

At 1:00 p.m., Mayor Condrey called the Special meeting of Middletown City Council Meeting to order in Council Chambers, Lower Level of the City Building.

ROLL CALL

EXCUSE ABSENCE

Ms. Condrey moved to excuse the absence of Mr. Moon. Ms. Nenni seconded. Ayes: Ms. Nenni, Mr. Muterspaw, Ms. Condrey, Mr. Ferrell.

RECEIVE AND FILE SPECIAL MEETING DOCUMENTS

Ms. Nenni moved to receive and file the Special Meeting documents. Mr. Ferrell seconded. Motion carried. Ayes: Mr. Muterspaw, Ms. Condrey, Ms. Nenni, Mr. Ferrell.

Ord. No. 02022-13 Contract for Warming Shelter for Homeless

Ordinance No. 02022-13, an ordinance authorizing the City Manager to enter into a contract with Freya's Hen House, a non-profit organization, to provide a short-term warming shelter for the homeless and declaring an emergency was read in its entirety.

Police Chief Birk stated we started looking for a warming shelter back in December. We have our COP (Community Oriented Policing) Unit working with several homeless throughout the City. We're working with OneCity and with SHALOM not helping this year because of Covid, we were looking for a shelter. We looked at the Central Avenue location and the Grove Street proposal. We believe that location is the best option, we don't have to worry about the transportation because all the services are within several blocks of the area. Erica Norton is working with the Fire Department to either add a fire suppression system or to have fire personnel there while people are sleeping. We added that into the proposal so we're looking for \$82,795 to be used from the ARPA funds for the warming shelter for 99 days. We still have to follow through with some of the fire codes and also prepare the building through the permit occupancy and once that's complete we should be ready to open.

Citizen Comments Adriane Scherrer

Adriane Scherrer, office address 1028 Central Avenue, Middletown, Ohio commented I'm thrilled that we're looking at a warming center. I'm hoping that the people who are at the warming center will get information about all of the services that are already available in our community to them and help them get to them. I would like to say that if and when we decide it's time to do something permanent about this issue, I would love to dedicate my time to helping with that. I've got some good ideas.

Chris Batty

Chris Batty, 128 Marymount Court, Middletown, Ohio commented that emergency votes have been abused in the past and we need to get away from those. It is unfortunate that failure is in the planning on this item have led to what seems like a do or die situation when we've known for a long time that the cold was coming as it does every year and that we have a homeless problem which has existed for many years. I do agree that we must start from a place of compassion for those in need. We must be diligent and care more for the person's overall care and trajectory of their life. There is a long history of giving handouts across our country that have actually worsened and encouraged homelessness as it creates dependency. I'm a big proponent of giving hand ups not handouts. There needs to be something else attached to this outreach that will help them to take the next steps in getting clean, sober, cleaned up physically, financially and getting employment and being a citizen who contributes to our community. I love the idea of partnering with Hope House and filling any vacancy that they have there. I appreciate the Council members that have reached out to Hope House and other churches and organizations to try to find alternative solutions. A few questions that I believe we need to answer in order to make an informed and wise decision and to be good stewards of the City's and the taxpayer's money. I appreciate the comments made by Council to call out that ARPA is not free money; it is taxpayer's money. Until staff and council collectively don't view these funds as just free money but rather the money that the whole city has and clearly define all the uses for it how can we make diligent decisions with it? Do we have a process for identifying all the current homeless people in the City? Does the process capture enough info about these folks to help us understand who wants the most help? Does this process include a connection to a program that will support them taking next steps to getting on their feet? Does this process include requirements that create enough of a barrier to entry to help drive accountability and success such as drug and alcohol testing, taking a class, going to a daily meeting? There has been a long history of just throwing money at a problem and hoping to fix it. How do we make sure that this is true investment in the people that want help, not just a band-aid that will leave all these folks with the same gaping wound that the homelessness had before we started? Can we say with integrity that the people helped by this money will be any better off three to twelve months from now? If the answer is no, then I would encourage the Council to take these into consideration and vote no and instead use this money wisely to develop a longer-term plan with Hope House and other churches and organizations etc. Thank you.

