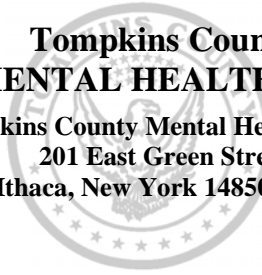


Tompkins County
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BOARD

Tompkins County Mental Health Center
201 East Green Street
Ithaca, New York 14850-5421



Mary Hutchens, Interim - Chair

Ellice Switzer, Vice Chair

Frank Kruppa, Commissioner

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Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee

Stu Bergman, Chair,
Substance Use Subcommittee

Chairs,

Tompkins County Community Mental Health Services Board
201 East Green Street, Ithaca NY 14850
November 7, 2022, 5:30 p.m. Meeting Minutes

Approved 1.9.2023

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UckpJNVbpLLbEbhoDbTIEgSQ>

Present: Mary Hutchens; Jan Lynch; Larry Roberts (Zoom); Stu Bergman (Zoom); Tom Lipa (Zoom); Dorothy Lovelace; Sheila McEnergy; Paula Winner; Ellice Switzer; and Sally McConnell-Ginet

Excused Travis Winter; Dr. Auguste Duplan; and Jessica Conner, PsyD.

Unexcused: Sullymar Pena Vazquez

Legislature: Veronica Pillar

Guests:

Staff: Frank Kruppa, Commissioner; Harmony Ayers-Friedlander, DCS; and Karan Palazzo, LGU Administrative Assistant

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The meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm by Ms. Hutchens. Introductions were made. Ms. McEnergy moved to approve the October 2022 minutes and 2nd by Ms. Winner; all were in favor.
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Privilege of the Floor: None.

Announcements: None.

Interim Chair's Report: Ms. Hutchens added an executive session to the agenda.

Commissioner's Report: Mr. Kruppa stated that the policy the Legislature is looking to adopt is still in the policy review and deliberations process. The Legislature voted unanimously to amend the County Charter to create the single department and we are officially the Tompkins County Whole Health Department. A communications plan is being developed for the start of the new year in January which will launch the new name to the public. The All Staff meeting is scheduled for December 8th, closing both departments to bring them together, similar to the kickoff for the merge in December 2019.

Mr. Kruppa stated that government operations is the committee that is considering the term limit resolution and currently there is no definite proposal for term limits. Mr. Kruppa will update the CSB when he receives any information on the term limits.

Discussion of Disproportionately served Homeless Individuals with Mental Health Issues and/or are Developmentally Disabled living in the Encampment/Jungle: Ms. Hutchens stated that today's meeting will focus on the outcome of a discussion at a Mental Health Subcommittee meeting regarding the issues in the encampment.

Ms. Lynch stated that Mr. Teitelbaum of St. John's Community Services was in attendance and said that 80% of individuals living in the encampment had some type of disability including intellectual/developmental disability, mental health disability,

serious mental illness, substance use issues or combinations of disabilities. Mr. Teitelbaum pointed out that living outdoors, being homeless causes stress and brings on mental health problems including substance use.

Ms. Lynch feels one project (like TIDES, or a few caseworkers) is not going to be the answer because of the myriad individual needs and problems faced by the unhoused people in the ever-spreading encampments. The cost to build campsites is a million dollars and six hundred thousand dollars a year to staff. Ithaca only has a limited number of affordable housing opportunities, with never enough housing. Many who do get housing often lose their housing for various reasons including paperwork process; making/keeping appointments and need intensive supports to relearn community living skills.

Her list of issues that need to be addressed to help the problem is below:

- As reported by Chris, the majority of people who are living in encampments have some type of disability – mental health, substance use, learning disabilities and developmental without supports or services
- Many people living unhoused would not choose to live in a planned encampment like TIDES
- At any given time, Ithaca has a few affordable housing opportunities for the 100+ who are unhoused
- In the rare instance that people get housed, they are not successful in retaining it because they don't have the common life skills to care for a place
- Having been unhoused for long periods of time, many people in the encampment will need intense supports to learn and build skills to live as part of the general community
- Most of the unhoused community find the appointments and paperwork involved in getting financial or other supports too daunting to complete the process
- The encampment has people who are involved in illegal activities – meth labs, human trafficking, burning down other areas in disputes, preying on the majority of people who are just trying to maintain themselves
- The hotel that houses many people when Code Blue is in effect is changing ownership so there may not be a place for people to go in the future
- There is pressure for the development plans near the encampments
- Nearby neighborhoods and businesses are complaining more and more about the problems that they see as a result of the unhoused people

Ms. Lynch said that it is a very complex issue and will need commitment, collaboration, and a long-haul approach by many service providers and county and city involvement, to address ways that the unhoused can live housed and receive all the needed support services to reintegrate into community living.

