City of Auburn, Maine
60 Court Street | Auburn, Maine 04210
www.auburnmaine.gov | 207.333.6601

BOARD/COMMITTEE/WG MEETING MINUTES

Homelessness Committee – Draft Minutes

October 20, 2026 | 9:30 AM – 11:00 AM

Auburn Resource Center @ 121 Mill Street, ARC Conference Room

Attending Committee Members: Tim Cowan, Bill Lowenstein, David Bilodeau, Cecilia Natale, Jennifer Eugley, Peggy Walton, Tom Hibbert, George Sheats

Excused Absences: Dawn Comeau, Rebecca Austin, Angela Blier

Attending Ex Officio Members: Jennifer Edwards, Sasha Anastasoff, Tim Cougle, Steve Almquist

Excused Ex Officio Absences: none

Attending Guests: Mayor Jeff Harmon, Erin Lamb (Drop-In Center), Zakk Maher & Chris Bicknell (New Beginnings), Tawna Dilts (PSY), Erica West (PSY)

Agenda Items

1. Call to order & Review of Agenda (Tim Cowan) – 9:32am
   - Excused Absences of Committee Members for today's meeting – Rebecca, Dawn, Angela
   - Motion by Bill, 2nd by George/Dave, all in favor
   - Introductions
2. Review and approval of 9/15/26 & 8/18/26 (amended) meeting minutes
   - Motion to accept by Bill, 2nd by Dave, all in favor
3. New Beginnings – Zakk Maher and Chris Bicknell: Longest Night December 21st event & winter operations
   - New Beginnings: only 24-7 shelter for children in Maine; usually 16-17 years old, first time homeless, family mediation free of service, onsite or at their home, usually family conflict leads to the need for services; best outcome is to return them home, or work with DHHS to place them in a safe environment; transitional living units here and in Augusta (stay for up to 18 months with services)
   - residential program for 18 and under; 24/7 support and basic living skills
   - 2nd tier: apartment on their own, staff offices but not 24/7 support
   - 3rd tier: apartments rented in the community, youth have skills they need but just need financial help; communication with landlords, too
   - Outreach program, drop-in center in Lewiston with food, bathrooms, laundry, hook to

get youth involved in case management

- Youth action program, those with lived experience to work with systems (on Maine CoC, NB board, policy work, etc.)
- Shelter program – 90 days, triage plus longterm plan, some coming out of longterm foster care, more intensive care compared to adult services, average of age 16
- Most funding from state and fed sources, with small amount of grant funding
- Zakk: plug for Longest Night Event – social mixer with service providers, remembrance slide show, program info to community, dine out after to fundraise for NB, looking for more participation
- Longest Night has been held by NB for many years, but looking to expand into more adult providers
- Bill: still being utilized by DHHS? Yes, work with them to help when necessary and push back when needed
- Youth from across the state come here
- Tom: limit? 12 beds at shelter but looking for more properties, state allows up to 20 beds
- limit is 8 to 1 youth to staff
- aiming for more state and federal funding
- Dave: will look to have representation at Longest Night from Spurwink and Alter L/A Shelter
- Tom: also interested in Longest Night representation
- Zakk: big push for prevention of homelessness, especially targeting youth and through McKinney Vento program
- Youth aren't counted in CoC numbers and therefore underrepresented in homelessness age trends
- Sasha: plenty of students in Auburn who could benefit from NB but can't get there (and numbers of those in need are underreported)
- Actively trying to push Auburn & Lewiston together as one service area to get better data
- Bill: are shelter residents counted in PIT? Yes, but less that 40 youth beds in the state; apartments are also counted in PIT
- Dave: this summer, he's noticed an increase in both youth and elderly

- Working on connection through Auburn GA
- Bill: data on how early intervention impacts chronic homelessness? Some, but not enough
- 83% of youth exiting NB programs are going to safe, stable housing
- Still try to keep in touch with youth who have exited
- Not all youth should be in shelter with adults
- Tim Cowan: important for this Committee to remember our charge and keep all these pockets of data in mind

4. McKinney Vento Liaison data and needs update for the 2026-2027 school year (Sasha)
   - "McKinney Vento Homeless Assesstance Act"
   - Is housing "fixed, regular and adequate"?; different criteria than other housing programs
   - Adequate: in areas of heat, hot water, electricity, pests, overcrowding, sleeping in actual beds, etc.
   - +28.5% increase in children and youth experiencing homelessness (nationally, identified through public schools) from 2021-2024
   - Jeff: actual increase in homelessness, or better identification? Sasha: both, plus more attention to it
   - Many share housing becase of economic hardship (unsheltered, hotel, shelter, doubled up) – 74.3% of identified students were reported as doubled up
   - Doubled up is Auburn's highest group, unsheltered is 2nd
   - If utilities fail, that becomes classified as "unsheltered"
   - CMP funding is limited with specific stipulations
   - Decreased funding means Sasha is working with families to first tap into other agencies and resources and hopefully she can help with the last bit
   - Jeff: how many "unsheltered" are unsheltered by HUD standards? Sasha: 4 kids living in campers (closest to that), or parent is sleeping in their car but the kids are doubled up
   - 167 students experiencing homelessness in 2025-26 (27 Auburn students unsheltered this school year, recorded since July 1, 2026 – 92 kids identified total this school year)