Council Comments

Mr. Muterspaw commented that I'm going to vote yes on this simply for the fact that I believe

Mr. Muterspaw

it's one of our responsibilities to help those who need it. I know that this is a temporary measure and we have not achieved success in Middletown the last few years dealing with the homeless. We've actually failed the community, we've failed the City, that includes me as the Police Chief and as a Council member. We've got to do better, but with that in mind, I have faith in this plan simply because I have faith in the Police and Fire Chief. They advise us to the best place, function and location. I'm disappointed about and what I'm hearing most about from our constituents in the community is the emergency legislation. We're in mid-January, it's been cold for a few months. I'm glad we're doing something about it now but when we have constant emergency legislation it just kills the trust of the community. These processes are in place simply because it gives the public an opportunity to hear what we're doing, to come up with their plan, to give input and suggestions. When we take that away because of an emergency measure we're taking away their right to be heard and their right to know what's going on. I'm a big believer in emergency legislation when we have to have it, such as a SAFER grant the other night with the fire department. I know those grant deadlines come in at the last minute sometimes and we have to do that. But with something like this, it makes the public believe that there's something behind the scenes, even if there's not. It's the perception. Also, we have a change of plan, I know costs change and that's what's happened here. It's a different cost than what we were told the other day. I appreciate the staff getting this out to us as quickly as they could but it's still a change. Yesterday some of us went to Hope House and met with Tim Williams for about an hour. There are long term plans in place. I've reached out to some churches for food for these people and try to come up with some stuff. The response has been great and I'm confident in Mr. Williams at the Hope House. He believes that this location will help them transition people into something more permanent to help them out. It'll be warm in a few months. That gives us plenty of time to come up with a permanent plan and to make sure that this doesn't happen again under emergency measure and this kind of money. I'm hoping we'll do that. This is not an indictment on anybody. The City as a whole has failed. A couple years ago, I made a post about other cities dropping off homeless and I was told over and over by people that it does not occur. It's still occurring. They're Uberring them here now from other cities. I will not hesitate to call out other cities publicly that are doing this and embarrass them because they're dropping people here inhumanely, like stray dogs. It becomes our problem in our police and fire, and our public works have to deal with this. The people are getting dropped here from other counties and places. They've never even been to Middletown and they're getting dumped here. It's still going on, those who doubt that need to go down the Hope House and talk to the director. He will tell you it's occurring. We have to do something and if other cities are doing that we need to call them out publicly because we care about our City. We care about our Middletown people and it's not fair for our services and our resources to be drained because other cities don't want to take care of their own people. There is data being presented. I know Chief Birk and the COP team have done a great job with documenting and working hard to take care of the Middletown people the best that they can. It's hard to track the people from out of town because many of them don't have id's and don't want to give you information. I'm frustrated. We have to do better and I know staff works hard but the emergency legislation. We have to make sure in the future we have plans in place so our people can come up to this mic or send emails to be heard.

Ms. Nenni

Ms. Nenni commented I appreciate the comments about the emergency legislation and how it comes to us. I think it's always also our responsibility, if something does come to us as an emergency measure, to be able to stop and learn more about what's going on and see if we can come to a resolution. We can call a special meeting, like we've done today to try to get more time to figure things out. I look forward to being able to spend more time at our strategic planning session talking about what we've learned from this experience and how it came to fruition and how we can do better in the future. To plan for this kind of thing in advance with community input and all that comes along with that. I look forward to doing that at the strategic planning session and it's something that we probably should have maybe had more focus on last year at the strategic planning session so that we could have come up with a plan before now. I also do think that this is something that serves a need in our community for the people who are here. I know that our police, our COP unit and Victoria have been working hard to try to find the resources that people need and place them with those resources when they're ready to accept them. That's a big part of it too, you can give someone a warm place to stay but it doesn't mean that they're going to want help. But we can offer it and have it available to them, and to me that's what doing the right thing looks like. I have been a supporter and volunteer at SHALOM before. I'm hoping that eventually we can talk to those churches and try to get back to a place where they're able to offer SHALOM to our homeless people here in town again. They do so with such love and compassion and understanding. Just to sit down and talk with someone and hear their story and know where they came from and make them feel like a human being. There are just so many wonderful volunteers from SHALOM who've done such good work and if we can follow their example of how to successfully work a program like this. I think, like Rodney said, food is a big part of that. Several of the comments that I heard back from citizens over the last couple of days mentioned asked how we were going to fill their bellies before we give them a warm place to sleep? I'm very curious to find out if there is a plan in place for that. If we're just looking for volunteers, do we make a call to the volunteer public of Middletown and say, these people are still in need, the same way that they were with SHALOM. SHALOM was reliant on donations for food, I am hoping that someone here today might have a good idea for that.

