



CITY OF NORMAN, OK
CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEETING
Municipal Building, Executive Conference Room, 201 West Gray, Norman,
OK 73069
Thursday, February 13, 2025 at 4:00 PM

MINUTES

The City Council Oversight Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Regular Session in the Executive Conference Room on the 13th day of February 2025, at 4:00 p.m. and notice of the agenda was posted at 4:00 p.m., and notice and agenda of the meeting was posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray and the City website at least 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Heikkila called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

PRESENT

Chairman Mayor Larry Heikkila
Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant
Councilmember Ward 7 Stephen Holman
Councilmember Ward 8 Scott Dixon

ABSENT

Councilmember Ward 1 Austin Ball

OTHERS PRESENT:

Councilmember Ward 3 Bree Montoya
Councilmember Ward 5 Michael Nash
Councilmember Ward 6 Joshua Hinkle
Ms. Shannon Stevenson, Assistant City Manager
Ms. Beth Muckala, Assistant City Attorney
Ms. Rachel Freeman, CEO City Care
Mr. Shawn Loyd, Senior Director of Homeless
Ms. Heidi Smith, Director, Thunderbird Clubhouse, Continuum of Care
Ms. Katherine Hammans, Administrative Tech III

AGENDA ITEMS

ITEM 1: EMERGENCY SHELTER UPDATE.

City Care took over the operation of the Norman Shelter on January 15, 2025, and have received support from multiple programs in Norman. City Care staff have toured and met with other Cleveland County Continuum of Care (CoC) agencies and received member status on February 11, 2025.

Mr. Shawn Loyd, Senior Director of Homelessness for City Care, presented the shelter report for the period of January 15 to January 31, 2025. He asked what the Committee would like reported each month so he can be better prepared for the monthly meeting.

Councilmember Grant said she would like to see as much data and demographics possible on the reports to help people on the outside understand what City Care is doing, what populations are being served, how long people are staying at the shelter, where do they go when they transition out, etc. Councilmember Holman said he would like to know how many in shelter have income, source of income, how many are disabled. Mr. Loyd said these items are included in the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) report and he will do a filtered report on requested data. Until the data is known, a plan to move forward cannot be made.

Mr. Loyd said the shelter was operating on winter overflow for ten of the first 16 nights, utilizing both the beds and overflow floor spaces, bringing the average number of guests to 58 per night during the month of January.

- 105 unique individuals stayed at the shelter, consisting of 59 men and 35 women.

- two people left the shelter for permanent housing

- One male moved into a Food and Shelter Tiny Home.

- One female moved in to self-pay housing through the assistance of Emergency Shelter Grant funds provided by Food and Shelter.

- 13 people on the shelter wait list were turned away due to capacity.

- 54 guests on wait list

He said staff are currently building full profiles on each guest and focusing on getting information into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for tracking and reporting. Councilmember Grant asked if there is a lack of data availability to City Care. Mr. Loyd said he believes it was not captured before.

Mr. Loyd said City Care's intake process asks for data, which will help the case workers determine what unique services the individual guests need. Such information can include, but not be limited to, income information, kinds of services currently received, Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance, no insurance, other benefits, how did they come to be homeless in Norman, where are they from, etc.

ITEM 1: (continued) EMERGENCY SHELTER UPDATE.

He said a few of the employees from Food and Shelter have been retained to help the guests feel more comfortable with the change and to make the transition go more smoothly. Staff are implementing procedures and process as done at OKC shelter for consistency and the change to City Care's operation has transitioned well.

Repairs to the building are underway, a team is working on tearing out carpets, new mattress' have been purchased, pest control is being performed to get a bed bug infestation cleared up and a regular pest control plan is in place for continued protection. When windows on the south wall are tinted, the curtains will be removed to further help control any bed bug issue.

The flow of the building has been redesigned, with a long interior hallway to get people inside faster, make them less visible to others in the area, helping improve community perception of the homeless. A security expert looked at camera design and the installation of a smoke detection system to cut down the need of a physical person to do hourly fire watch on the facility, allowing more time for case management.

Councilmember Holman said he has noticed a lot less "hanging out" at the shelter since City Care took over management. Mr. Loyd said a coordinated effort and moving the main entrance to the east door has helped greatly.

Ms. Shannon Stevenson, Assistant City Manager, said staff are working on the installation of a washer and dryer to assist with facility maintenance. She also said fence quotes have been received, coming in more expensive than anticipated and other options are being explored. The Post Office would like fencing to the facility adjacent to the shelter. Staff met to discuss options and ways to make it more affordable are being researched. She said staff are looking into options for paint to brighten up the interior of the building and other items are at various stages of work.

Councilmember Dixon suggested the "Swap Shop" at the Hazardous Waste Facility for paint on hand that might be used for painting the shelter. Mayor Heikkila said staff need to check with Mr. Jason Olsen, Director of Parks and Recreation, to see if there is any old fence available to use at the shelter, to break the view, provide a windbreak and help mitigate some of the trash blowing around.

Councilmember Dixon said it would be great to know the number of people who leave the shelter and come back. Mr. Loyd said he will work with Ms. Heidi Smith, Continuum of Care Director, to see if they can determine this from the data they currently have at the Continuum of Care.

