



WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

January 22, 2025

WORKING SESSION

I. ROLL CALL

A Working Session of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners was held at the Administration Building, in the City of Ann Arbor, Michigan, on January 22, 2025.

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Comm. LaBarre, Chair of the Working Session.

Members Present:	Comms. Shannon Beeman, Justin Hodge, Andy LaBarre, Jason Maciejewski, Yousef Rabhi (5:34), Katie Scott, Annie Somerville
Members Absent:	Comms. Crystal Lyte, Caroline Sanders
Others Present	Greg Dill, County Administrator; Andrew DeLeeuw, Deputy County Administrator; Michelle Billard, Corporation Counsel; Tina Gavalier & Catherine Jones-Alther, Finance; Brady Peck, Director of Operations; Terrence Williams, Administration; Guillermo Hernandez, Director of Human Resources; Jeff Rose, ITS; Ashley Hall, BOC Communications and Operations Manager; Ashlyn Poole, Clerk's Office; and members of the public.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Gary Munce, Washtenaw County, expressed his support for the discussion of the older person's service millage.

JoAnn McCollum, Washtenaw County Road Commission, thanked the Board of Commissioners for coming out in the cold weather and working hard for the community.

Kat Layton, Ypsilanti City, thanked the commissioners for funding hotel stays for people who need it over the cold weather. She stated that the process could be improved and made more sustainable through infrastructure. Layton stated that 72% of people in the shelters are disabled. She expressed the need for a shelter in Ypsilanti.

Anna Pekrul, echoed the sentiments of Gary Munce and thanked the commissioners, stated that people are having trouble understanding what the timeline is on the millage.

Barbara Nees May, Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels, thanked the BOC for coming together to speak about the senior millage. Echoed previous comments about the millage dollars being spent in the community.

III. REPORT FROM THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

None.

IV. REPORT FROM THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS LIAISON

Ashley Hall, the Board of Commissioners Liaison spoke about the calendar amendment to add the Board of Commissioner's retreat happening February 7th, 2025.

V. DISCUSSION ITEMS

- A. Shonagh Taruza spoke about Alpha House and Ann Arbor providing an office for additional space for housing people. They are now able to accommodate 14 families at a time. She also spoke about weather amnesty program that they were able to fund through the Board of Commissioners. She also spoke about the increase in people that housed last night due to the weather (73, up from 22-24). Some of the funds were used to pay for a shelter director who handles case work and meets with families about next steps. CMH also helped some families, and they were able to send some people to hotels. Families asked what they would do when the program ends in March. Taruza spoke about the need for a plan to transition after the end of the program, and the need for services on the eastside of the county.

Comm. Somerville thanked Shonagh for highlighting the situation. She also stated that the Board had the same discussion last year about not stopping Winter services April 1st because the date does not necessarily mean warmer weather. She encouraged her colleagues to work on the issue with her. Comm. Somerville also spoke about the emergency sheltering funds that the county has set aside from the state. SHe thanked CMH for being good partners.

Comm. LaBarre thanked Taruza for her work and stated that he would be looking for an update in the future.

Dan Kelly, Executive Director, Shelter Association of Washtenaw County, echoed a lot of what Taruza said. He spoke about the record need that the county is facing, up 15%, He thanked the County Administrator and Toni Kayumi from OCED for their meetings on the issue. Kelly spoke about the sites that the Shelter Association runs. He stated that the Shelter Association has seen an increase in numbers and an increase in acuity. People over 55 that they shelter has increased and brought an increase in difficult health needs.

72% disabled, up from 40% a few years ago.

35 people from the Winter Shelter have been housed so far.

Comm. Somerville, thanked Dan for the work that he is doing. She spoke about the Senior Millage and how it would impact the Shelter Association. Emphasized that the LRC could be used in the event that all of the shelters in the county reach capacity. Comm. Somerville stated that she is looking forward to future discussions.

Kelly stated that he appreciates Somerville bringing up the availability of the LRC.

Comm. Scott asked how Kelly and his staff were doing with the increase in people that they are serving.

Kelly stated that he and his team are dedicated to the project and are doing fine. He

stated that they have upcoming professionalism and mental health training.

Comm. Scott stated that the Board of Commissioners is also limited. Comm. Scott asked how the County could work in a more sustainable way.

Kelly stated that good coordination, discussions the problem and needs, more housing development, being as nimble and adaptable with funding, diversion, making the community more aware of the intense need would all help.

Comm. Scott asked how the County could increase the awareness of the need that the county faces.

Kelly stated that there has been an increase in awareness that the housing issue has caused.

Comm. Somerville asked if it would be helpful to get funding specifically for homeless and housing. She also spoke about people from the surrounding counties coming to Washtenaw and asked if it would be helpful for the Board to have conversations about collaboration and asked if Kelly would be willing to be a part of these conversations.

Kelly stated that he would be willing and also stated that speaking to other counties would be helpful.

Comm. LaBarre asked if there were any outliers this year that should be flagged.

