

Morris County Advisory Committee on Women
January 19, 2022, 5:30pm to 7:00pm
Via Microsoft Teams

Present: Kasey Errico, Pam Bennett-Santoro, Karen O’Keeffe, Joann Bjornson, Eileen Specchio, Donna Boyce, Elaine Muller, Charlotte Miller

Guest: Nancy Eberhardt, Executive Director, Pro Bono Partnership
Jeff Bashe, Human Services Advisory Council

Welcome and Introductions: Ms. O’Keeffe called the meeting to order at 5:34 pm. Committee members and guests introduced themselves. The Committee also welcomed new member Charlotte Miller. Ms. Miller gave a brief background on herself and was excited to be appointed to the Committee.

Presentation: Jeff Bashe, Morris County Homeless Trust Fund – Mr. Bashe introduced himself and thanked Ms. Bjornson for inviting him to participate in this meeting. Mr. Bashe stated that for the last several years, he has focused on the goal of creating a Homeless Trust Fund. This concept has been discussed with the County over the years. The Morris Housing Alliance and Morris County Habitat for Humanity are key nonprofits which, support this concept. Habitat for Humanity received a grant from their national organization to conduct a study on advocacy, and a Homeless Trust Fund (HTF) was chosen as the advocacy issue. Nonprofit staff have been trying to revitalize the discussion of a HTF in Morris County. Monarch Housing was commissioned to conduct a study of the HTF and how it could benefit Morris County. HTF Legislation was passed in 2009 by the State. The then Freeholders were not on board at that time, as this initiative was perceived as another tax, and decided it would not be beneficial to Morris County. A few years, Monarch Housing conducted an in depth study of the HTF and why it would be beneficial to Morris County. Mr. Bashe reviewed the handout summary on Homelessness in Morris County, and the Housing Alliance of Morris County FAQ, provided by Monarch Housing. He stated that, as an example, by adding a fee for any documents filed within the Morris County Clerk’s Office, there is a potential to raise approximately \$350,000 to \$400,000 annually to support and provide local homeless services. Mr. Bashe went on to commend the County and Human Services for the great job that is being done to address homelessness or the risk of becoming homeless. However, there are still homeless people and families in Morris County. Mr. Bashe referenced the annual Point In Time count, as well as ALICE statistics. Morris County’s nonprofit community and advisory committees do a great job in assisting with homeless matters, but despite all this good work, there are still gaps. The creation of a HTF would be the best way to address the local/County gaps in services, by a way of adding about \$350,000 annually. The Morris County Continuum of Care (CoC) Executive Committee created a letter of support endorsing the results and recommendation, the United Way also sent a letter of endorsement, and the County Human Services Advisory Council (HSAC) also endorsed this initiative. A formal recommendation will be provided to the County Commissioners. Mr. Bashe stated that he is asking for a letter of support from the Advisory Committee on Women. He understands that the Women’s Committee is focused on homelessness matters, and how they can be a part of this mission. This initiative has some public support but it needs to get over the hurdle of convincing people that it’s not another tax, but a fee. They need to get support from the Commissioners.

Ms. Bjornson stated that the role of the Women’s Advisory Committee is to recommend and advise the Commissioners on matters that affect women in Morris County. This Committee agreed that for the next three years, their focus will be Housing as Healthcare. The HTF is very important and would be an initiative this committee would support. The County Clerk’s office is already on board.

Mr. Bashe stated that 12 Counties already have successful, established HTF as of 2009.

- A comprehensive summary of the analysis of homelessness in Morris County and the potential implementation of a County Homeless Trust Fund (CHTF). Handout
- County Homeless Trust Fund FAQ Handout

Q&A

Ms. O’Keeffe asked that with the other counties, is there a risk of funding cuts. Mr. Bashe replied that he was not aware of any funds being cut, but there is always a risk.

Ms. O’Keeffe asked what kind of documents would be charged a fee. Mr. Bashe replied the documents would be related to real estate (deeds, mortgages, title search, etc.), most documents that are filed by the County Clerk.

Ms. Eberhardt asked if all participating counties get their money from filing fees through the Clerk’s Office. Mr. Bashe stated that yes, only documents filed from the County Clerk’s office will be charged a fee, which will go into the HTF. There was a law passed (a State of NJ law) with the structure of the initiative. If funds are not spent within four years, it goes back to Community Development, to be reallocated for similar projects, the County does not lose this money. There are 21 Counties in New Jersey.

Ms. Bjornson asked if there are any County’s in process for the HTF. Mr. Bashe was unsure at this point. Due to COVID, he hasn’t seen any data since 2018. He will reach out to Monarch Housing to see if they have any information. Ms. Errico stated that through a copy of their minutes, Atlantic County put it up for discussion, but the topic was pulled. She is not sure, but they may still be in the process.

Ms. Boyce commented that this Committee studied that latest ALICE report and it was noted that a significant number of Morris County senior women were just on the cusp of homelessness. The pandemic largely impacted females. COVID assistance will most likely be going away, which will create tremendous hardships for the female population. It’s very important to have another funding source to prevent them from becoming homeless. The HTF seems to be the best solution to address this crisis.

Should the HTF initiative come to fruition, Mr. Bashe would like to see the funds go to more permanent sheltering facilities and affordable housing.

Ms. O’Keeffe thanked Mr. Bashe for his information presentation.

Upon the conclusion of the presentation, Ms. O’Keeffe asked the Committee what their thoughts were on creating a letter of support for the Homeless Trust Fund. The Committee unanimously agreed to write a letter of support. Ms. Muller stated that years ago, the Women’s Committee conducted a homeless study. Homelessness has been an issue for many years and should be noted in the letter. Ms. Boyce recommended that HUD data be incorporated as well. Ms. O’Keeffe asked for a volunteer to write the letter. Ms. Muller and Ms. Eberhardt said she would assist. Ms. Bjornson will get information to be added to the letter, there are a lot of sources to obtain the data. Ms. O’Keeffe recommended creating an Ad Hoc Committee. Ms. Boyce said she would be a part of the Ad Hoc Committee. Ms. O’Keeffe recommended moving forward with an Ad Hoc Committee to include Ms. Muller, Ms. Boyce, and Ms. Bjornson to write the letter of support. Ms. Bjornson made a motion to vote, Ms. Muller seconded, the motion passed.

Ms. Errico informed the Committee that the Federal Emergency Rental Assistance funding has been fully expended.

Review of November Meeting Minutes: The Committee reviewed the minutes from the November 16, 2021 meeting. Ms. Bennett-Santoro approved the minutes, Ms. Bjornson seconded.

Discussion Topics: 2022 Seeds of Change Award- sub-committee update Nominee discussion – Ms. O’Keeffe gave a brief background on the Seeds of Change (SOC) award to Ms. Miller and Ms. Eberhardt. Ms. Bennett-Santoro announced to the Committee that based on her application, Mary Ledyard was chosen to receive the SOC award. Her application was impressive, stating all the incredible volunteering Ms. Ledyard accomplished to date. Ms. Bennett-Santoro made a motion to approve Mary Ledyard for the 2022 Seeds of Change Award. Ms. Specchio seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Errico will reach out to Brian Murray, to see if this matter can be added to the March, 9th Commissioner meeting. She will also seek his guidance on how to move forward with the event.

Ms. Kisatsky will forward copies of prior letters (as examples) to the Seeds of Change Award Sub-committee that were sent to past recipients, the person who submitted the application, and to the nominees that were not chosen. The Committee can revise as necessary. Per Ms. Errico, the date and time of the meeting will need to be included in the letter.

Ms. Bennett-Santoro asked if the meeting will be in person or virtually. Ms. Errico stated that Commissioner meetings have been in person as well as virtual. An in person meeting would be the best, pictures will be taken and posted on the County Website. Ms. Errico will check with Brian Murray to see if we can do both.

Ms. Muller asked if we will also recognize Carole Harper for her contribution to the Committee and her dedication to Morris County. Ms. O’Keeffe confirmed it should. Ms. Errico will follow up with Brian Murray. The Committee will need to forward him a summary of her accomplishments so he can create a Proclamation.

Meeting Dates for 2022: The Committee discussed conducting monthly meetings on the third Wednesday of each month, except for August and December. Ms. Bjornson made a motion for this change, Ms. Bennett-Santoro seconded, motion passed. Ms. Kisatsky will follow up on posting the meeting dates.

Orientation presentation at February meeting: Ms. Errico and Ms. Kisatsky will work on this matter.

Ms. Bennett-Santoro asked the Committee if anyone needed more information on Impact 100 Garden State, or had an interest in joining this group, to please contact her.

Ms. O’Keeffe reminded the group that should they have any possible candidates for the Advisory Committee to please reach out to her or Ms. Bjornson.

Public Section/Questions: None

Adjourn - The meeting was adjourned at 6:56 pm.