



Responding to Homelessness in Orange County: A Call for Community Conversation

Community House is Orange County's *only* shelter for men. The proposed update to the Good Neighbor Plan (GNP) is a call for a community conversation to determine how we as Orange County respond to the needs of people who live among us unhoused and often unseen. Everyone who lives, plays, works or worships in the County and Towns is a stakeholder in this conversation.

Summary of Good Neighbor Plan Proposed Update

At the request of many members of our community, IFC has shared an update to the GNP that would be necessary for us to more effectively address homelessness in Orange County and to better respond to stated community need for safety, health and dignity of all residents.

The proposed update will allow IFC to address an identified gap in Orange County's local homeless services system and is consistent with the Housing First model, which is a nationally-recognized best practice of lowering barriers to shelter entry and facilitating exits from shelter into housing.

The GNP Proposed Update is an eight-page document, which is available on IFC's website: www.ifcweb.org. Following is a summary.

An updated GNP will allow Community House to:

Offer housing-focused shelter (also called Housing First), consistent with nationally-recognized best practices (updates B,C,Y). This model is person-centered and assumes that people know what they need to successfully exit homelessness. A large body of research shows the success of this approach.

For IFC, Housing First means that each of our 52 residents will be assigned a bed upon entry and will remain in the same bed until they move out. A case manager will meet with each resident to establish and track progress toward goals that will support their ability to obtain and maintain housing. For some people, securing housing can be accomplished in a couple of months; for others, it may take a year or longer. Currently at Community House, under a "transitional housing" focus, residents expect to have a more lengthy stay and to complete "stages," a process of moving to beds in different rooms over time. Rather than working on a plan toward exiting into housing, the focus of the resident's stay thus becomes where he is in the "stages" process. Staff are required to spend time processing residents among the different stages rather than fully focusing on their housing plans. Residents will receive more support and guidance under the Housing First model because the focus will be transitioning out of an institutional setting into housing.

Lower barriers to entry, allowing IFC to address an identified gap in Orange County's local homeless services system for emergency shelter (updates D,F,G,H,I,J,K,M,N,O,R,S). Reducing barriers to shelter allows people to more easily come in from outside and begin to stabilize in a supportive environment. When the threshold for shelter is too high for our most vulnerable community members, they end up staying for long periods of time in our parks, on our streets, in our neighborhoods, or in other public

places not meant for human habitation. This is neither healthy nor dignified for the person or the community.

For IFC, lowering barriers means changing our current practices of requiring government-issued identification and completing comprehensive assessments before entry, requiring background checks, mandating sobriety, and limiting transportation options. It also means using some of our inclement weather cots for year-round overflow space to allow unsheltered people to come inside at night, regardless of weather, and begin to experience stability. Orange County's 2018 Point-In-Time Count indicates increased community need for shelter space, with 152 people experiencing homelessness and 39 of them unsheltered on a given night.

Update language and remove other administrative and efficiency barriers (updates A,E,L,P,Q,T,U,V,W,X,Z). The update includes allowing any staff to discharge residents according to standard protocol, transferring the 24-hour emergency contact to the front desk so staff can receive feedback in real time, providing some meals at IFC's Community Kitchen for Community House residents, opening the on-site Piedmont Health Clinic to all Piedmont Health patients, and allowing residents to enjoy the grounds and outdoor common areas of their temporary home without it being considered loitering.

History

Three years ago, IFC moved Orange County's men's shelter from the downtown Rosemary Street location into a brand new home at 1315 MLK Jr Blvd in North Chapel Hill. The move marked the end of a lengthy process to approve the site for this purpose, negotiate the terms of use, raise the funds, and ultimately build the facility.

During the process, neighborhood residents and members of the larger Orange County community were involved in a series of discussions, some with concerns about its proposed location and others in support. Chapel Hill Town Council required IFC to work with a coalition of stakeholders to develop a Good Neighbor Plan and create a Community House Advisory Committee (CHAC) as a condition of the Special Use Permit allowing the change in zoning so the facility could be built.

The CHAC is an active group of neighbors and other community stakeholders that has met to review how the program operates and to assist with any issues that arise. Since Community House opened on September 24, 2015, CHAC has met regularly, submitted required reports to the Town, and held three open houses. There have been no complaints about Community House or its residents from neighbors or other members of the community in the past three years. There are various methods for registering complaints, including in person to staff, by phone, via the dedicated voicemail or online form.

IFC has partnered with the Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness (OCPEH), County and Town officials, state and federal governments, community members experiencing homelessness, and other community stakeholders to examine how IFC can best respond to demonstrated community need and work toward the stated goal of ending homelessness in Orange County.

According to the 2018 Point-In-Time Count conducted by the OCPEH, 152 people experienced homelessness on the night of the count. Of these, 39 were unsheltered, which means they were staying on the street, in parks, in cars, or other outdoor places not meant for human habitation. Many could not access shelter at IFC because there was no space available and/or barriers to entry imposed by the Good Neighbor Plan were too high.