

Notes from Norfolk Safety Advocacy Meeting

Topic: **Norfolk Community Services Board Speaks about Homelessness in Norfolk**

Date: **July 13, 2023**

Location: Park Place Multi-Services Center (606 29<sup>th</sup> Street, Norfolk, VA)

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## Notes

The meeting was held at 6:30 PM on 7/13/23. It was facilitated by Carolsue McGehee, Programs Manger of the Norfolk Community Service Board. The presenters were Marla Robinson (Programs Director for Homeless Services of Norfolk Community Services Board) and Cyndi Katz (Lead Outreach Specialist of the Norfolk Community Services Board).

In addition, we were thankful to have Norfolk City Councilmember (Superward 6) Andria McClellan as well as Community Officer C. Dreer in attendance as guests. **Thank you to Ms. McClellan and Officer Dreer** for giving of your time and joining us! Your presence and wisdom helped make the meeting productive and informative.

Any confusing or incomplete text in my notes is due to my lack and not the presenters.

## Questions and Comments:

Q-Where can homeless people use the bathroom? Community members sometimes see homeless people going to the bathroom in private yards, green spaces, and in the street. Where can a homeless person relieve themselves in Norfolk?

A-In public library bathrooms and latrines at the beach. There have been talks of public toilets. Funding is an issue. Another issue is NIMBY (not in my backyard). People are concerned about having public toilets in their neighborhood.

[**My question in regards to libraries**, which I just emailed to wonderful Norfolk city councilmember Andria McClellan (Superward 6): Recently the city council provided additional funding to libraries. I went to Van Wyck Library Branch to find out if they would be open later. They said they would be open later on Fridays, but all other days their hours would be the same. I am wondering why their hours are not longer since they received funding to be open longer. There are a lot of homeless individuals in need who live in near the Van Wyck library. Currently they are open Monday – Thursday, 10 AM – 6 PM and Friday, 10 AM to 4 PM. The library worker told me the hours will stay the same except for Friday when the Library will be open from 10 AM – 6 PM. I had been hoping the library would be open until 8 PM. It is hard as a parent to get my children to the library by 6 PM—so we do not end up going much.]

[**My thoughts regarding public toilet facilities**: One wonders who will clean them. Who will make sure that people are not living in them. How can we protect people from committing acts of violence, molestation, and rape in public bathrooms? Would there be cameras in those bathrooms? What would prevent people from using the bathroom as a dwelling?] What would prevent people from damaging the bathrooms by blocking the plumbing? What would prevent people from using bathrooms to store stolen or illegal items?]

Q-One participant commented: She volunteers with the shelter and Catholic Church, providing food for homeless people. It sounds like it is hard to make enough food to keep up with the demand for food. She said the line is very long.

A-When the city purchased the shelter (which is now called The Center), there was talk of turning the facility kitchen into a shelter kitchen that could feed homeless people. Turning the facility kitchen into a shelter kitchen to feed the homeless is currently in the works. The city is very interested in community involvement and help. If people are interested in volunteering at The Center kitchen in the future, they may contact Marla Robinson, Programs Director for Homeless Services of Norfolk Community Services Board ([Marla.Robinson@norfolk.gov](mailto:Marla.Robinson@norfolk.gov)). You may also try calling the Norfolk CSB at 757-823-1600. Note: The Center is located at 1050 Tidewater Drive, Norfolk, VA 23504).

The Center provides various services. It serves people who are residents and also people who need day services. It also provides a physical mailing address for people who lack a mailing address.

We discussed various entities involved in housing and homelessness, including the Virginia Board of Housing

<https://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/board-housing-and-community-development-bhcd>

and SRO (or permanent housing program).

<https://www.srohousing.org/>

[My thoughts: I found this survey and will submit a response:]

[https://sirresearch.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_dnb191P25EoreBM](https://sirresearch.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dnb191P25EoreBM)

We discussed short term and long term housing.

Q-Why are the homeless allowed to congregate on public beaches. One of the participants saw evidence that people were on the beach, in a tent, publicly fornicating night after night. Finally the police came and removed the individuals.

