



## Minutes

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**Present:** Sally Ragonut, Chair; Paula Mason, Vice-Chair; Bruce Metcalf, Secretary; Supervisor Lee Lor; Iris Mojica de Tatum; Keng Cha; Supervisor Lloyd Pareira; Mary Ellis; Vicki Humble; Emil Erreca; Micki Archuleta; Zachery Ramos

**Absent:** Brian Pena; Virginia Vega; Vince Ramos

**Others Present:** Genevieve Valentine; Sharon Jones; Jacqui Coulter; Nancy Reding; Adam Lane; Eli Sachse; Ye Thao; Araceli Sanchez; Steve Roussos; Sharon Mendonca; Zachery Coston; Jeffery; Carol Hulsizer, Recorder

### Call to Order / Roll Call

Chair Sally Ragonut called the meeting to order at 4:32 p.m. Roll call was taken. Sally asked that before anyone makes a comment, to please state their name and then give their comment.

### Mission Statement

The Mission Statement was read by Sally Ragonut.

### Opportunity for public input. At this time any person may comment on any item which is not on the agenda.

**Discussion/Conclusion:** Adam Lane from the LGBTQ+ Alliance questioned why the \$30K of the \$8M (3% of \$8M) is such a disproportionate amount. They are doing mental health there and the LGBTQ+ have a lot of extra mental health issues particularly depression and anxiety.

Eli Sachse commented that up to 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ. This is a huge disparity. The mental illness and physical health that LGBTQ face and the reason these health measures like this are so crucial and should have a SMART goal. He hasn't seen these come forth from the people with the funds, the cultural brokers. He continually asks for the SMART goals and to see how they can hold these programs accountable to address these health disparities. He thanked everyone for holding this meeting later at night; he appreciates that.

**Recommendation/Action:** Information only

### 4:36 p.m. – OPEN PUBLIC HEARING: Program Update to the FY 19/20 Mental Health Services Act (MHSa) Annual Update

#### a. Close Public Hearing

#### (1) Approve Program Update to the FY 19/20 Mental Health Services Act (MHSa) Annual Update

**Discussion/Conclusion:** Sharon Jones gave a brief presentation. This is a program update to the most recent Annual Update for FY 19/20. This update involves the homeless community, Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) funds and also capacity building for our community.

**Demographics –** In January 2019 it was noted that 607 people were identified as meeting the HUD definition for homelessness in the County of Merced. About 285 were unsheltered in the City of Merced; 46.3% were identified as chronically homeless. 322 individuals were considered sheltered in either transitional housing or emergency shelter. The goal of having a Navigation Center campus means



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moving towards getting individuals into permanent housing. The Navigation Center will play a distinct role in homeless services and the homeless system that will be set up in Merced County. It will aid individuals in shelter, provide opportunities for food and other benefits and supports.

Supportive Services – Currently there is New Direction which has already started some of the work. The Navigation Center will replicate what New Direction started and expand. The priority population is individuals living with a mental illness or at risk of a mental illness that may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The Mental Health Services Act (MHSa) is about disabling symptoms of mental illness; but there are many intersections (such as being homeless). It is about having healthy meals, helping with hygiene, and intensive case management. Some individuals need guidance or help facilitating a process to help them heal or get linked to services. The Navigation Center will have 24/7 staffing; there will be a safe and welcoming environment. It will help eliminate barriers to housing. It will be considered a low-barrier shelter with supportive outreach and engagement services. The definition of low-barrier Navigation Center is housing first and enriched with services where people can move on to receiving permanent housing. There will be linkages to employment, public benefits, and health services with the primary goal of having a permanent place to live. The Navigation Center will be a 75 to 100 bed low-barrier shelter. There will be co-located service providers, referral assistance and an outreach and engagement team that will work in conjunction with law enforcement and other providers in the community.

The action being discussed today is the use of Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) funds. PEI focuses on interventions across the life span (meaning from zero up to 65+). PEI is about not having symptoms getting so severe where an intervention is needed. Prevention reduces risk factors, builds protective factors for individuals and promotes social, emotional and cognitive development that lead to a state of well-being. This action builds capacity in the community – linking those programs together to have a focus of community health. Prevention focuses on outreach and engagement, providing information about services and programs, providing resources, brochures and flyers, and linkage to appropriate agencies and services. Early intervention is about symptom reduction; avoiding the need for more intensive treatment.

Program Expansion – this is a one-time opportunity to leverage dollars for the homeless navigation center and building collaboration here in Merced County to help our homeless community. With this program expansion they are hoping to reduce homelessness, increase access to shelter and housing, improve coordination system with the different programs in the community, help those facing homelessness and may need supportive services. By leveraging dollars for the Navigation Center through the use of PEI funds, they will be able to broaden the provision of community-based services by taking prevention and early intervention services to individuals where they are located, in their natural settings. Again, this is one-time funding of \$4M. This includes a blending of other funding sources. The person implementing this program along with the collaboration of BHRS is the Human Services Agency (HSA). Sharon then asked for questions and comments.

-Iris questioned the oversight falling on HSA. Sharon reiterated the oversight will fall on HSA. They will have to provide what all other MHSa program provides which is a description of the work happening, their key objectives, how many people they will serve within the timeframe, the cost to serve each person, how they will measure it and any success stories. All MHSa programs have the same infrastructure – fiscal year, number of individuals served, amount that it will cost per participant, the amount of funding for the overall project, a description of the program, key objectives, SMART goals, performance measures, satisfaction surveys, and pre- and post-tests/evaluations as well as quarterly reporting.

