

Minutes for Working Group for Welcoming New Mainers
Freeport Town Hall, Council Chambers
7/30/19, 5:00 pm

In attendance: Melanie Sachs (chair), Councilor Doug Reighley, Sallie Smith, Dean Paterson, Beatrice Perron Dahlen, Nancy Kiernan, Town Manager Peter Joseph Town Manager (in for Johanna Hanselman, GA Administrator).

Special representative Sarah Leighton (YMCA of Southern ME),

On phone: Councilor Tawni Whitney, Council Chair Sarah Tracy

Notetaker - Liza Moore, representing Freeport Community Services

1. Introductions

2. Purpose of Group

Reviewed the purpose as outlined in minutes of 7.23.19. Motion to amend (Doug/ Dean). No comments. All in favor to amend. Purpose of group to read as:

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 through allocating money from the approved budget. 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.

3. Status Updates - Resource List

Reviewed "Resource List from Freeport Working Group to Welcome New Mainers" draft from Melanie. This is designed to help folks who are hosting families, or who might know of families already here, connect with goods and services. This is also designed as a resource for those who may want to donate or offer services, such as housing, concrete goods, or funds. The committee discussed several areas of the resource document:

- A. Host Housing - Doug met with Chris Hall at Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) which will be umbrella for all the communities for short-term housing coordination (to minimize confusion and avoid duplication). To date 61 families have been placed in temporary housing throughout Southern Maine. We don't know if any families have been placed in Freeport to date, although aware of some families who have gone through the process through GPCOG. Interested hosts should sign up at Hosthomes@gpcog.org. GPCOG will be having another meeting soon for all interested community coordinators.

Yarmouth has a coalition of three churches, run by Carla Hunt: Yarmouth Compassionate Housing Initiative (YCHI) see "Resource list..." for more details. This group has existed for about 4 years. Good resource for understanding the longer term needs. Sallie S. noted that Greater Portland Family Promise

(<https://greaterportlandfamilypromise.org/>) provides help for homeless families. On a rotating schedule, 4 churches take in families for a week. Y in Portland serves as a Day Shelter. It is unknown if any local entities will take on development of host homes network, with translators, mentors, etc.

- B. Sponsorship/Legal Issues- what does this mean? Confusion as to whether one must be a legal sponsor to be a short-term host. Answer is “no.” (Sponsorship is not relevant in the context of individuals helping asylees with housing.) Those with questions about legal issues, including sponsorship, may want to connect with the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (www.ilapmaine.org), which is the only state-wide immigration legal services organization in Maine.
- C. Additional Community Resources- Sarah Leighton, chief development officer at YMCA of Southern Maine described some of the things happening at the Y. They offer the New American Welcome Center run primarily out of Portland branch but which may expand to Biddeford and Freeport sites. It offers some specific support for asylees, ie. child care while parents are in processing meetings, women’s only swim lessons, financial education (opening bank accounts, etc.), English lessons, social activities. They are in the midst of planning Welcoming Week - Sept 13-22. It’s an annual national initiative that also happens at the Y, bringing together natives and newcomers to build awareness. <https://www.ymca.net/welcoming-week>. Maybe there’s an opportunity find some help for our committee’s work here.
- D. Medical resources- Dean P. contacted Lois Skillings, CEO of MidCoast- Parkview Health. They have a plan and resources for partnering with new Mainers who may end up in Freeport. Greater Portland Health Clinic also offers health-related resource for families. This is valuable info for host families who will want to be able to direct families to medical resources. Mid Coast is not just for Brunswick- Bath area.; Freeport residents may also access their services.
- E. Transportation- Freeport Community Services is able to offer transportation for medical appointments. Freeport Friends Neighborhood Brigade has a robust volunteer transportation network as well.

ACTION ITEM:

Please review the list and send Melanie any revisions, additions, comments by no later than the evening of August 4th. Melanie will revise and send resource list to Peter J. on Monday August 5th, for posting on Town of Freeport’s website by Tuesday, August 6th.

4. Community Coordination

Discussion: As a community, how will we coordinate information about services?

- What structures and information do we want to support?
- We may need a community-based entity to organize and coordinate services.
- Is there a model for this? Several options:
 - It could be with one agency being the umbrella org;
 - could be a meeting with the service providers (Freeport Community Services, Freeport Friends Neighborhood Brigade, Johanna as GA administrator, Casco Bay Y, and interested churches) to make sure everyone knows what areas each one will focus on within existing frameworks;
 - could be a hire (i.e. Brunswick hiring a coordinator).

ACTION ITEMS:

- Freeport Community Services- Liza will meet with ED, Paula Paladino and BOD chair Pat Palmer.
- Melanie will contact local churches to see if there are any plans/efforts underway for housing coalition or other community supports?
- Sarah Leighton from the Y will connect about programs in the Freeport location

5. Fundraising/Awareness Event

There is a desire to do something but we want to have a clear idea of the purpose and whom/what it will benefit. Value of an event is the opportunity to raise awareness and educate.

- Recent event at former Bartol Library was successful. If that space hasn't been rented out by the Town it could be used, pending Town Council approval.
- One concept suggested included Heifer Project Model (for levels of donation), display photos - stimulate conversation/ educational , have sign-up tables of volunteer opportunities.
- Money could be raised to support the role of a Cultural Broker / case manager.
- Peter J. reported that Freeport (Johanna) processes GA requests for Freeport and Yarmouth. Asylees will be eligible in 3 months (instead of 6 because of recent decision by Governor Mills). Vouchers can be used for housing and food. There are expenses that fall outside of what GA covers. Maybe that is what we fundraise for, as Johanna has identified this as a need for families.
- Following on the idea of Welcome Week, at the Y we could have an event at the Library where immigrants, who've been here a long time or are more recent arrivals, share their experiences. To build awareness, compassion and an appreciation our experiences. Maura had suggested this at last meeting.

ACTION ITEMS:

- **Find out from Yarmouth (YCHI) what kind of money is needed to run their model. (Melanie will ask Maura or Johanna if this was part of the conversation with Carla).**
- **Beatrice will coordinate a subcommittee around an awareness event what we might do during Welcoming Week. Connect with Beatrice at threadandladle@gmail.com if you are interested.**

Next Meeting, 8/13 at 5 PM in Town Chambers.

Respectfully submitted,
Liza Moore
8/1/19