



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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Safe Homes & Neighborhoods

START DATE: September 6th, 2023

COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP: Emily Falco, Ed Overbey, Len Carson

CITY STAFF PARTICIPANTS: OPD Chief Witzenburg

COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS:

Names of the work-groups' members will be provided to Council for approval

REPORTING:

To Mayor – every other week / To Council – monthly /

Meet with Community Wellness – Quarterly / Meet with Community Police Board - Quarterly

Committee Purpose

The **Safe Homes and Neighborhoods Committee (SHN)** will begin its work in September of 2023 with a daunting charge: to address growing community concerns empathetically, compassionately, but methodically regarding the related issues of the idle undomiciled and domiciled individuals who demonstrate in public their struggle with mental illness & drug addiction. In this effort, the committee will be expected to engage the community, service providers, agencies, institutions, legislators, and all whose assistance and expertise might potentially yield strategies whose implementation will have positive effect.

Five Point Plan of Action

- 1. Increase Community Involvement and Education in Support of Public Safety**
- 2. Explore, Determine, and Facilitate New and Additional Avenues to Expand Wrap-around Services and Accountability for Oneonta's At-Risk Population**
- 3. Enhance Accountability and Reduce Oneonta's Unsheltered Population through Relocation Within and Outside the city**
- 4. Identify Appropriate Social Services for Relocation/ Replication, and Determine the Mechanisms and Funding Support Required**
- 5. Facilitate Environmental Adjustments in the City's Downtown and Other Frequented Areas as a Deterrent to Vagrancy and Misuse**

Overview: The Need for Immediate Response

- As fellow members of the community, it is our responsibility to ensure that those neighbors for whom life has become a challenge, and who require assistance to navigate their way to a better future, are provided with the support and resources necessary to ensure their safety, security, and best possible path to a successful future.
- Many of our unsheltered and at-risk neighbors find themselves in the City of Oneonta because of the promise of services being offered, and the housing and transportation options provided.
- Evictions, which were rare during the pandemic, have displaced dozens of people who have added to the city's homeless population, putting increased strain on DSS and others who were already understaffed.
- In the City, housing is provided without the optimum level of accountability at the Town House Motor Inn and Motel 88. While a minority percentage of that housing is specifically purposed for the shelter of our homeless population, others for whom we have no proper accounting, and over which we have limited authority, are occupying those and adjacent rooms. Without on-site support, people whom we shelter there become connected with others who are challenged, distracting, and disruptive, yielding an outsized impact on "healthy" decision making.
- The current strategies of care and support for Oneonta's homeless (and those who choose that lifestyle) have been generally successful in assuring that those in need have shelter, and support for access to food, and other necessities. Our religious institutions, organizations, and caring community members should be lauded for their compassion and commitment to this growing crisis. Together, they have collaborated to create a network of assistances and support that augment and expand the capacity of county services.

However, those efforts are greatly offset by an inappropriate level of accessibility to the very challenges that have contributed to the ills of many of those needing assistance. Access to proximate substances of abuse puts their recovery at further risk.

- Petit larceny complaints are on the rise, and the police are restricted by the requirements of discovery and frustrated by the rapid release of those arrested. The constraints on law enforcement coupled with ease of access to illegal and illicit opportunity continues to strain the resources of the city and the patience of affected businesses and the community. Not coincidentally, and a concern of consequence, is the evolving narrative of a perceived deterioration of our downtown, which poses a growing threat to the livelihoods of business owners.
- There is an increasingly disturbing presence of people who are undomiciled, idle domiciled and those who are demonstratively mentally ill on Main Street, Chestnut Street, and Elm Street. People are sleeping in vestibules and on benches, and in makeshift shelters. Some are animated in their mental illness on Main Street. Many residents and visitors find this behavior disturbing and scary. People are increasingly reluctant to come downtown – especially in the evening. Mornings typically yield piles of litter and drug paraphernalia, including syringes. As the City addresses one

area of concern (see Muller Plaza) it's replaced with another (the youth programs area at CANO, as an example.)