-Public – where can this information be found? Sharon replied it is in the Annual Update.

-Public – has HSA permitted a breakdown as to what they will do, what their focus is, what percentage is going to deliverables? Sharon stated that the next phase would be to sit down with the PEI analysts working out the SMART goals, key objectives, and the number that can realistically be served. After it is approved, that is when the work begins. The deliverables are required.



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-Public – could Sharon expand on the definition of low-barriers and what type of barriers has happened in the past? Sharon stated they are trying to build a system flow where individuals will be supported in a timely manner. Access will be easier. They will understand what is available to them and how to access it. They will have a plan established in a timely manner to determine what is needed for them individually. The goal is to have a faster access without barriers so that housing can come faster.

-Public – this sounds great and he suggests using LGBTQ+ as a resource and by consult, having a rainbow flag in there somewhere, having awareness of LGBTQ+ for the staff, using available resources in the community and knowing of the large amount of LGBTQ+ homeless in this town. Sharon stated this will definitely be passed on to HSA and thanked him for his offer.

-Sally – in the past having a pet was a barrier, could Sharon discuss if the homeless will be allowed to have a dog. Sharon stated there have been a lot of conversations regarding this; she will find out definitely and let everyone know. They are looking at building protective factors and a pet is definitely a protective factor for the homeless. Bruce commented that there will probably be some kennels outside and also be some small kennels inside. A number of ideas are being looked at.

-Public – low barrier ideas – she knows that Fresno County is doing a great job.

-Sally – she commented that in looking through the program there was a notice that said there would be other sites around Merced County somewhere down the line – like Delhi or Atwater – has there been any discussion around this? Bruce commented that the County has already contracted with The Mission to have ten bridging houses. They presently have four or five in the city of Merced. They are looking for two houses in Atwater, one in Livingston, one in Dos Palos and two in Los Banos. They already have one in Los Banos. A bridging house is a low-barrier house much like the Navigation Center except it is located in houses all over the county. The people in those bridging houses will have full access to the facilities at the Navigation Center.

-Public – with HSA taking over the \$4M, will it be added to other funding? Sharon stated that the \$4M will be leveraged with other funding. The cost of operating a 24/7 Navigation Center can be very costly. It can also be very impactful for the community.

-Sally – she read the plan and they planned to start build this October, but will this be hindered by COVID-19? Sharon stated that conversations are taking place with whatever can be done now. Of course, we are “sheltering in place” and there is no better time to get people out of the elements. Bruce commented that construction has already begun in southern California where the same developer is developing the same type of facility. Another location in California is already working on pre-fabbing; at some point in time they will be bringing all those pieces and putting them together on site. They have already begun the construction off-site.

-Public – how much of the \$4M will be used for construction? Sharon replied that PEI dollars cannot be used for construction. They have to be used for preventive support services. The question was asked how long supportive services would last. Sharon stated that the goal is to have an individualized client care/housing plan for everyone so it will vary for everyone. The ultimate goal is to get everyone into permanent housing. The question was asked how long \$4M can sustain such a program. Sharon stated that the program cost is over \$4M. HSA has other funding to go along with this and that is how the sustainability will be created. They will also have a budget and will be monitoring the program. The hope is to continue building so this can be a center for our community.

-Emil – he questioned if there will be public meetings for other organizations, such as LGBTQ or 12-step programs, to come in and educate the population? Bruce stated there will be a classroom in the building. Sharon stated that the arranging of these trainings will fall under HSA; BHRS will definitely be a collaborative partner and they are hoping for many other collaborative partners as well.

-Iris – she questioned if the Navigation Center is still opening on schedule? Bruce stated he believes it is. Sally read it is to be open by October 2020. Bruce stated that the County is expecting to sign a contract for organizations to operate it by sometime in June. Iris asked if they are looking at a turnkey in Merced County – placing people in hotel rooms. Sharon stated there is a process right now. Jennifer Jones is assisting with securing hotel rooms for individuals. Iris then reported that she was listening to Governor Newsom's



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daily briefing and he mentioned Merced County in terms that he was pleased with what is happening here in regards to homelessness. Bruce mentioned that Adam Gray is a strong proponent for our area and he has probably let the Governor know what is going on. Adam Gray has worked a lot with Merced County, the City and CoC Board. Bruce is very happy to see the collaboration taking place across private organizations, the city, the county, the state.

-Adam – he corrected the percentage he gave earlier in the meeting in regards to 3% of \$8M – it is not 3%, it is .375% which is an incredibly disproportionate number. He just wanted to rectify this.

At 5:30 Sally closed the Public Hearing.

**Recommendation/Action:** M/S/C (Ellis / Archuleta) to approve a referral to the Board of Supervisors for the \$4M for the Homeless Navigation support. Director Valentine commented that a roll-call vote must be taken. Carol will read each member's name and they have to state "approve" or "nay".

Supervisor Lor – Approve  
Brian Pena – not present  
Keng Cha – Approve  
Vicki Humble – Approve  
Paula Mason – Approve

Virginia Vega – not present  
Mary Ellis – Approve  
Sally Ragonut – Approve  
Emil Erreca – Approve

Iris Mojica de Tatum – Approve  
Vince Ramos – not present  
Bruce Metcalf – Approve  
Micki Archuleta – Approve

Sharon stated that the next step is the document being sent to the Board of Supervisor's for their approval.

Submitted by:     *Signed*      
Carol Hulsizer  
Recording Secretary

Approved by:     *Signed*      
Bruce Metcalf, Secretary  
Merced County Behavioral Health Board

Date:     5/6/20    

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