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- Tim Cowan: are there more resources for food or utilities? Sasha: food (almost all homeless experience food insecurity, plus food insecurity among those who aren't homeless)
- One elementary school has doubled the number of food bag requests over last year
- Food pantries are seeing decrease in supply, folks are losing SNAP benefits
- Lost access to PAL Center food pantry, Sasha has been tapping into NB weekend food boxes, which has been helpful
- Dave: look into whether Sasha could access food through Trinity?
- Dave: Trinity is looking into bringing food to AA Groups; George will explore that
- Students identified by 10/20/25: 96 and students identified by 10/20/26: 92 (slight decrease, but about 20 families Sasha hasn't been able to connect with yet)
- Tim Cowan: should we be plugging more financial support towards utilities vs. food?
- Sasha: worried for oil costs this winter ($1600-1700 to fill an oil tank once), when families use stoves, space heaters, etc. to heat, they're increasing their electricity bill (can't be shut off until April, but then owe a huge amount)
- George: money spent on food vs. utilities is related – putting funds into one means you free up funds for the other
- Sasha: food funds gives the appearance of making more of an impact compared to utilities
- Bill: folks have less to donate because they're having to spend $ on their own increasing costs
- 45 unaccompanied youth in 2025-26 (Auburn School Dept) – not in physical custody of parent or legal guardian, student choosing to leave based on family conflict or asked by parent to leave, or family has lost housing and are split up, single parent households where parent has passed away (includes students in shelters)
- Tim Cowan: how many new vs returning families each school year? Sasha could generate those #s
- Last school year changes in immigration policies led to less identified students
- Chris: unaccompanied are at greatest risk of predators within the community; Sasha: also higher suspension levels, substance use and engagement with law enforcement
- Food pantry at EL and giving access to families outside EL, supplied by Good Shepherd; Erica: suggest parents/teachers donate to food pantries, too

- Jeff: what's the priority? Sasha: where to start? Top needs are most expensive – rent and utilities ("housing disruptors")
- Celia: recommended Shared Opportunities Fund (one-time, last resort, Healthy Androscoggin got through Sewall funding, committee reviews requests once/week, up to $2000, but average about $1300-1500, average approval is $1000ish, help with utilities, rent, transportation, etc.)
- Partnered with Store Next Door, extra funding through them
- Jeff: LIHEAP is the primary source of heating help, demand increased and oil prices higher
- Bill: clothes closet at EL/accepting donations? Yes, but limited capacity, shared with food pantry

5. Regular update on Auburn Resource Center (Jennifer Edwards)
   - MERN Friendsgiving on 11/8, still looking for volunteers to prep on 11/7
   - Career center on 11/17 for hiring event
   - MERN group meeting every Thurs for families with incarcerated loved ones
6. Regular update on Drop-In Center (Jen Eugley)
   - Guest attendance: average of 150 guests/day in Aug/Sept is starting to dip down to 140/day in Oct so far
   - Jen is stepping down as Operations Manager (last day on 11/6); Erin Lamb will be taking over (and will apply to fill Jen's spot on the Committee, minus secretary duty!)
   - Kayla Castonguay (hired by City to do CE assessments at DIC on Wednesdays since January) will now attend Case Conferencing to represent DIC guests in HMIS
   - Foot Care Clinic coming up on 11/4 (nursing students from Maine College of Health Professions)
   - Thank you Celia for the link to free online ASL classes – a couple of our volunteers are taking it
   - An Angel's Wing & Volunteers of America Homeless Response Team is now tabling on Wednesdays (they recently branched into Androscoggin County for the 1st time, as a push by Julia that was backed by our PIT numbers)

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- With Julia leaving, Hub 4 is looking for a PIT point of contact/coordinator – is the Committee interested? (finalized PIT date is the night of Jan 25)
- Dave: there's the option to have unhoused peers do surveys
- Tim Cowan: ask VOA if they might help survey?
- Jeff: ask state to help since the Hub Coordinators have coordinated in the past: Jen Edwards will reach out to Amy
- Tom: MERN Friendsgiving on 11/8 – lots of agencies/volunteers helping and FREE!
- Jeff: 10/30 at 2pm, groundbreaking at 63 Academy for Paco's Place, renovating it for re-entry housing

7. Regular update on Warming Center/Shelter (Dave Bilodeau) – time didn't allow
8. Regular update on Auburn Comp Plan (Councilor Cowan) – time didn't allow
9. Discussion of any carry-over items from the September meeting – time didn't allow
10. Community House Warming Subcommittee for Home For Good – time didn't allow
11. Discussion of items for next month's agenda – time didn't allow
12. Public Comment
13. Motion to adjourn at 11:00am by Bill, 2nd by Peggy, all in favor

Resources:

1. Ad-hoc Committee's report: *Addressing Homelessness in Auburn, Maine*
2. 2025 Auburn Housing Study: PowerPoint Presentation

Upcoming Meetings for Homeless Committee:

- November 17, 2026 9:30 AM – 11 AM