.

Danna Mauch said that we want to develop selection criteria based on the regions.

Mandy Gilman added that ABH doesn't have an opinion on the location, but would support a strong relationship with ESP being a major factor in the procurement.

Scott Taberner said that the ESP system must be re-procured in the next couple of years. He suggested the group speak with Dan Tsai at MassHealth in order to not miss any connections to the work they are doing on the broader delivery system. He also thought there would be some value in narrowing down to two regional options, and suggested that Lowell has a lot of appeal with there being significant need in the Merrimack Valley.

Sheriff Koutoujian added that Lowell is the biggest contributor to those incarcerated/detained at the jail.

Judge Minehan added that the Lowell numbers are extremely high from a court perspective as well.

Danna Mauch said she appreciates the need to take a broader approach, and wants to narrow in on the procurement criteria. Danna asked Nancy Connolly and Deirdre Calvert if they had any thoughts on that.

Nancy Connolly said that the Lowell court clinic is overwhelmed, and that the community is clearly underserved and desperately in need of services. Lowell has the highest number of fatal drug overdoses of any drug court in the state. She added that, at this point, DMH is COVID-focused, and they haven't been able to bring this up internally. She agreed that it would be important to have a discussion with leadership at EOHHS and DMH.

Deirdre Calvert added that overdose data shows that Lowell is an important area to explore. She thought the procurement should emphasize partnership with the ESP/city/etc.

Eliza Williamson said that in general, families that NAMI works with are thrilled to hear about the restoration center and want to know more. She has less to say about a particular geography or region – each identified area has a strong NAMI affiliate organization, which could be an asset. NAMI wants to do what they can to help get funding approved.

Tim Burton added that the decision about where to place the center should be where it has the greatest chance for success. Lowell has the potential to be very successful.

Danna Mauch asked Representative Gordon if he has been hearing from constituents or colleagues about the restoration center.

Representative Gordon responded that the legislature is very interested, as are Middlesex County colleagues. But he emphasized that we are headed into fiscally perilous times. Lowell seems to have a lot of need; the costs are higher in the Southeast part of the county. He sees no particular reason not to focus on Lowell, especially since we might get more for our dollar there.

Danna Mauch asked Sonya Khan if there was anything to add.

Sonya Khan said that the Data-Driven Justice Project is still working on their analyses, and hope to have more to say in the coming months.

Mandy Gilman said that a narrow geography limits the potential bidders for the project, and to keep that in mind.

Danna Mauch said we might not get to the procurement this year due to the budget situation.

Scott Taberner said that would provide more time to work with MassHealth and others to change the ESP program, and align this resource through the re-procurement. Scott recommends seeking an opportunity ASAP to talk to the Commissioners, Secretary, etc.

Danna Mauch said that coming out of COVID, we are going to see even more clearly the need to manage people's behavioral health outside of jail settings. We have to make diversion from jail a priority.

Sheriff Koutoujian said that the world will be a very different place after this.

Eliza Williamson asked if it was too soon to know if there would be recidivism from COVID?

Sheriff Koutoujian responded that the Middlesex Sheriff's Office has been decarcerating and is now down to 605 in total population – they haven't been below 800 in years. They put some people out on bracelets, which is completely within his discretion as Sheriff. Otherwise, the Supreme Judicial Court and the District Attorneys have to change bails and other things to release people. It is too soon to know the effect of this, but he is hearing about people overdosing upon release, which is unfortunate. The biggest challenge is finding placements for people – they are having people assault officers on their way out because they are frightened and agitated about having nowhere to go (maybe their mom doesn't want to take them in because of the virus, for example). We need to wait to find out how decarceration is affecting people and the public safety of the community.

Nancy Connolly added that the police aren't looking as hard for Section 35's because it is harder to get evaluations now.

Sheriff Koutoujian thought there was a commonality of opinion about Lowell as a potential region for a restoration center.

Danna Mauch said that the sense from the group is that Lowell is a priority, but that perhaps the procurement could cast a broader net.

Scott Taberner thought there would be an opportunity to recommend that this resource interact with MassHealth reforms that are ongoing. This is even more important now than we thought a year ago. People are going to be looking for a solution at the legislative and Governor's levels.

Jim Cremer said that DPH regulations are being looked at as part of a behavioral health redesign process at EOHHS. They are looking at flexibility for ATS and CSS step-down, and looking to align with larger developments in the system.

Mandy Gilman thought that it would not make sense to make administrative and regulatory changes until we know what the program looks like. She warned of overreach.

Danna Mauch asked Catia Sharp to review the transportation proposals.

Catia Sharp reviewed the transportation options from the Advocates report and the pros and cons of each.

Danna Mauch thought we would need a combination of options to do diversion effectively. On the front end, we should be working to minimize the use of police vehicles and ambulances. She thought we might wait to decide on the use of Via to see what the unique needs and preferences are in a particular region.

Scott Taberner said that in Tucson, they continuously emphasized that police are supportive of bringing people to care specifically because of the limited amount of time officers have. Police saw the value in using the center. Would some of the police concern about cruiser dropoff go away if we could prove that this would be a speedy dropoff? There also might be a lack of understanding generally among officers of the potential in a restoration center.

Representative Gordon agreed about Tucson. He said that in the beginning, there was reluctance, but it melted away as they see the no wrong door attitude.

Danna Mauch agreed. She added that the police chief indicated agreement in Arizona with the way the crisis services people were characterizing the relationship. Here, police would need to understand reliability better to get on board.

4:45 PM: SFY 2021 BUDGET REQUEST

Catia Sharp presented three options for budget requests for the next state fiscal year, which were designed to provide our legislative partners with flexibility given the COVID-related fiscal challenges and uncertainty.

Representative Gordon noted that SFY 2022 might also be challenging – we just don't know yet.

Danna Mauch noted that the Commission can ramp up doing some useful things in the meantime.

Catia Sharp shared that Arnold Ventures has finally released its report on crisis centers, which Sonya Khan was kind enough to share.

5:00 PM: NEXT STEPS AND CLOSING

Danna Mauch thanked everyone for a good meeting, and added that in the midst of a pandemic and a related behavioral health pandemic, she was thankful for what each Commission member is doing to help people in the Commonwealth. The meeting was adjourned.