Mr. Ferrell

Mr. Ferrell stated for me three words: integrity, compassion and dignity. Nobody loves an emergency vote. I had 20-30 people reach out to me in the last few days about it. An emergency vote should be used when it's for the good of the people. I go back to three words integrity, compassion, dignity. Does this piece of legislation follow all those things? In my opinion, yes. So, for that, it's going to be a yes from me. Long term we need to plan things out better. We wake up every single day, we get a little bit better or we get a little bit worse, we never stay the same. I think our City is on the path of getting better every single day and this piece of legislation goes towards that so it's going to be a yes from me today. I appreciate everybody that reached out but I hope that as a City we look at integrity, compassion and dignity from now on.

Ms. Condrey

Ms. Condrey stated that I have a lot of questions. I appreciate this being put together and I just want to discuss this a little bit more because we just received this 30 minutes ago. Does this include introduction to wrap around services? Is there any effort or staffing hours being put towards that?

Chief Birk responded that the women running the shelter will be offering their services and their ultimate long-term goal is more of a transitional living type of service. Victoria and our COP officers are going to be involved with these individuals. They will have to log in every night so we're going to have their name and their information to be able to follow up with. There will also be a fire officer there all night long in case there's any medical issues or fire or anything like that. We will be able to follow up with them for long-term services.

Ms. Condrey expressed her concern that there is only funding for one employee for the intake duties and suggested that we may be better served spending more to have two, so that we're actually having an impact on getting them the services that they need. I'm afraid with the one that person's going to be focused on all the administrative aspects but we won't have the chance to actually have the impact on their lives and get them up off the street which is the end goal. The costs associated with that is only \$6,480 for that intake period and if we had a second person there I think we would probably see more benefit in the whole program. What is the need for the firefighter?

Chief Birk explained that a firefighter must be present because they do not have a fire alarm and a fire suppression system in the building. Fire Chief Lolli explained that a trained firefighter will be on site while it is open. That will allow them to obtain the required certificate of occupancy to be able to do this. They will have to install smoke detectors throughout the area and the fire watch person is there in case something would happen. They're trained in orderly evacuation and getting people out when needed. The Chief Building Official has given them a list of things they need to complete to get the approval. The reinspection is scheduled for Monday or Tuesday. Then the Chief Building Official and Fire Marshal will sign off on it.

Ms. Condrey asked how much would it cost for the building owners to upgrade their system and is there a better way to accomplish a fire suppression system and a fire alarm system instead of spending \$43,000. Chief Lolli responded it could be up to \$1M.

Ms. Nenni stated that to open your facility they are going to need that type of safety system. Maybe the Economic Development Department could work with this new business to help with the system rather than spending the money. Chief Lolli commented that it probably will take several months to get a system like that installed.

Erica Norton explained that our ultimate goal with that building when we purchased it was for a permanent solution to the homeless problem in the City. Not just to provide them with shelter, but to provide those supportive services. That is what we provide with our business. We offer life skills, counseling services and substance abuse treatment if they need it. The resources they need to break the cycle of homelessness. We got a quote yesterday for a suppression system, he said it would probably be somewhere between like \$50-70K to have everything that needed to be done to bring it up to code, it would take several weeks to get the equipment.

There was discussion about possibly using some of the funds for a more permanent solution to the building. There was also discussion about staffing and having personnel available to provide assessments and offer services.

Chief Birk reviewed the process that the police officers follow when they encounter homeless people. If they get a call about a suspicious person or come across someone that's homeless, the officers speak with them and see if they're intoxicated. They ask if they need any medical help at the time. Many of the homeless deal with different issues of substance abuse or mental health and certain locations won't accept them if they've been drinking. SHALOM was one of the few places that would accept somebody that had been drinking that wasn't causing a problem. They're not allowed to use drugs or alcohol at the location, but if they have been on some substance they were allowed to take them there. That was a nice feature for us. If my officers come across someone in the middle of the night they can contact the warming shelter and they can drop them off there. Last year, when it got really cold, we opened up the Police lobby

doors for them. One time, we had 15 people sleeping in there. I talked to SHALOM. They would have anywhere from 25 to 30. It's a resource for us and a place for individuals that want to get out of the elements during the coldest months.