Mr. Loyd said the lack of affordable housing options is preventing people from transitioning out of the shelter. The state and local housing authorities have put a hold on vouchers due to lack of funds. When a voucher is available it is challenging to issue with so many on the wait list and a lot of landlords will not accept a housing voucher further impacting the availability of affordable housing options.

ITEM 1: (continued) EMERGENCY SHELTER UPDATE.

Ms. Rachel Freeman, CEO, City Care, met with Ms. Karen Canavan, Executive Director, Norman Housing Authority, (NHA) and she said Permanent Supportive Housing Units are vital to ensure newly housed, at risk individuals are successful. The process should be, someone stays in the shelter, accesses services, moves to permanent housing, freeing up shelter beds for more people to be assisted in their journey for housing and more productive lives. Mr. Loyd said long term case managers link the guests in the reporting system and are able to follow their progress.

Ms. Freeman said City Care does not normally evict people and have project based vouchers to help the residents. Councilmember Grant asked if the housing solutions are only available for use in Norman or can they be used in other communities. Mr. Loyd said you do not want to send homeless people somewhere else, where they might fall through the cracks or have to start all over. City Care is looking at ways to bridge services and possibly move to voucher supported housing in Norman.

Ms. Freeman said there are currently zero voucher holders staying in the shelter. Councilmember Holman said he would think the elderly would be the easiest to move into permanent housing. Ms. Freeman said fixed income and increased rents sometimes make housing choices unobtainable.

Councilmember Hinkle asked, with the continued conversations and debate on where to put a shelter, what would City Care recommend on placing a permanent shelter, where would it fit best in a neighborhood.

Mr. Loyd said there will always be NIMBY issues, (Not In My Back Yard) when trying to find locations for affordable housing options. Ms. Freeman said City Care has West Lawn Gardens and the development fits in just like any good neighbor.

Councilmember Dixon asked about the possibility of obtaining the homes on Reed Avenue, across from Food and Shelter. Councilmember Holman said you would need people willing to sell their house or are having a hard time selling and want to move.

ITEM 2: UPDATE ON THE HOMEBASE PLAN

Ms. Heidi Smith, Director of Operations, Thunderbird Clubhouse and Cleveland County Continuum of Care Coordinator, spoke to the committee regarding the Continuum of Care Homeless Plan and the recent (PIT), Point in Time homeless count completed for the annual homeless report.

Ms. Smith said she wanted the committee to know that City Care is the gold standard for what they do. They give so much hope to their guests that things are going to be great and applauded the City of Norman for going above and beyond to help.

ITEM 2: (continued) UPDATE ON THE HOMEBASE PLAN

The purpose of the Continuum of Care is to ensure the planning, coordination, and implementation of an effective and efficient system-wide response to homelessness within the City of Norman and Cleveland County; to promote community-wide planning and commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; to secure funding for efforts to prevent homelessness and rapidly rehouse homeless individuals and families; to promote access to and strategic use of mainstream resources; to optimize self-sufficiency among persons experiencing homelessness; and to improve data collection and community performance measurement.

The PIT count must be done during the last 10 days in January and Ms. Smith said the Cleveland County Continuum of Care coordinates with OKC to make sure they are not duplicating counts due to the mobile homeless. The assessment documents are put out by the Federal Government and can be modified to best meet the unique needs of the local area.

This year volunteers started at 5:00 am and visited 57 sights in Norman and three in Moore. Food and Shelter had the dining room open due to the extreme weather and volunteers were able to complete 60 assessments at their location.

100 homeless assessments were completed, the total assessments have not been compiled for the annual report yet, but the number of street homeless in the area range between 130-150, with prior reports showing 70-100 of them in Norman being chronic homeless.

The Norman Housing Authority, (NHA) works great with the homeless, but vouchers have not been available for issuance since June 2024, and the next voucher issuance is not expected until December 2025 to June 2026. The wait list for NHA has been closed and it will be three plus years and pre-COVID numbers when reopened. Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency (OHFA), state housing voucher assistance is also on hold and is at a seven – ten year wait. The Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) may be issued by the end of 2025.

Ms. Smith said that when vouchers do not exist, it is almost impossible for people to get out of homelessness. Councilmember Holman asked how long someone has to use the voucher once it has been approved, to which Ms. Smith said 30-60 days and under special circumstances an extension can be granted.

Councilmember Montoya asked if there has been any success in getting landlords to take vouchers. Ms. Smith said a housing navigator was hired to increase affordable housing options and he has increased the number of units from 2,000 to 3,000 in just a few months.

Councilmember Holman said he believes the idea behind Crimson Flats was to assist low income families in a housing option similar to The Commons, which is no longer used for student housing. Ms. Smith said shared unit housing can be approved for Section 8 vouchers. She said she has seen a lot of communications about the homeless in Norman and is beginning to see positive dialogs now.

Mayor Heikkila said it would be great to have a two-page data report with common definitions for all, with public information to put online to further improve the perception of the homeless community.

Ms. Freeman said they are looking into setting up a landlord risk mitigation fund and a landlord incentive fund to encourage other property owners to accept Section 8 vouchers. All of the players need to come together and prioritize the wants and needs of the community.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:23 pm.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor