OPEN TOWN MEETING

An Open Town Meeting was held on June 28, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. with Mayor Christiansen presiding. Council members present were Mr. Anderson (arrived at 6:03 p.m.), Mr. Sudler (arrived at 6:24 p.m.), Mr. Neil, Mr. Polce, and Mr. Lindell. Mr. Lewis, Mr. Cole, Mr. Hare, and Mr. Slavin were absent. Mrs. McDowell was also present.

REPORT OF THE MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON HOMELESSNESS

Mayor Christiansen welcomed everyone to the Open Town Meeting, noting that the Mayor is authorized by the tenets of the City's Charter to hold a quarterly town meeting. He thanked the members of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness for bringing information forward and noted that the Panel's recommendations would be presented by Dr. Jerome Abrams, Chair.

Mayor Christiansen explained that members of the homeless community and those who cater to that community had brought questions, concerns, and issues to City Council over the last 12 to 13 months. He advised that under the tenets of the Open Forum segment of City Council meetings Council members had not been allowed to comment. Mayor Christiansen stated that he felt that the City owed it to those currently providing services and those who wish to provide services to the less fortunate in the community to come up with a game plan to assist those individuals. He advised that most members of City Council had, as individuals, taken on projects and assisted the less fortunate, and he commended members for their efforts. Mayor Christiansen indicated that there was not a member of City Council who did not feel compassion for the homeless, and the Blue Ribbon Panel was put together to address the issues. He explained that the next steps would be to put a task force in place and to develop meaningful programs and partnerships in the community to address the issues that everyone in the room and the entire community of Dover were concerned about.

Mayor Christiansen asked the members of the Blue Ribbon Panel to stand and be recognized, commended them for their efforts, and thanked them for their labor of love. He noted that they had been given 60 days to perform their task and were granted an extension in order to present a quality product that will eventually answer the needs of the less fortunate in the community. Mayor Christiansen stated that when the Mayor's Challenge to End Veterans Homelessness began, he had acknowledged that it would not be possible to end homelessness among all veterans and, likewise, it would not be possible to end all homelessness among the civilian population. He noted that some veterans and civilians choose to be homeless; however, a concerted effort would be made to develop partnerships to address the issues brought forth by the Blue Ribbon Panel.

Dr. Jerome Abrams, Chair, Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness, read a statement, as follows:

> I want to start by thanking Mayor Christiansen for the honor of naming me as chairman of his Blue Ribbon Panel to End Homelessness in Dover. It has been a privilege to serve in this capacity and I deeply appreciate the opportunity I was given to work on this important project. As you may or may not know, I have served on the Board of Directors of the Dover Interfaith Mission for Housing [DIMH] for the past 4 years, and in this capacity I have learned a great deal about the issues surrounding homelessness in general and its impact locally. I have gotten to know some truly remarkable individuals; both folks who are dedicated to helping the

homeless and those who are struggling with homelessness themselves. I initially became involved in DIMH as a result of seeing for myself the devastating impact that lack of stable housing had on a number of my patients. As I began volunteering at the shelter I came to realize the enormous scope of the problem as well as the myriad efforts currently underway to provide help for those who are struggling. What I discovered was that there is not an overall coordination of those efforts. Although the various agencies and organizations endeavor to work with each other, there is no recognized centralized system in place whose goal it is to ensure that organizations, funding and individual and group efforts are utilized to their maximum potential. My vision for the Mayor's panel was to facilitate establishing such a system.

Mayor Christiansen charged the panel with moving expeditiously to formulate a plan and provide a report to the Dover City Council within 60 days. When the panel first convened and came up with a work plan, it quickly became apparent that in order to respond to our charge with the thoroughness and comprehensiveness which we felt the project deserved, 60 days was just not realistic. We informed the Mayor of this and he expressed his understanding and support and responded by saying "Take all the time you need." I am here tonight to present you with the results of our efforts. I must admit, however, that given the enormity of the task of adequately addressing the needs of the homeless population in our community, we are not able to claim that we have discovered a "magic solution" to the problems. Instead, what we have to offer is a road map; a plan, which we feel will point us in the direction to which we should go. We started out at our first meeting agreeing that the goal is to end homelessness in the Dover community this very year. Is it an achievable goal? Perhaps not-after all, the year is already halfway over. But we felt that by expressing that goal we emphasized the urgency which we feel the situation requires.

Before I go any farther, I would like to take a moment to thank the members of the panel for their time and efforts. Their true concern was evident in the seriousness with which they approached the work of the panel. Together we sought to be inclusive, sympathetic and innovative. We are fortunate to have such dedicated, hard working members in our community who are willing to open their hearts and minds to work together to improve the lives of those who need our help.

Also I would like to acknowledge and thank all of those who came to our meetings to give testimony and participate in our discussions. They included both representatives of organizations and agencies who we asked to make presentations and members of the community who came voluntarily to our open public meetings to make their voices heard to make sure that we understood how things are from their points of view. I'd especially like to thank those who came who have actually experienced homelessness themselves. They allowed us to put actual faces on problems and help us understand the many unique circumstances which result in a person becoming a statistic.

Hopefully you have all received advance copies of the report and have had the opportunity to at least glance at the summary if not read it in detail. What I would

like to do is to go over the report and emphasize what I believed are the key points and then point out our conclusions and recommendations. After that, we can open it up for discussion. Several members of the panel are here tonight and hopefully can participate in the discussion and help with any questions which require further explanation. *(City Clerk's Office Note: Subsequent to the meeting, the report entitled "A Housing Pathway for the Homeless" was revised to include the City seal, the date of the meeting, and a sentence stating that "Code Purple will always remain in effect when the outside temperature reaches 32 degrees or below.")*

So to begin with, the panel collectively decided that we should base our recommendations on a set of core values. Although we identified many values worthy of inclusion, we challenged ourselves to limit them to 3 because, as one of our members quoting a noted psychologist said, more than 3 core values lessens the impact and just confuses things. So the 3 core values we agreed on were as follows:

1. Housing comes first! Homeless individuals frequently have other problems both because of their situation and as causes of their homelessness. These include mental health issues, addictive behaviors, legal problems and problems unique to veterans. In order to provide comprehensive assistance these have to be acknowledged and addressed. However, we believe it is important to emphasize that the primary goal is to provide immediate shelter and then secondarily to address their co-morbid conditions. Address the need for housing first! Once the person has a roof over his or her head then he or she should have access to all the services which they require. Access should be unconditional and non-discriminatory. Recognize that homelessness is a situation, mostly not of a person's choosing, and it does not define who they are. These are people who at a particular place and time lack housing. They deserve the same amount of human dignity as anyone else.

2. Once immediate shelter needs have been addressed, individualized issues should be identified and addressed by appropriate referrals. Hopefully this will enable the individuals to progress toward more stable housing situations.

3. Family units should be respected and supported. Although many if not most of the homeless are alone, couples, single parents with minor children and family relationships of all types including "non-traditional" families should be afforded housing opportunities which keep those families intact.

We estimate that there are between 300-400 homeless adults in the greater Dover area. That is a difficult number to ascertain and ongoing efforts are underway to refine and verify that number. But, by counting the number of unique individuals who signed in at Code Purple and the DIMH Resource Center and unscientific head counts, that seems to be a reasonable working number. While every situation is

unique, we thought it useful to try to group individuals together according to similar housing needs in order to provide a framework which addresses common needs. We identified 7 such groups:

1. The transient homeless. These are those who have been adequately housed but due to a sudden loss found themselves out on the street. Many of those have jobs and incomes. But due to a lack of affordable local housing they find themselves in need of immediate shelter until they can get back on their feet.

2. The Unemployed. These are individuals who lack stability in their lives and need help obtaining employment. For a variety of reasons they are relatively unemployable and need both temporary shelter and various types of assistance leading to an income stream and access to highly affordable housing.

3. The unemployable. These are primarily the disabled who subsist on SSI, disability income, welfare. Their need is for long term low income housing-possibly with the opportunity for part-time jobs to augment their inadequate subsidies and opportunities for volunteering, which should be sought and encouraged.

4. The chronically homeless. We must acknowledge that some individuals are homeless by choice. Many have severe mental health issues which render them unable or unwilling to participate in structured programs. Unfortunate though their situations may be they are entitled to freedom from coercion. Some efforts should be made to make them aware that help is available should they choose to avail themselves of it, however we feel that resources should be primarily allocated towards those wanting and seeking assistance and are willing to put forth efforts to obtain it.

5. Families with dependent children. These are mostly single parents, mostly women. There are facilities to address their needs but not enough currently to meet the demand. Additional housing adequate to suit their needs is necessary.

6. Young adults. These are primarily graduates of the foster care program but also include a transient population. It is difficult to get a handle on the size of this group as they are highly adaptable to unstable housing situations such as crashing on couches and so are often invisible.

7. Veterans. This group has already received a lot of support. Many services are available to homeless veterans as a result of recognized gratitude for their service to our country. They have many unique needs related to their military service. Efforts to help this group should consist of identifying

those in need and connecting them with services which are available and to which they are entitled.

We believe that it is useful to consider housing needs as consisting of 3 distinct, though interconnected, phases. Addressing those needs entails a process of helping individuals advance from one phase to the next, ultimately leading to a more permanent solution for them. Although not everyone will need all of the services, it is important to ensure that those services are readily available and easily accessible.

Phase 1 is immediate needs. This includes emergency shelter for protection from the elements, safety, health care needs and access to case workers who can begin to assess individual needs and make appropriate referrals for services. It cannot be stressed too strongly how important case management is. Having services in place is mandatory but the lack of the ability to find and access those services prevents many from getting the help that they need. Although we recognize that resources are tight, the answer to the question of where to allocate those funding to get the most "bang for the buck" is overwhelmingly clear. We need more CASE MANAGERS.

Phase 2 is transitional housing. The lack of adequate temporary housing is a problem. There are currently 3 facilities in the area: DIMH has a capacity of 36 men; People's Place/ Whatcoat Shelter and Shepherd Place provide temporary housing for women and their children. Additional transitional beds are needed and suggestions for developing unused properties in the community are discussed in the written report.

Phase 3 is affordable longer term living arrangements. There just isn't enough low income housing available locally. The cost of a single housing unit in Dover is in the range of $1000-$1200/month. Although 70% of the homeless are working, that cost exceeds the means of many, if not most, minimum wage employees. In our report, we provide several recommendations for the development of basic highly affordable housing. We emphasize that this development must include ongoing assistance in the form of individualized case management, job skills training, life skills education and personalized encouragement and support. In the body of the report are detailed analyses of how such facilities can be financially viable and self-supporting. These facilities can take various forms including large group homes, multi-family dwellings and Tiny Homes communities. However building codes and housing regulations can present barriers. All of these approaches are worth pursuing and they are by no means mutually exclusive.

So what are our recommendations?

In order to keep things simple, we have identified 5 specific steps that we believe the city council should approve and implement:

1. Immediately create a homelessness task force. This should comprise a group of 12 -15 members with specific skills and authority. They should

have the knowledge and power to implement changes to existing housing codes and regulations which could impede the construction of housing including redevelopment of existing vacant properties. The initial focuses of the task force should be to expand the physical space for homeless people to gather during the day other than the Dover Public Library and to develop highly affordable rental housing that provides limited personal space in exchange for very low rents. Recommendations for members of the task force have been provided to the Mayor.

2. Identify a specific individual to serve as a housing liaison - a point of contact in order to centralize efforts and foster greater cooperation and to address issues regarding plan implementation.

3. Identify suitable buildings and properties to meet objectives. This includes both vacant buildings and city owned undeveloped land.

4. Devise a plan to rehab those properties and unutilized housing stock.

5. Put a permanent nonprofit organization in place to implement the plan, apply for funding and allocate resources. Currently, no such organization exists. A new one could be formed or an existing organization such as DIMH cold be strengthened and given additional authority and resources.

I would refer you to the full report which goes into great detail regarding specific proposals for developing additional transitional housing as well as affordable low cost long term housing.

After 4 months of hearings and deliberations, the Mayor's task force is optimistic in reporting that there are workable affordable solutions to the problems of homelessness in Dover and with the commitment of the Mayor and City Council, Dover can succeed.

Please allow me to quote from the conclusion of our report:

Eliminating Homelessness in Central Delaware

In conclusion, the Panel acknowledges this is a long-term prospect which will be challenging on many fronts not the least of which is funding. Any discussion of funding cannot take place without the acknowledging and tabulating the actual costs to a community caused by homelessness itself. Among these are:

- Medical costs: emergency room visits, detoxification, mental health support
- Law enforcement: use of local and state policing to respond and manage crisis

- Justice/Legal system: court costs and incarceration costs
- Costs to public facilities which the homeless frequent when they are not sheltered

These costs have not been tabulated to date in central Delaware because of barriers such as HIPAA. Delaware's Continuum of Care is currently attempting to compile these costs.

The Panel is confident that solutions will be found that will lead to permanent housing for those in our community who are experiencing homelessness. And this will improve the quality of life of all community members.

We urge the Mayor and local leadership to begin today by forming the Task Force which will be charged with amending codes, deciding governance, enabling free flow of information and resources, finding funding, and implementing the phases as outlined here.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today and for your attention.

Mayor Christiansen stated that he guaranteed that the next step would be the formation of a task force, including the recommendations that were provided for the make-up of the task force.

Mr. Anderson thanked everyone who had been engaged in this process, including members of the Panel, members of the public who had been attending almost every meeting and had provided input, and the citizens who cared about this issue. He questioned if there had been consideration of the people who were not ready to live in individual housing. Mr. Anderson explained that, due to a settlement regarding the mistreatment of patients at the State hospital, the State had released patients from the mental hospital. He advised that the State had committed to self-sustaining, multi-person living arrangements at that time and was supposed to allocate funds for these types of living arrangements; however, it did not seem that this had happened on any great scale. Mr. Anderson indicated that people frequently are able obtain initial mental health treatment and are supposed to have a place to be released to; however, they end up on the streets. He stated that this was an additional element to consider and noted that he had not heard a real emphasis on sober living housing mentioned. Responding, Dr. Abrams advised that sober living was one (1) of several approaches and solutions that should be looked into. He indicated that mental health challenges, including psychiatric illness and drug and alcohol addiction, were probably the biggest, most frequent, and most difficult challenges to solve. Dr. Abrams stated that there was a need to address these issues and the Panel did not have an answer to them. He emphasized that the Panel felt that when people with those types of problems are homeless, the homelessness should be addressed first. Dr. Abrams indicated that a roof must be provided overhead before trying to solve these problems.

Mr. Anderson stated that he had worked with a bright gentleman who worked as an engineer for a major medical company in Delaware but suffered a head injury that fully affected his thinking. He explained that, as a veteran, this individual was able to obtain help and get off the street; however,

he kept returning to the street because of his behavior, which was affected by his injury. Mr. Anderson advised that this individual would remove all of his money from the bank at the end of the month and take it to a bar, and he was often robbed while he was drunk and unconscious. He would then be evicted and wonder why this occurred. Mr. Anderson stated that he appreciated the statement about housing first; however, in his experience, other services cannot wait if housing is to be sustained. He indicated that money and resources were limited and could be wasted if other services were not provided simultaneously with housing. Mr. Anderson explained that his church had provided apartments for people and helped them to obtain jobs, and there had been success stories when housing was connected with other resources. He stated that before using this combined approach, his small church had sometimes wasted their limited resources.

Dr. Abrams stated that he concurred with Mr. Anderson, noting that case managers were needed, in addition to putting roofs over people's heads. Dr. Abrams advised that it was not just a matter of placing people somewhere, wishing them luck, and forgetting about them. He expressed the need for case managers to work and have relationships with these individuals over a long period of time to guide and direct them. Dr. Abrams explained that the homeless have longstanding problems that will not be solved overnight. He expressed the need to get them someplace safe and then begin working on obtaining additional services, while continuing to work with them. Mr. Anderson stated that he agreed.

Mayor Christiansen stated that when he went to Washington, D.C. to talk about veterans' homelessness with First Lady Michelle Obama and Second Lady Jill Biden, he was advised that the key to ending homelessness and other issues was for an individual to have an address. He expressed his belief that this was a wise approach.

Mr. Anderson noted that sex offenders cannot live just anywhere because they cannot reside close to a day care or school, for valid reasons; however, this makes things difficult for them. He also indicated that the State should focus on what a sex offender is because, in his opinion, the sex offender net was currently too broad. Mr. Anderson indicated that the unique challenges of sex offenders may have to be considered specifically because there was a disproportionate number of sex offenders in the homeless population, due to the current restrictions. He stated that there may be a need to think about unique circumstances for those who would not fit into the general housing stock. Responding, Dr. Abrams noted that sex offender status affects not only an individual's ability to find adequate housing but also their ability to seek employment. He explained that once someone is on the sex offender roll it is difficult to get off. Dr. Abrams noted that even if an offense was committed years ago, the stigma stays with an individual for a long time.

Mr. Anderson stated that he had seen a person with a perfect resume apply for a delivery job, and the resume seemed too good for the position. He explained that he found the individual listed on the sex offender list for child pornography. Mr. Anderson stated that this person could not be used to make deliveries since they would be going into people's homes.

Ms. Jeanine Kleimo, DIMH Chair and a member of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness, advised that DIMH is one (1) of the few places in Delaware and the only place in southern Delaware that houses sex offenders, noting that she was very familiar with this issue. She indicated that she had helped to write the report, and she had not included the sex offender subset

of the population so that the report would not be alarming to people who are not familiar with this issue. Ms. Kleimo advised that DIMH had considerable success in working with the sex offender population and found them highly motivated and ready for any available opportunities. She stated that sex offenders absolutely must be included in the plan, and she wanted members to understand the reason why this was not made explicit.

Mr. Neil commended the entire group who worked on the report, stating that it was a marvelous blueprint but only a first step, and many things must be worked out. He indicated that he is in the business of trying to keep people in their homes in Delaware, noting that he was referring to those who own their homes and lease the land. Mr. Neil explained that, as the rents rise and communities are not maintained in healthy conditions, these homeowners leave and become homeless. He stated that there is not enough affordable housing in the State. Mr. Neil expressed his belief that, by working with the Delaware Housing Coalition, Milford Housing Development Corporation, Diamond State Community Land Trust, and National Council on Agricultural Life and Labor Research (NCALL), homes and probably communities could be purchased, improved, and used to put people in permanent housing. He stated that, unfortunately, the State of Delaware does not enforce its own laws, and the 55+ community where he resides was facing a sale because it is on leased land. He noted that, even though the residents want to purchase the land, sometimes the General Assembly does not hear them well.

Mr. Neil questioned whether the 37,000 citizens in the City would pay for a problem that is not just a City problem but a national, State, and County problem as well. He asked how many additional homeless people would gravitate to the City if the problem was solved successfully. Mr. Neil noted that, during the Regular City Council Meeting held on June 26, 2017, a homeless gentleman had stated that he was from Virginia, and others had indicated during previous meetings that they were from Maryland, California, and other areas. Mr. Neil stated that Seattle's experience was that they had to keep expanding their facilities for the homeless, and that this must be part of the consideration going forward. He asked if the approach taken would be for anybody who is homeless or if it would be restricted. Mr. Neil noted that those with passion would state the need to take care of everybody; however, he questioned if this burden would then fall strictly on the taxpayers of the City and where resources would come from. He indicated that buildings that were being discussed were not habitable and asked who would pay. Mr. Neil stated that any group home, whether a tiny home or big building, would need governance, noting that problems would happen because people are human. He reiterated that the report was a good start; however, he questioned if consideration had been given to who would pay for this, other than through grants, and who would benefit from what the City does.

In response, Dr. Abrams stated that the Panel envisioned having an organization in place that could apply for funding and receive money to get group homes or tiny homes off the ground. He advised that once these places are established and a governance organization is put together, the undertaking would become self-sustaining and financially viable. Dr. Abrams indicated that the government and the City's citizens do not have unlimited funds to support people indefinitely, but the idea would be to house individuals, give them training, get them jobs, and get them to the point that they are self-sustaining. He stated that the City's role would be to put the systems in place to help people to help themselves.

Mr. Polce thanked Dr. Abrams and the Panel for their efforts. He stated that this conversation was happening simultaneously up and down the State, from Wilmington to Georgetown and Seaford. Mr. Polce expressed the need to coordinate resources and appropriate them adequately and specifically to high targeted areas. He stated that he challenged the notion that case managers were needed, noting that the need was for community health workers. Mr. Polce explained that the community health worker model was formed at the University of Temple and had been very successful in the City of Seattle. He advised that community health workers are intensified case workers or health navigators, and their scope of practice is on the front lines. Mr. Polce indicated that these individuals would be dispersed in high targeted areas and work around co-morbidity specific to addiction and behavioral health, which are two (2) of the primary sources of homelessness. He applauded Dr. Abrams and the Panel for recognizing that the shelter or home first approach is the adequate and correct way to go. Mr. Polce advised that once homeless individuals are identified and sheltered, their treatment can begin through partnerships and relationships with the Department of Labor, not-for-profit organizations who work to increase the work force, and the health sector.

Mr. Polce stated that the present was a great time in central Kent County in the arena of health, noting that the Delaware Center for Health Innovation (DCHI) had launched the Dover-Smyrna Healthy Neighborhoods subgroup. He advised that this subgroup went to the heart and spirit of the report of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness. He encouraged his colleagues, as well as the Mayor, to look to this DCHI working group as a thought partner as the task force is developed and the Panel's recommendations are furthered.

Mr. Lindell thanked the Panel for their efforts. He noted that it was stated in Part 1 of the recommendations that any effort needed to be a joint City/County/State effort. Mr. Lindell asked if there was any discussion regarding the economic situation being faced by the State, which would come down to the County and local governments. He noted that each organization was receiving different funds from the State, noting the potential for groups to compete against one another for the scraps that are left rather than focusing on the issue. Mr. Lindell questioned if there had been discussion on how to bridge this issue. He agreed with Mr. Neil that this responsibility could not fall just on City taxpayers and there must be a cooperative effort; however, he indicated that the emphasis at the State level was on cuts. Responding, Dr. Abrams advised that cooperation was a key point because funding was limited and it was not desired for similar groups to vie for the same funds.

Ms. Kim Brockenbrough, Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA), 18 The Green, and a member of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness, stated that DSHA's goal was to identify available sources. She explained that DSHA uses some competitive funding for building and renovating properties. Ms. Brockenbrough advised that the federal government has other grants; however, she explained that a plan must be in place, which must be more than a blueprint and must be ready to implement, with partners in place. She stated that the Blue Ribbon Panel planned to look at funding sources with the task force and consider how to leverage funds to make different pieces of the plan happen through existing State and federal funds. Ms. Brockenbrough noted that there was a question about whether these funds would exist in the future; however, it was assumed that they would continue to be available.

Mr. Sudler asked what information or financial resources Kent County had that may be available to the City or State. Mr. Allen Angel, Kent County Levy Court Commissioner and a member of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness, stated that the County typically starts working on its budget in October, noting that their recent budget process was finalized in May 2017. He noted that the State may decide to take funds away or stop funding some of the programs during their discussions scheduled for Friday, June 30, 2017, which could hurt the County and they would have to go back and review the budget. Mr. Angel stated that there was no extra funding that he knew of.

Mr. Sudler asked if any funding had been allocated for the homeless by the County. In response, Mr. Angel advised that there was an initial allocation from the County of approximately $3,250 when Code Purple started.

Ms. Margie Cyr, Dover Public Library Director and a member of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness, referred to Mr. Lindell's comments about the need for cooperation between agencies and explained that one (1) of the most critical points of the proposal was that no project could be successful without the City, County, and State working together cooperatively. She advised that homelessness was not just a City or County problem, but also a State problem. Ms. Cyr stated that one (1) of the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations was for a liaison to work with all the agencies that are already working on the issues, noting that there was no one to coordinate. She advised that the Panel had discussed that it did not benefit anyone in the long run for the different agencies to compete for the same pot of money since everyone needed to work together to make the most of the limited available resources. Ms. Cyr indicated that this was why a liaison was so important.

Mr. Sudler asked if the State Human Relations Commission (SHRC) had been considered as an agency liaison and suggested this option. He explained that he is an SHRC Commissioner and that the SHRC enforces housing and is a State agency. Mr. Sudler advised that the SHRC is the only commission that has representation from the Department of Justice. Responding, Ms. Cyr indicated that the Panel had not discussed who the liaison should be or where the liaison should come from. She stated that the Panel believed the task force should make this decision as one (1) of their first steps. Mr. Sudler suggested that Ms. Cyr convey to the task force that he had offered the SHRC as a liaison.

Ms. Kleimo stated that, in regard to Mr. Neil's point about the cost of addressing homelessness, she wished to emphasize that there are costs to homelessness that had been pointed out in general terms but were difficult to quantify. She explained that when it is made possible for homeless people to go back to work, they contribute to the economy. Ms. Kleimo advised that DIMH alone generates a wage bill in excess of $3M per year on the part of the people that they put back to work, which she explained was substantial in terms of people contributing to the local tax base and generating revenue that could be used for a variety of purposes, including taking people off the streets.

Mr. Lindell stated that economic development is another issue, noting that it is said that a rising tide lifts all boats. He asked if there had been discussion about offering incentives to businesses to hire homeless individuals who may be qualified for particular jobs. Mr. Lindell advised that having a job may not be enough initially to place someone in a home, but it would get them on their feet and be a step in the right direction. In response, Dr. Abrams stated that it had been pointed out to the

Panel that there was not a lot of funding available through the City and, although he thought offering incentives was an excellent idea, he was not sure where the funding would come from. Mayor Christiansen indicated that encouraging current or future employers to look at this option could be considered by the Economic Development Committee. Mr. Sudler stated that Mr. Lindell's idea was excellent and that there should be incentives to motivate employers to hire eligible homeless individuals.

Major Bill Farley, Delaware Commission of Veterans' Affairs Chairman and a member of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness, explained that Mayor Christiansen had asked him to chair the Mayor's Challenge to End Veterans' Homelessness that began two (2) years ago. He advised that this effort had been very successful, and it had started out in a situation similar to the present homelessness situation in the general population. Major Farley expressed the need to determine who the homeless are, what they need, and how to go about identifying them individually and providing them with case managers, health workers, or people who are prepared to help them get through all the steps necessary to get a house, and then to get the help they need to lead stable lives. He stated that when the Mayor's Challenge to End Veterans' Homelessness started in January 2015, the members involved were just the Mayor's home team. Major Farley explained that the project then caught fire and grew to include the County and State, noting that there are now teams in each county working together to help end veterans' homelessness. He advised that Delaware was one (1) of three (3) states in the country that had effectively accomplished this task. Major Farley stated that, in looking at the report, the Panel was on the road to making it possible to end homelessness in the general population. He advised that success would require that federal, state and local agencies; individual shelters; churches; etc., all come together to help. Major Farley indicated that there was readiness to begin and encouraged everyone to be optimistic that success could happen. He noted that there were problems; however, he stated that when people start working together, red tape falls and problems are solved. Major Farley indicated that the problems would get solved as long as everyone keeps the homeless individual at the center of each solution, each solution is based on what the person needs, and those working with the homeless have the resources and the network to get the help that is needed. Major Farley indicated that there was a need to begin, which was what the report was about.

In response to Mayor Christiansen, State Representative Sean Lynn indicated that he had no questions or comments.

Mr. Edward Christian, Jr., 9 Pennwood Drive, offered glory, honor, and praise to the Creator of heaven and earth. He expressed his belief that everyone continued to wish, hope, and pray, so as not to throw their arms and hands up in despair, and noted that the struggle continued. Mr. Christian stated that the problems being faced in 2017 were problems of 2007, 1997, 1987, and several decades back. Mr. Christian indicated that the problems are overwhelming for individuals, groups, organizations, and society as presently programmed, and the problems continue to increase while economic and financial resources continue to decline. He stated that, regardless of whether the unfortunate members of society are called homeless, misfits, or chronic problem people, their problems are similar, if not the same. Mr. Christian stated that the report appeared to identify a centralized effort by society, which is required, but that, for some reason, everyone continues to go a separate way. He expressed his belief that a centralized effort borders on or resembles socialism too much, and that capitalists would stay away from it. Mr. Christian stated that a centralized effort

is one (1) of the key points of society addressing problems and that, as problems continue to increase and resources decline, things would not get much better. He explained that he does not use the terms optimism or pessimism and instead uses the term reality, stating that reality slaps him in the face every day. Mr. Christian advised that he tries to wake up, not be indifferent, and not to act as if the problem is going to disappear.

Mr. Christian stated that he encouraged people to watch three (3) movies: 1) "Rollerball", from 1975 with James Caan or an updated version from 2002 with LL Cool J, which reflects the past and present of society; 2) "Soylent Green" with Edward G. Robinson and Charlton Heston, which reflects the present and the future; and 3) "I, Robot", because society is now involved with artificial intelligence, and this movie reflects the future. He advised that the problems that the City, County, and State face have been around for a long time. Mr. Christian indicated that the State is faced with a $350M shortfall and the City is competing for resources. He noted that it would be difficult and that some point in time there would be casualties in life. Mr. Christian stated that the question was whether the number of casualties could be reduced, noting that this was becoming much more difficult. He indicated that we do not have the resources to address all the problems, and the resources would not increase to address them. Mr. Christian stated that it was a grand idea to have a task force, liaison officer, and health official; however, he asked if these had not already been tried. He questioned how far we would travel, stating that the pace was slow and he did not think this would happen in his lifetime. Mr. Christian expressed the need to do more than wish, hope and pray, stating that these three (3) approaches need not be at the top anymore and should be dropped to number two (2). He advised that he was impatient and wanted to see more progress because of the despair of the less fortunate. Mr. Christian indicated that in the United States of America, either you have it or you do not have it, and there will be competing elements. He stated that the proposal was good and needed to be done; however, we had been doing this for too many years. Mr. Christian advised that the problems were increasing and the economic and financial resources were less, and he questioned what would be done. He reiterated that there would be some casualties and suggested starting to look at what to do with the casualties.

Dr. Abrams stated that Mr. Christian had hit on a number of important issues and helped to put the problems into perspective; however, he was a little taken aback by Mr. Christian's characterization of what the Blue Ribbon Panel was trying to do as socialism. Responding, Mr. Christian advised that he was not classifying it this way but was stating that a number of people label discussion of a centralized or concentrated effort as socialism, and do not want to hear that term. He indicated his belief that these people state, "That's socialism; I want no part of it, so let's continue what we're doing." Mr. Christian stated that what was being done was not providing solutions and expressed the need to work together and for a central force to coordinate and manage the resources. He noted that there are a County and a City government and that he had a problem with this. Mr. Christian advised that everyone was stuck in how things had been done for the last 100 years; however, we it was a new era and time. He stated that, although some of what used to work 50, 100, or 150 years ago might be applicable to the present, there was a need for more modern day solutions. Mr. Christian suggested combining the County and City and no longer using the excuse that things had been done that way for 100 years as the reason as for continuing to do what was outdated. He suggested combining and refreshing the new with the past, learning from mistakes, and not living in the past.

Dr. Abrams stated that socialism has a negative connotation, and that the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations were not a way of pushing problems under the rug. He advised that what the Panel was trying to do had to do with basic human decency and stated the goal of taking care of people because it is the right thing to do. Dr. Abrams expressed his belief that progress was being made. He noted that, as part of the Panel's work, they had heard from representatives from a number of different agencies and organizations that were working with various pieces of the puzzle and different aspects of the problem. Dr. Abrams explained that members of the Panel realized that, although the pieces were there, there was no centralization or coordination. He stated that when he mentioned case managers to Mr. Lindell, he had been discussing people who understand and know what agencies and resources are available and are able to use that knowledge to help people to access resources that are already there. Dr. Abrams advised that he did not think they were starting from 50 years ago or from scratch, noting that a lot of pieces were already there.

Mr. Sudler thanked the Mayor for putting together the Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness, the resources he was bringing to the community, and the current dialogue. He asked if there had been any discussion about exploring the option to utilize vacant or non-occupied buildings that the City of Dover may have. Mr. Sudler noted that Victory Church had been strongly advocating this and questioned which building may have been discussed and what would be needed from Council to assist in implementing that concept. Responding, Mayor Christiansen advised that one (1) of the recommendations brought forth by the Panel was that the task force look into zoning and planning issues that surround that question. He noted that Victory Church and others in the community had asked about implementing the use of vacant City property.

Mr. Chris Cooper, Central Delaware Habit for Humanity and a member of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness, noted that vacant homes had been discussed. He explained that many of the homes that Habitat for Humanity had purchased through monitions sales, now owned, and was in the process of tearing down were vacant; however, they were not fit for any inhabitants. Mr. Cooper advised that if there were vacant homes owned by the City that had not been broken into and used for dwellings by people who should not be there, these homes would be a great option. He stated that Habitat for Humanity had boarded up homes; however, people had ripped off the boards and gone in and used these homes. Mr. Cooper noted that once a home is vacant, it is very hard to keep it livable for any length of time.

Mr. Sudler stated his understanding that there were dwellings available; however, they could not be occupied due to their current status and the violations they may have with the City. In response, Mr. Cooper advised that, in Habitat for Humanity's experience, the homes that had been vacant while they were working to get them torn down were not habitable in any way, shape, or form.

Mr. Sudler asked whether Habitat for Humanity could be assisted by contractors donating time and material to make dwellings habitable. Responding, Mr. Cooper indicated that this would largely depend on how long the home had been vacant and how long someone had been living in it without running water and electricity. He indicated that he did not want to become too graphic; however, conditions in such homes deteriorate rather quickly.

Mr. Sudler noted that, as a contractor and builder, he can submit a blueprint and build from the ground up. He stated that if individuals are willing to donate material and time, the concerns stated by Mr. Cooper are minute or irrelevant. Mr. Sudler indicated that he was willing to donate material, time, and his skill set to assist in bringing a unit or dwelling up to Code, not as a Councilman but as a contractor. He advised that he has friends who are also contractors and are willing to do this, but they have to know that the dwelling would be used to house the homeless. Mr. Sudler advised that there would be no problem that a contractor could not handle. He noted that a situation that would require building from the ground up would take more materials; however, a pre-existing building would be no problem and could be handled. In response, Mr. Cooper advised that this would be great. He noted that, from Habitat for Humanity's perspective, it was better to flatten these dwellings and start all over again. Mr. Cooper explained that Habitat for Humanity had torn down dwellings at 11 South New Street, 18 North New Street, and 20 North New Street, and that walking through these homes gives a different perspective on life and the need to help the people and the community. He stated that he was sure there were similar homes on the books and encouraged Mr. Sudler to go through some of them before making such a commitment, noting that conditions are worse than Mr. Sudler might think.

Mr. Neil advised that he is big fan of Habitat for Humanity, noting that they had combined with NCALL to enable people to purchase and reside in homes. He expressed his belief that, in talking about the transient homeless, the discussion was about a big building that may be owned by the State or City. Mr. Neil advised that this would be a building where multiple people, who may have health or other problems, would stay and may receive training. He indicated that a single house would not be a factor because the problem involved a much larger homeless population. He suggested that DSHA could do much more than they are doing. Mr. Neil stated that it would be up to the Governor to state that there is an existing liaison called the DSHA, which could be very effective in finding people and groups, as well as receiving and distributing information. He stated that Habitat for Humanity was putting people in homes, and every time someone is placed it is like planting a tree because they make the neighborhood better as homeowners.

Mr. Cooper stated that when a holistic approach was originally discussed, his idea was to use the former ValuCity or the Playtex building on the highway. He noted that these buildings were large enough to house a health care/case worker who could guide an individual through the process to long-term housing and also provide temporary shelter under one (1) roof. Mr. Cooper noted that there are not many buildings that size in Kent County. He noted that Habitat for Humanity had walked through the process and was open to new ways, which is why a task force was proposed to help get everyone on the same page.

Mr. Sudler asked if the former Dover Public Library would be sufficient. Responding, Mr. Cooper advised that he thought it was too small. He explained that there is an organization in Baltimore that was doing nearly exactly what the Blue Ribbon Panel was proposing. He indicated that this organization has a facility specifically for veterans in a two-story warehouse and provides temporary shelter, long-term services, and services for mental health and drug addiction under one (1) roof. Mr. Cooper advised that this was the direction that the Panel was nudging toward; however, they could not get there in 60 days. He indicated that he would like to see the task force move in that direction.

Pastor Aaron Appling, 2660 Forrest Avenue, stated that he was very excited about the discussion, noting that just talking about the issues was a good step forward. He advised that the lack of affordable housing was the biggest problem, noting that houses must be bought at a certain rate and things had been made complicated, even with restored houses. Pastor Appling advised that he agreed with Mr. Sudler, noting that he had bought two (2) completely condemned houses, restored them, and rented them out to homeless people who had been staying in hotels, and the restoration was cheaper than rebuilding the house. He indicated that he could only do this on a low-income level. Pastor Appling stated that every contractor does not want to become involved in this type of effort, but some can.

Pastor Appling stated that he had read that it is necessary to make $18 per hour to be able to afford to live in Dover. He advised that few of the homeless would be able to make that much income in the next five (5) or six (6) years and that even he could not get a job making that much. Pastor Appling stated that rentals below $600 - $800 were needed and that the government was subsidizing one-room hotel rentals for $1,200 a month. He advised that his church was trying to buy a shelter with their own money but was hung up on government issues, indicating that otherwise they could open up beds overnight. Pastor Appling indicated that there is sometimes a great deal of red tape involved in helping the homeless and that it was time for everyone to get together and cut some of the red tape. He advised that his church was ready to pay a couple hundred thousand dollars for a shelter but was being held up at Legislative Hall by a process that they do not understand, noting that they are not politicians or involved in government but just want to get people off the street. Pastor Appling suggested having everyone put their heads together so that churches and other organizations like his church would find it easier to help the community and get people off the street. He advised that he thought that many other non-profit groups would put their own money into doing what is on their hearts if some of the red tape was out of the way, noting they were already doing this in many ways. He indicated that he thought it would be good for non-profit groups to use their funds because this would save the State and the City a lot of money.

Mayor Christiansen thanked Pastor Appling for the work that he and his church were doing. He stated that two (2) of the top people on the task force would be from the Kent County and the City planning offices and could review the existing rules and regulations. Mayor Christiansen expressed his hope that the rules and regulations were not discriminatory and stated that they were there for safety. He indicated that he had always stated that if his children or grandchildren could not live in a house, neither should anyone else. Mayor Christiansen noted that there is a middle ground to provide necessary accommodations that are safe.

Mr. Sudler advised that, as a landlord, he knew that, two (2) years ago, the DSHA fair and standard payment for a one-bedroom unit was $850, noting that this payment rises each year and is probably higher than that now. He stated that there is a program whereby people must work 20 hours per week in order to obtain a voucher for public assistance. Mr. Sudler expressed his opinion that the requirement to have a job working 20 hours per week and the ability to pay $850 for a one-bedroom dwelling were the two (2) biggest challenges for housing individuals and the homeless. He stated that income determines the portion people pay, and they must be eligible for the program. Mr. Sudler noted that there are a lot of variables to consider in regard to negotiating with the DSHA when advocating for the homeless and a new program to assist them.

Dr. Abrams noted that, in discussing the report, he had spoken about three (3) phases of helping the homeless, and he reiterated that the first phase was to provide immediate shelter and housing and the third phase was permanent housing. He advised that the second phase was also extremely important, noting that this phase involved getting someone who had been living on the street to the point where they can live in a house. Dr. Abrams indicated that many of the homeless lack education and job skills, have never had a bank account, and do not know how to manage money. He stated that they cannot go directly from being homeless to owning a home and need time to obtain a job and job skills, be on a career path, and be taught life skills.

Mr. Anderson asked if anyone knew how much it costs the State to put a child in foster care. He stated that quite a few families with dependents had gone to the State for help and had gotten temporary help in hotels. He explained that, while these families were in this process, the State discussed putting their children in foster care. Mr. Anderson noted that if families have two (2) or three (3) children, the cost for foster care would be in the four-figure range. He stated that it is much cheaper to help a family get on their feet than to split them up, which also has psychological costs. Mr. Anderson expressed his hope that the State would consider reforming their current approach, stating that if a family is relatively healthy, breaking it up is the most expensive path.

Mr. Anderson advised that, as a result of the Great Recession, there was a marked increase and a change in the nature of homelessness in 2007 and 2008. He indicated that prior to that time the problem seemed to be more people who had substance issues, noting that these are the individuals who are now referred to as the chronic homeless. Mr. Anderson stated that, around 2007 and 2008, he started to see not only homeless people who had mental illness or substance abuse issues but people with many other issues, including economic issues. He noted that he also began to see more families, and explained that this problem had not gone away. Mr. Anderson stated that foreclosures, many of which were illegal, had created enormous problems. He advised that a part-time economy had emerged, wages had decreased, and the rents had not, which had created pressure in a lot of ways. Mr. Anderson stated that, due to the health care law, many people were trapped in part-time jobs. He advised that macro problems had contributed to homelessness, and he stated that addressing homelessness would take long-term and creative commitment. Responding, Mayor Christiansen stated that this was the reason for the task force.

Mr. Anderson indicated that taking advantage of the new State law that allows land banking would be one (1) creative solution. He suggested that, if City zoning issues were to be reviewed, consideration be given to tweaking the Planned Neighborhood Design that is already in the City's Code to allow tiny houses or other affordable housing options. Mr. Anderson also suggested considering appropriate ways to encourage housing for the disabled, who have income but were being priced out of the market because of waiting lists. He noted that all disabled people can eventually obtain housing; however, some are on the street for months or years because of waiting lists and inadequate housing stock for the disabled. Mr. Anderson advised that the disabled are among those who are most deserving of help and are often left out. Mr. Anderson indicated that there were many issues that need to be reviewed and expressed his hope that the specific solutions he had mentioned would be considered in the mix. In response, Mayor Christiansen advised that Mr. Anderson's comments would be taken into consideration with the advent of the task force.

Mayor Christiansen advised that he would appoint a task force to address the issues and recommendations brought forth by the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Homelessness in seven (7) to 14 days. He advised that the Panel's report was not the end of the work and noted that the first step of a long journey had been taken in addressing the issues.

By unanimous consent, the meeting adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

TRACI A. McDOWELL
CITY CLERK

All ordinances, resolutions, motions, and orders adopted by City Council during the Open Town Meeting of June 28, 2017, are hereby approved.

ROBIN R. CHRISTIANSEN
MAYOR

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