Mr. Roberts stated that encampment is not a new problem and is expanding. He believes people need to make recommendations the Legislature and Common Council about what would work and what we want to see happen for those homeless in general. He noted that since COVID, many agencies and human services have given more attention but there also needs a group to continue to ensure things are moving along and working with the City of Ithaca and Common Council. He believes the CSB should have some sort of input in the hiring of the new position the county has designated to focus on the issues and concerns.

Mr. Kruppa confirmed that County Administration budgeted for a new position called a homelessness coordinator who will work with community partners to bring solutions for consideration to the legislature. The Legislature put one hundred thousand dollars in a contingent fund for the potential support of projects related to homelessness which the Common Council has matched.

Mr. Kruppa stated that by request from County Administration he participated with the TIDES group as a county representative to share what the county knows, what they can do and to give insight on the county's systems. As he worked with TIDES, he felt strongly in supporting them. He felt their proposal was more of a harm reduction to alleviate some of the human suffering occurring in the encampments, not a solution to the homelessness issue but a step in the right direction. He said, many times projects evolve from the private sector, community-based organizations and non-profits and gave an example of the controversial supervised injection facilities.

Mr. Kruppa said that the Legislature and Common Council need to set policy on what they want to see happen related to homelessness and task department heads, advisory boards, and the community as a whole with finding solutions to that policy approach. He feels that two foundational things need to occur, one being a lower barrier shelter for those who are willing to go; and secondly to make sure that camping is not allowed on public lands once there is an alternative place for people to be.

He said, unfortunately, there will be some individuals that there is no solution for. The smaller the number of people, the more manageable.

Mr. Roberts asked what is the best avenue for the CSB to offer expertise, guidance, and input to the county and to the new homelessness coordinator when hired. Mr. Kruppa believes in continuing to educate yourselves about the experience of the people that live in the encampments and continuing to understand different organizations that support folks in the encampments. He believes that communicating with the new homelessness coordinator and letting the Legislature know you want to be involved and your ideas on how it should be addressed in the county.

Ms. Switzer believes that many people living in the encampment feel it is their home, and have an emotional attachment making them relatively stable. She believes it would be helpful to commission a study that involves the people that are the subjects of the research that can be segmented and once you have the populations segmented, information can be gathered from key informants to dissect the data.

Mr. Kruppa agreed that it would be effective to speak to the people in the encampment that are affected and believes the new homelessness coordinator will be helpful in connecting people with resources as well as outreach workers. Ms. Switzer suggested engaging Cornell students with research projects and writing proposals that have real-world impact. Mr. Kruppa added that the criminal activities in the encampment must also be addressed.

Ms. Lovelace added that Tompkins County has a severe housing crisis. Mr. Kruppa agreed and stated that it is a big issue and the conversation needs to continue.

Ms. Switzer stated that with the interconnectedness of homelessness and the workforce crisis, the director of Workforce Development was invited to the December Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee meeting. They will discuss the workforce crisis in direct support services because DSP workers are unable to afford housing in Tompkins County because of the low wages, which makes it hard to keep those agencies/providers properly and fully staffed. Ms. Switzer believes that involving workforce development, economic development people, and giving tax breaks for SROs who support the people coming out of the encampments or other services will help with housing issues.

Both Ms. Switzer and Ms. Lynch spoke of individuals who left employment prematurely or accepted offers of employment but had to resend their acceptance due to the unaffordable housing in Tompkins County.

Mr. Kruppa noted that children are living in unstable housing, community couching surfing which creates vulnerabilities to substance use disorders, human trafficking, and the sex trade.

Mr. Roberts noted that Libby Barger, Housing Coordinator of the Human Services Coalition will be present at the December Mental Health Subcommittee meeting. Mr. Kruppa responded that the newly budgeted housing coordinator position recruitment process will begin in early 2023. The County Administration and Human Resources is developing the job description. Ms. Hutchens suggested inviting the new housing coordinator when hired. Mr. Roberts suggested the CSB and Subcommittees discuss ideas prior, concerns for the coordinator and will reach out to the other subcommittee chairs.

Ms. Ayers-Friedlander stated that OASAS is looking into more funding for housing as they recognize its relationship to substance use and mental health. She is looking to have an OASAS representative regularly attend the Substance Use Subcommittee meetings.

With there being no further business to discuss, a motion was made to enter into Executive Session for personnel discussions of appointments at 6:55 p.m.; Ms. Lynch 1st/ Ms. Winner 2nd.

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**The Next Community Mental Health Services Board Meeting is
Monday, December 5th, 2022, at 5:30 pm.**