

Notes from Coalition for the Homeless, NEIGHBORHOOD TASK FORCE (NTF) MEETING on Thursday, Mar 21 at 1pm:

Pam Campbell and Barbara McGuffey from Museum Park Neighborhood Association met with Mike Nichols, Interim President/CEO, and Sara Brown, Director of Development & Communications, from the Coalition.

Cynthia Aceves-Lewis, President of Midtown Super Neighborhood, and Blake Robison, EADO, were unable to attend.

The purpose of the meeting was to “meet and greet” Mike Nichols and discuss the function of the Neighborhood Task Force.

Introduction

Barbara McGuffey introduced the original goals of the Neighborhood Task Force:

- Discuss a plan to close the Wheeler Encampment and use that plan to establish a model plan to close other encampments. This primary goal was accomplished with the closing of the Wheeler Encampment on Nov 2, 2018.
- Create a Public Education Campaign (PEC) that would go beyond the “Meaningful Change” campaign to encompass educating the public on why giving directly to panhandlers, feeding, and dropping off “stuff” to unsheltered homeless only serves to enable staying on the streets and refusing assistance being offered. Goal was to redirect those efforts to coordinate with Coalition partner efforts to provide long term assistance toward permanent supportive housing. Also, NTF proposed developing “mentoring” programs where non profits could participate one-on-one with unsheltered homeless through Coalition partners.
- Support the creation of a “center” where unsheltered homeless could receive assistance in a “low barrier shelter” with supportive services. Now being referred to as the Navigation Center.
- Address the influx of released prisoners from the Huntsville State Prison to the Greyhound Bus Station. Many of whom become unsheltered homeless in Houston.

Wheeler Encampment Follow-up

- Requested that Coalition navigators make a follow up assessment of the individuals who loiter in the area of Fannin (south of Jack in the Box), San Jacinto/Wheeler on the sidewalks on both sides of Pacesetter, and around the Fiesta Grocery @ San Jacinto/Wheeler/Caroline as well as in the Fiesta parking lot.

Are any from the original Wheeler Encampment? Who is truly homeless vs the “hangers on” who were reported around the Wheeler Encampment? What services do these individuals need?

- Explained that HPD is working with TXDOT to continue to address the people, trash, feedings, etc. and is coordinating cleanups. Sgt. Flores has permission to approach those “feeding”, provide information about the ordinance and ask for their cooperation.
Read ordinance @ <https://www.houstontx.gov/health/Charitable/index.html>

Sgt. Flores has also been coordinating through Midtown Mgt. District and other law enforcement agencies and has met with the local and regional management of Pacesetters and Fiesta to discuss issues and possible solutions.

Requested that Mike Nichols meet with Chief Art Acevedo, and South Central Division Captain Salim Zia and DRT Sgt. Eric Flores to learn more about their efforts and how the Coalition might provide assistance.

Public Education Campaign

- Sara Brown shared that the Coalition has received additional grant money for a comprehensive Public Education Campaign.
- Coalition will continue to work with the Neighborhood Task Force (NTF) in developing this campaign and will request input from the NTF as the campaign progresses.
- Campaign will be positive, i.e., encouraging other ways to help.
- Requested that Coalition continue NTF goal to establish Midtown/Museum Park as “Focus Group” area to be initial test site for the PEC before a citywide campaign release.
- An “Impactful Giving Seminar” luncheon is being held for faith based groups on April 10 with a panel discussion. Panel will be comprised of Eva Thibaudeau, Coalition Chief Program Officer; Thao Costas from SEARCH; Reverend Michael Gott, Senior Minister with Unity Church; and Cynthia Alvarado, Operations Manager of Midtown Mgt. District and Coalition Board member.

Navigation Center

- Mike Nichols shared his involvement with finalizing a location for the Navigation Center. He discussed difficulty of neighborhood acceptance and that he will personally be meeting with neighbors in the proposed area to address concerns.
- Opening of this Navigation Center is a priority for the Coalition.

Greyhound Bus Station

- Concerns were shared that released prisoners arriving at the bus station from the Huntsville prison are becoming new unsheltered homeless.
- Mike Nichols asked the NTF for more information and to provide factual current information so that he can study and address.

Ongoing Effort of NTF

- Mike and Sara agreed to continue the efforts of the NTF through regular meetings. Sara will schedule the next meeting for late April, 2019.