

Freeport Working Group for Welcoming New Mainers
July 23, 2019
5:00 p.m.-6:10 p.m.
Freeport Town Council Chambers

Present:

Town Staff- Peter Joseph, Johanna Hanselmann
Town Councilors- Sarah Tracy, Tawni Whitney, Doug Reighley
Community Members- Dean Paterson, Wayne Jortner, Fred Palmer, Maura Pillsbury, Ed Bradley, Melanie Sachs

Purpose of group: The Working Group will organize and distribute resources and information for Freeport residents to assist asylum seekers who have chosen to live in our community. These resources may include utilizing the in-kind supports from the Town of Freeport, including staff time, communication tools, and facilities, but not direct tax dollars. It was discussed that while we do have some excellent supports for all residents, both current and brand-new to Freeport, that this particular group of new residents face language, cultural and eligibility barriers that will require an extra bit of support established at the outset.

Areas of discussion:

1. Housing

A. Long-term housing:

- Several residents (Fred P., Ed B.) have been attempting to connect with private landlords who would donate their spaces. Thus far only one property identified, and that would significant work to be habitable. They stated this is very time-intensive, as it needs personal appeals and knowledge of available vacant spaces. Group decision made to table that effort for the moment, although grateful for the efforts thus far.

- Connection has been made by Melanie S. between Freeport Housing Trust/Preservation Management, Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA), and the Portland Shelter Director. FHT/PM will connect with shelter director about possible units (not certain - may be anywhere between 1-4 units available). He then identifies families, and sends applications to MSHA, who may have up to two years of funding for the housing. This same process can be used if a private landlord has a space. Information on this process can be disseminated on the town website. Wayne J. reminded folks of all of the AirBnB homes in Freeport - they may be willing to rent long-term. Guarantee of funding may also encourage other private landowners to consider opening their housing.

ACTION ITEM: Melanie will follow up with FHT/PM to see the status of their units. She will also write a blurb to be put on the town website after the next

meeting for private landlords/homeowners who can offer their properties with potentially guaranteed reimbursement. Will include reminder to AirBnBs.

B. SHORT-term housing:

- Efforts being coordinated by Greater Portland Council of Governments. They encourage any Freeport resident to email them at hosthomes@gpcog.org. You will be screened by CIEE (an agency that normally screens host families for international students.) and if approved, will be matched with a family. GPCOG states the placements are initially intended to go to mid-October, and that efforts to find more permanent housing would continue during the placement. Unlike the long-term option, this is donated space by the Freeport resident/homeowner.

- Maura P. has connected with Yarmouth faith-based group, which provides "overflow temporary housing" for one or two weeks for families until space opens up in shelters in Southern Maine. She believes only families in the southern part of Freeport could be added as an option, but she will connect back to see if that is needed.

ACTION ITEM: Melanie S. will include the GPCOG information in write-up for town website. Maura will connect with the Yarmouth group about adding Freeport families.

C. Sponsorship:

Doug R. noted that sponsorship of families is an established practice, where a family agrees to be the sponsor and support a specific asylum-seeker/refugee family or person for a period of time, with certain legal obligations and process.

ACTION ITEM: Doug will look into this process (perhaps with information from Maura) and bring back specific information next meeting to be added to the website as an option for folks who are interested in pursuing that avenue of support.

2. Concrete Needs

There was a broad discussion of concrete needs that will be possibly required for these families.

A. Translation: We do not yet know what will be needed, but we in particular have excellent resources for french-speakers here in Freeport due to the French school, local folks, and the high school. This will be evaluated when needed- no action item yet, other than having volunteers denote willingness to translate.

B. Household items - discussed having Freeport Community Services at the table for next meeting, as they have provided some clothing thus far. Tawni W. also offered to be the point of contact for furniture in particular when/if families

identified and needs established, as she has many contacts through her Neighborhood brigade group. Maura P. has also been very involved in Maine Needs, which has a list of places throughout Southern Maine which has been organizing/collecting items. Items will be determined as soon as possible, an eye to cultural sensitivity (i.e. if put together a bucket of cleaning supplies, labeling what each item is for is apparently super helpful.) No action yet.

C. External Agency Services- as much information as possible of services these families are already connected to will be obtained. All have reportedly had medical screenings at the Expo, and are connected with case managers and immigration services. We hope to have a list of Freeport folks who are willing to act as mentors for each family who can make sure these connections continue (see more under volunteer.)

ACTION ITEM: Maura will check in with Yarmouth group, and Melanie will check in with Brunswick group (TEAN) to see if checklists/resource lists such as this already exist, and will bring to next meeting. Tawni is ready! Melanie will also invite team from Freeport Community Services to be part of ongoing Working Group.

D. General Assistance - Johanna is here and ready to help!

3. Fundraising

Discussed whether fundraising event is needed, and what the scope of such an event might be.

ACTION ITEM: Each member asked to think about what kind of one-time fundraising event might be helpful, and more importantly, where the funds would go and with what intent (i.e. all to FCS to support concrete needs for all community members, but also to purchase some of these needed items that are normally perhaps not available, like cleaning supplies, bus passes, etc? Immigration services such as ILAP? Case management services such as Maine Access Immigrant Network?)

4. Volunteer opportunities:

Hope to have a place on website where people could indicate they would like to volunteer. This list includes:

- Being a mentor to a family - helping them coordinate services
- Being a translator, and in what language
- Providing transportation (FCS already has a system for this- could add to their volunteer pool?)
- Willing to be contacted about concrete needs (gift cards, items)
- Willing to work on fundraising event

ACTION ITEM: Let Melanie know if I forgot anything! This will hopefully go out next week.

Please let me know if I forgot anything else that should be in these notes. Thank you again!

Warmly,

Melanie