



**MMHTFMC HOUSING FORUM
MEETING NOTES
DECEMBER 13, 2007**

On December 13, 2007, the Mayor’s Mental Health Task Force Monitoring Committee (MMHTFMC) convened a forum to discuss a variety of planning activities related to housing for individuals with behavioral health needs. The Corporation for Supported Housing (CSH) encouraged us to convene this forum, and Kelly Kent, a representative from CSH, attended the meeting to provide technical assistance.

Participants included:

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At the outset of the meeting, Susan Stone, Executive Coordinator of the MMHTFMC acknowledged that there are a number of groups participating in planning around a critical shortage of housing in our community. She also reflected that, while housing is one of the most critical focus areas for the MMHTFMC, it has been difficult to get traction on how to move forward. Participants reflected that this is likely because housing for individuals with behavioral health needs encompasses a broad array of structures, services and supports. It was also noted that, while there are numerous planning groups, none is focusing specifically on this particularly challenging population.

Kelly Kent, from CSH, provided a brief overview of the six building blocks for system change that assists communities in developing and expanding permanent supportive housing. Participants generally agreed that the Austin community has significant appreciation for supportive housing, but that we need more strategies to implement it.

Recommendations that arose from lively discussion included:

- 🚧 Development of a cost study and financial modeling analysis**

It was noted that, while there have been cost estimates in the past around housing needs, none have really taken into account the dollars being spent across all systems due to the lack of affordable housing available. Susan Stone noted that this kind of analysis is similar to a recent Mental Health Jail Diversion Cost Simulation Study done in this community. This Cost Simulation Study looked at a variety of jail diversion scenarios to analyze whether, when looking across all systems that touch justice involved individuals with mental illness, they are cost

effective. This Cost Simulation Model was developed by Human Services Research Institute, or HSRI.

Kelly Kent presented an overview of program and financial modeling that CSH has done for other communities, including some in Texas. This kind of model helps determine and communicate answers to critical issues in planning surrounding supportive housing, including:

- How many units of permanent supportive housing are needed, and for whom?
- What kinds of units should be created, and how quickly?
- What should the balance between development and leasing strategies be?
- What levels of services are needed by tenants?
- How much will it cost to create, operate and pay for services for those units?
- Where can (or should) the money come from, and over what time frame?

Participants agreed that using a combination of the Cost Simulation and Financial Modeling approaches could yield valuable information to begin discussions about ways that policy leaders make funding decisions in our community.

In addition, Susan pointed out that all consumers entering the ATCMHMR system, returning to that system from justice system involvement, and entering the Travis County Jail are assessed with an instrument called the Texas Recommended Assessment Guidelines, or TRAG. The TRAG provides valuable information about level of functioning, and thus level of need, of individuals with behavioral health issues. Analysis of TRAG information could provide valuable data that will also help in this planning analysis.

While the CSH Financial Modeling does not specifically break out behavioral health and criminal justice populations, participants generally agreed that this would be helpful information that could

be obtained from potentially utilizing the Cost Simulation Model and TRAG data.

Identification and recruitment of local “champion(s)”

While the participation in this and other meetings reflects intense interest in this issue across the community, attendees expressed a need to recruit one or more community leaders, including leaders in the business community, to act as “champions” for this issue. The results of the studies described above could help provide data to recruit one or more such individuals.

Suggested strategies for including the business community included approaching the Austin Real Estate Council, the Austin Neighborhood Council, the Austin Downtown Alliance, and Leadership Austin.

Convene a Leadership Table

It was noted that there are a number of very influential leaders at the federal, state and local levels who would likely be able to provide traction on this issue. Participants suggested convening a “Leadership Table” during which housing providers, advocates and others could present a unified message regarding supportive housing to all of those leaders at one time. Again, the Cost Simulation/Financial Modeling data will be helpful in engaging their interest.

Consideration of Site Visits

Kelly Kent reflected that other communities have benefited from participating in site visits to cities across the country that have implemented successful strategies. Specifically, he noted that there are some site visits being planned by CSH in March or April of 2008 to Chicago and Minneapolis, and offered to potentially include representatives from Austin at those visits.

Participants also suggested that taking local leaders on site visits in our own community may be helpful, but they must be planned carefully. In the past, such “tours” have focused on successful programs and initiatives, rather than on the challenges facing our community with regard to these issues.

NEXT STEPS:

- + Develop a one page description of the Cost Simulation/Financial Modeling concept (Susan Stone)**
- + Contact HSRI to determine if the Cost Simulation Model might be applicable to this plan (Susan Stone)**
- + Present the proposed study to critical planning groups, e.g. CAN, ECHO, United Way (Who?)**
- + Consideration of a formal inter-agency recommendation to the Housing Marketing Study Group to contract with CSH/HSRI to conduct the study described above – collaborative funding between various agencies to build buy in? (Yes? How best to approach?)**
- + Convene a smaller work group to:**
 - Discuss identification of “champions” and ways to approach**
 - Plan/discuss Leadership Table concept**
 - Consideration/planning of site visits**

VOLUNTEERS?