

The City Council Committee on Public Health, Safety & Environment Committee of the Whole met in the Council Chamber on March 27, 2024 at 6pm for the purpose of discussing the matter listed below. Notice of this meeting was posted March 15, 2024 at 9:29am. The meeting was recorded.

In attendance:

All members of the Committee as well as, from the Committee of the Whole, Councillors Hapworth, Merkl, Harvey, Davis, Varela, Stott. Also in attendance from City staff were Mayor Pangallo, Solicitor Rennard, Fire Chief Dionne, Health Agent Greenbaum, Building Commissioner Orfanos, Public Services Director Jodoin and Police Chief Miller. Lifebridge President Jason Etheridge was also in the room.

Mayor Pangallo lead off the meeting with a summary and reasoning for the ordinance, stressing that the City's intent to have as humane a policy as possible. Solicitor Rennard spoke about how she and her staff used language from Boston's ordinance and others across the country and detailed some of the proposed implementation.

Chief Miller talked about the Community Impact Unit and their work with Salem's unhoused and the wide spectrum of those who inhabit the encampments. He also talked generally about his department's role in securing property for those who've moved from the sites.

Health Agent Greenbaum detailed some health issues, such as rodent infestation and the prevalence of needles as well as coordination with DPS for trash removal.

Jason Etheridge presented how he and City staff had been diligent in attempting to secure a safe sanitary space to be used for sheltering those as a choice as prescribed in the ordinance and that they looked at 25 properties. He was clear about misinformation about regulations at Lifebridge, but also that the shelter in process would not have regulations mandated by funding sources, so the policy would be "come as you are, stay as long as you need."

Councillors then weighed in asking questions:

Councillor Merkl (not being a member of the Committee) was concerned about language in the purpose section that was too harsh and not reflective of necessary sensitivity. The Committee did vote 5-0 to approve the motion by Councillor Morsillo to delete "shield drug trafficking, human trafficking, weapons, fire hazards, violence and other criminal activity, and that create conditions for large crowds to congregate" from (b) Purpose (ii) and replace with "may create public health concerns."

Councillor Davis (not being a member of the Committee) questioned the reasoning for the 15 mile radius to locate shelters, mentioning how difficult that distance is even for those with their own transportation. The Mayor & Solicitor responded open to reviewing and revising the radius.

Council President Hapworth (not being a member of the Committee) brought up eligible properties and how belongings would be safeguarded by our police department. Chief Miller didn't have exact info about the storage, but assured the Council of the intent for people to believe was protected.

Councillor Prosniewski asked about capacity at the initial shelter space and both Mr. Etheridge and Captain Jon Burke responded that 40-50 beds and that 18-20 of the unhoused seemed to be open to accepting shelter.

Councillor Watson-Felt proposed an idea about public transport and asked about regulations of Lifebridge and the initial shelter. Mr. Etheridge relayed that there was misinformation about regulations at Lifebridge, but also that the shelter in process would not have regulations mandated by funding sources, so the policy would be "come as you are, stay as long as you need." She also requested that notice was in more formats and available more than the ordinance requires.

Next we had public testimony and about 50 people spoke in person or through Zoom. A few people, including the Executive Director (Rinus Oosthoek) of the Salem Chamber spoke regarding the impact of the encampment at South River on their businesses. Managers from Wendy's, Tim Clarke (has 8 tenants who's establishments border the river walk) and others talked about the effect on their employees and customers and the detrimental consequences, including declining revenue they attributed to the encampment. They spoke in favor of an ordinance.

A few others spoke in support, especially as would mandate some sheltering that could lead to more necessary housing.

Most of the testimony was against the ordinance or components of it, such as the 15 mile radius, insensitive deliberate action, profiling, systematic reactions, treating the unhoused as criminals, the emotional impact of "sweeps" and a belief that some just wanted to deal with the "eyesore."

Those opposed were comprised of those who also had businesses close proximity, a few teachers, someone who was on the verge of homelessness, a couple of people who had been unhoused in the past, someone who did legal services, students and a therapist.

When the meeting returned to the Committee, Chair Cohen recounted a story of when was on the board of directors for a shelter for homeless children and meeting with an 8 year old whose family deserted him and the focus on shelter and housing 1<sup>st</sup>.

Councillor Jerzylo talked about an unhoused person she met when a police officer who has frostbite.

Councillor Morsillo talked about a contradiction of some who opposed the ordinance and also the expansion of Lifebridge, Harborlight.

Councillor Prosniewski stressed that the ordinance and the City responses were not about criminalized the unhoused, repeating a concern that encampments not healthy.

Councillor Morsillo made a motion for the matter to stay in Committee, which was seconded by Councillor Watson-Felt and the vote was 5-0 all in favor.

Before scheduling the next meeting, the Solicitor and Mayor asked the Council to submit concerns, possible revisions to the language within a week and then the Chair will work with City staff to schedule the next meeting.

Councillor Prosniewski moved to adjourn the meeting, and the Committee did so at 8:24pm.

\_\_\_\_\_ Chairperson Councillor Cohen  
Jeff Cohen