There was discussion about Victoria from OneCity, the COP unit and the Mindful Healing Center working together to build relationships, and help get people the help and the supportive services they need.

There was additional discussion about homeless people being dropped off in Middletown that are from other areas and people who ended up homeless in Middletown. Discussion included adding an intake metric asking people where they came from immediately prior because we want to try to track any of these situations where someone brought them to Middletown. This warming shelter is to serve Middletown's homeless population. We are compassionate people, but our doorstep is being trampled. We need to continue to work at the county level about how to solve the homeless problem and find permanent solutions.

There was discussion about the structure and organization of the shelter. There is room for families in certain areas and there are separate restrooms facilities. Women and children would be separated from the men. Covid tests, thermometers, hand sanitizer and masks will be available. If they have been drinking, we will be able to treat them. If someone has been using drugs, the trained fire personnel is there if something were to happen in the facility. Any organizations or church that wanted to donate snacks or water can do so to the Police Department and they will deliver it to the shelter. The Dream Center serves dinner and then the warming shelter is open for them to go to. If a person is unable to care for themselves due to drugs or alcohol, they will be transported to a hospital facility for treatment. Smoking, drinking and using drugs are not allowed at the facility. Staff will be there to make sure that those things aren't happening.

Ms. Condrey stated my biggest concern is the enabling part. The last thing I want this to do is be an enablement to continue that lifestyle. So, to me, it's very critical that have a second staff member there.

Ms. Condrey moved to amend the appropriation in Ordinance No. O2022-13 to include an additional \$6,480. Mr. Ferrell seconded.

There was additional discussion about the role of the second person. One person would be allocated specifically for intake purposes and the other person would be spending more one-on-one time with them, familiarizing them with the facility and talking to them about their needs and the resources that are available to them.

Ms. Nenni asked they would be open to having volunteers at the shelter, it's very humanizing to have someone there from the community who's volunteering. They welcomed volunteers to be part of the outreach.

The shelter operators asked for an amendment for the utility costs and explained that the building has been vacant for two years and we had no idea how much the utility bills were going to be. Since we've had it in our possession it's been unoccupied. The figure that we used was like \$700 a month but we just looked at the bill from the past month and it was \$1,500. The utilities are going to be higher or lower depending on what the weather is like. Is it possible to turn in the utility bills and get those reimbursed as opposed to putting it in the budget?

There was additional discussion about the fire suppression system and the fire alarm system estimate and how soon it could be installed. Maybe some of the funds could be used towards a capital improvement and not use all of those funds for temporary solutions/personnel.

There was discussion about how to make sure that the costs of the program are covered and authorizing a threshold not to exceed that amount but to only to cover the actual costs.

Ms. Condrey moved to amend the appropriation in Ordinance No. O2022-13 not to exceed \$95,000. Ms. Nenni seconded. This would include the second person and the increased allowance for actual utility expenses. Motion Carried. Ayes: Ms. Nenni, Mr. Muterspaw, Ms. Condrey, Mr. Ferrell.

Waive Charter

Ms. Nenni moved to suspend the Charter provision that requires reading on two separate days and to declare Ordinance No. O2022-13 an emergency measure to be read one time only. Mr. Ferrell seconded. Motion carried. Ayes: Ms. Condrey, Ms. Nenni, Mr. Ferrell, Mr. Muterspaw.

Ord. No. O2022-13 Contract for Warming Shelter for Homeless

Ordinance No. O2022-13, an ordinance authorizing the City Manager to enter into a contract with Freya's Hen House, a non-profit organization, to provide a short-term warming shelter for the homeless and declaring an emergency was read.

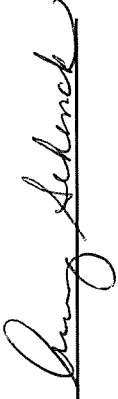
Ms. Nenni moved to approve Ordinance No. O2022-13, an ordinance authorizing the City Manager to enter into a contract with Freya's Hen House, a non-profit organization, to provide

ADJOURNMENT

a short-term warming shelter for the homeless and declaring an emergency. Mr. Ferrell seconded. Motion carried. Ayes: Mr. Ferrell, Ms. Nenni, Mr. Muterspaw, Ms. Condrey.

At 1:57 p.m., the meeting was declared adjourned until February 1, 2022 at 5:30 in Council Chambers.

Attest:



Nicole Condrey, Mayor