A-Norfolk beaches are open 24-7. People are allowed to be on those beaches as long as they are breaking any laws. Norfolk community beaches are open 8 am – 8 pm.

[**My thoughts:** Which beaches in Norfolk are public and which ones are community beaches? I did not know there was a distinction.

Q-How long can a person stay in a shelter?

A-In an ideal world, it would be 30 days or less. Since COVID, it has become non-transitional. Thus it sounds like people are staying at shelters for MUCH longer periods of time.

The Norfolk CSB said that, if a person is not willing to take a housing assessment, then they are given a 30 day notice of needing to leave the shelter. If they take the housing assessment, they are potentially allowed to stay longer.

Q-One person said they feel the city is not doing enough to solve the homeless problems.

A-The city is working within the means it has.

Q-What should we as citizens do if we see a mentally ill person, such as the schizophrenic woman who lives in Ghent, sometimes screams at people, goes in people's backyards, and knocks on people's windows at 2 AM. Citizens are concerned that this person may eventually become dangerous and hurt people—but then it will be too late. She is known by numerous community members for acting in an erratic, concerning way.

A-We can try calling the Norfolk Community Services Board. They will try to come out, connect with that person, and explain to them what resources are available and try to get them to access help and building a relationship with the Norfolk CSB worker. The Norfolk CSB is not going to act like a Police Officer and remove the person.

Q-Could we turn the MacArthur mall into a mental health facility?

A-You cannot mandate that a person get mental health care.

Q-Is the police doing anything to drive through the problem neighborhoods, where people bang on windows, sleep on private properties?

A-I do not know if this was answered. I believe Andria McClellan said that there is nothing illegal about panhandling or being outside on the sidewalk as a homeless person. The Federal Law has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to protect Homeless people to panhandle due to the 1<sup>st</sup> amendment. It sounds like there is nothing the city government, Norfolk CSB, nor the police can do until the homeless person commits a crime. Even then, they may not receive any punishment nor jail time. They may also not be forced to get medical care.]

Regina Brisgone, PhD., an assistant professor in the department of Sociology at Norfolk State University, attended the meeting. She specializes in criminal justice, criminology, research methods, and women/drugs & urban crime. She suggested we need to create a system where citizen needs and concerns are brought before elected officials.

[**My thoughts:** Since it seems like this is a Federal issue, I would like our group to connect with Federal legislators from Virginia and brainstorm solutions such as editing existing Federal laws or creating new ones.]

## **Recording**

In addition to taking handwritten notes, I also recorded just the audio portion of the presentation. Going forward, I hope to continue to record the audio portion of presentations. I will not be recording the Question and Answer portions of meetings, as I want to develop a feeling of connection and safety. If people are being recorded, they may feel inhibited from sharing with others.

Note Regarding Audio Recording Meetings: Going forward: All attendees of Norfolk Safety Advocacy Group meetings will hold their questions and comments until after the presentation has ended, so that we will record just the presentation but not the back and forth between the presenter and

attendees.

Here is the recording of the Norfolk Community Services Board presentation on Homelessness in Norfolk:

<https://audio.com/citizenadvocacy/nsag-meeting-2023-07-13-homelessness-norfolk-csb>

### **Norfolk Community Services Board Is Hiring**

Marla Robinson, Programs Director for Homeless Services of the Norfolk Community Services Board, shared at that the meeting that the Norfolk CSB, thanks to funding from the Norfolk City Council, will be hiring additional lead outreach specialists. They encouraged people to apply. I reached out to find the job listing from Carolsue McGehee, and she provided this general link:

<https://www.norfolk.gov/5516/Careers>

That being said, I looked on that site, and I am wondering if perhaps the job listing is one of these links:

<https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/norfolk/jobs/3957116/family-services-worker-ii-csb-mobile-crisis-team?keywords=community%20service&page=2&pagetype=jobOpportunitiesJobs>

<https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/norfolk/jobs/3992644/street-outreach?sort=Salary%7CAscending&page=6&pagetype=jobOpportunitiesJobs>