Safe Homes & Neighborhoods (SHN) Committee - Goals

- **Increase Community Involvement and Education Regarding Safety Strategies, Protocols, and Opportunities**
 - Creation of a **Citizens' Academy**
 - Oneonta Police Department to implement a one-hour education and training exercise.
 - These sessions to be provided regularly and include:
 - What are the current challenges of OPD?
 - OPD's plans to expand its effectiveness?
 - How should residents / businesses respond and/or what course of action should they take upon observation of illegal, dangerous, or concerning behavior?
 - Integration to the **Community-Police Board**
 - One of three Council members to attend and provide input to the quarterly meeting of the CPB
 - Creation of a **Neighborhood Support** "ad hoc" sub-group
 - Committee to determine structure, appoint/ approve, monitor, advise
 - Membership:
 - Ward - Council Members
 - Church representatives
 - Neighborhood specific resources/ providers
 - Interested community members
 - Charge:
 - Enhance neighborhood communication
 - Determine opportunities for collective engagement in the upgrade of quality-of-place and safety
 - Propose specific supportive actions by the city
- **Expand Wrap-around Services for Oneonta's At-Risk Population.**
 - Committee to create a sub-group, **Community Partnership**
 - Membership:
 - Representatives of Hartwick and SUNY Oneonta, OFO, DSS, Catholic Charities, and others TBD by SHN Committee.
 - Charge:
 - Engage students from both colleges in augmenting the capacity of current service providers.
 - Pursue the creation of curricula-based programming that will enlist students in hands-on assistance of our at-risk population.
 - Determine other opportunities to educate and assist, and enlist the community (see Neighborhood Support) in the creation or support of an infrastructure to ensure long-term success

- One council member on the SHN Committee to report to and inform meetings of the **Community Wellness Committee**, once per quarter.
 - One council member on the SHN Committee to join and attend meetings of the **Caring for the Homeless Collaborative**
- **Reduce the Numbers of Unsheltered, and those Living in Temporary, High-Density Locations within the City**
 - With the Mayor initially taking the lead, the SHN Committee will assume and continue dialogue with the County (and others TBD) to determine and establish:
 - A location outside of the city boundary in which those who are unhoused are provided a congregate space in which they are well sheltered, and given the appropriate levels of service, support, and supervision.
 - Other options within the city in which small groups can be provided shelter and support, and for which there can be a high-level of accountability.
 - The SHN Committee will create an “ad hoc” sub-group:
 - **Transition Assistance**
 - This group will coordinate with service providers, and enlist any necessary support of the SHN Committee and city government to facilitate the population’s successful move from current “high complaint areas’ for the Police Department (The Town House Motor Inn, Motel 88) to other options, as determined
- **Identify Services for Enhancement, Replication, and Relocation**
 - The SHN Committee will work create an “ad hoc’ sub-group:
 - **Targeted Services**
 - This group will survey and create a database of all services provided within the City of Oneonta that are specifically offered in support of our homeless and otherwise at-risk population.
 - Services that might appropriately be offered at a proposed location outside of the City of Oneonta will be identified for replication or relocation.
 - Services that are identified for relocation will be assessed for such impact as may be felt by any other recipient of their support, living in the city.
 - Such impact will be reported to the Safe Streets Committee and will inform its decision making.
 - The group will research and propose funding options
 - Members of the SHN Committee will join the mayor in advocacy at the County Board, and with other decision makers TBD.
- **Facilitate Environmental Adjustments as a Deterrent to Misuse of Public Spaces**

- The SHN Committee will create an “ad hoc” sub-group:
 - **CPTED (sep’ ted) Strategies**
 - This group will engage in conversation and planning with other community partners, committees, and agencies to formulate strategies in support of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

SHN Committee - Function and Responsibilities

- **Mandate, Authority, and Expectations**

- Strategic Planning and Advocacy
 - The Committee will engage in conversation and explore strategies that address each of the 5 points in the plan of action.
 - For such proposed actions as might require dialogue with government officials, legislative bodies, or institutions, based on an agreed communications strategy, there will be prior consultation with the mayor.
 - Any proposed action that would commit the city government to staff engagement and production, funding, or any modification of its comprehensive plan, code, or legislation must be advanced to the appropriate committee and/or the Common Council for approval.
- Membership / Dialogue / Communications
 - One committee member will join and meet regularly with the **Caring for the Homeless Collaborative**
 - One member will meet quarterly with the **Community Police Board**
 - One member will meet quarterly with the **Community Wellness Committee**
- Oversight and Direction of Sub-Committees
 - In accordance with the strategies and parameters detailed above, the committee will staff, direct, and support the following five (5) sub-committees:
 - **Neighborhood Support**
 - **Community Partnership**
 - **Transition Assistance**
 - **Targeted Services**
 - **CPTED Strategies**
 - Sub-committees will report to the SHN Committee and will follow its direction.