Kelly stated that the increase was an outlier and also stated that they should look at a more sustainable Winter model.

Comm. Rabhi asked what the most viable path forward is and what the Shelter Association would need to get it done.,

Kelly stated that a permanent eastside site and state investment would be helpful and more effective.

Comm. Rabhi spoke about the space plan moving forward and stated that he hoped that facilities in the county could be considered for further sheltering.

Comm. Scott asked staff what areas in the county have been identified as land where the shelter could be built.

Comm. Somerville stated they were looking at CMH staff permanently moving which she stated that she was against.

She stated that there had been discussions about 750 Towner being used. She reiterated that this was not possible.

Call Center staff as well as another team are working in 750 Towner so it is not available but stated that they were looking at other sites that could be purchased on the eastside of the county. A majority of new homeless families are coming from Ypsilanti Township. A new space should be on the bus line.

County Administrator Dill stated that they have had extensive conversations about 750

Towner and how the space does not work for the county.'

Comm. Hodge stated that a site on the St. Joe campus could help put a dent on the family homeless population.

Comm. Somerville stated that per her conversations with others and St. Joe's, the space would not be available.

Comm. Rabhi asked about the eastern campus.

Fee stated that the eastern campus had 4 buildings in the Towner campus.

Comm. Rabhi asked about the demolition of one of the buildings.

Fee stated that that was a potential option. He also stated that 22 Center St. not very occupied 90% unused.

Pending negotiations with the state, they could reduce some of their space at the site and they would like to reduce to about 50%.

Comm. Rabhi stated that this may open up some space for opportunities. Stated that underutilized space opens up opportunities for discussion.

Comm. Rabhi asked if 750 Towner was renovated recently.

Fee stated that the North 1/3rd of the building was renovated in the last 5 years.

Comm. Rabhi asked what funds would be used.

Fee stated that he would follow up.

Comm. Hodge stated that the location on the St. Joe's campus could work if they were able to make it work.

Comm. Somerville stated that the conversations were urgent and that as she understood it, they were looking for a site to buy urgently and that to her knowledge if they wanted to get rid of the court the city of Ypsilanti would have to make the decision. She stated that the best path forward is identifying a site to buy.

County Administrator Dill stated that he has been speaking to administration about revisiting the space plan. He also stated that he has been looking at sites to buy. He also spoke about other properties that are not being used and how they may be reimaged.

Comm. Scott spoke about land at the corner of Washtenaw and Hogback and stated her belief that that would be a great location for a potential shelter.

Comm. LaBarre stated that he would be happy to speak about the issue again at another meeting.

Comm. Somerville stated that the problem with putting shelter space that close to the

Sheriff's office is that many people would not use it . She also stated that the area may be better for family shelter space.

- B. Comm. Maciejewski expressed his appreciation to stakeholders that he has spoken with about the issue. He shared some of the thoughts and priorities that he has noted in the process.

- Nutritional Program Enhancement
- Foundational Support for the Senior Centers
 - (200k to help pay for operation, so other funding can be used for programs and support for seniors)
- Goal of ending older adult homelessness
- RFP for services and programs
 - Health and Wellness programs
 - Transportation
 - Dr. Appts
 - Gov. Resources
 - Other Services
 - Legal Assistance
 - Technology education
 - Mobility resources
 - Innovative proposals
 - Director of Aging Services position
 - Monitoring compliance of county contracting
 - Coordinating with stakeholders
 - Resource line
 - Minor home repair programs
- Periodic needs assessment process to understand what needs are

Comm. Scott stated that the list is aspirational and also stated that the Board needs to engage the REO in this process. She stated that one of the things that the Board could do to honor the legacy of Treasurer McClary is keeping people in their homes. the millage is not going to solve every problem but stated that they should focus on what the residents of the county would be looking to see accomplished with the millage and how the funds could be used to keep seniors in their homes.

Comm. Somerville echoed the sentiments of her colleagues and proposed a working, working session in the LRC with other people in the community to receive feedback on the issue. Added that she participated in a town hall in her district on the senior millage and stated her belief that there should be a county wide townhall joint with the commission on aging. She stated that it would be in the best interest of the board to have the REO included in conversations. She spoke about older adult homelessness and that the operational gaps still exist and stated that they need to figure out where the county could cut or expand their budget to address these issues. She also spoke about underfunding of older adult programs to prevent homelessness. She also expressed her desire to not duplicate services. Supports having a director of aging instead of a full department. She also mentioned that she would like to see the information gathered from the senior mapping conducted by Ann Arbor. She also spoke about people who fall right outside the line of means based programs and stated that this would take some work.

Comm. Hodge stated that the office on aging should have a similar model to the resiliency office and asked for Comm. Maciejewski's thoughts on this.

Comm. Maciejewski stated that he was not looking to create a large bureaucracy in the government and that there would be a lot of synergy with offices that already exist. He stated that the Board still needs to decide on what they need to do.

Comm. Beeman thanked everyone for their work. She expressed her desire for the dollars to get into the hands of the community and asked if it would be possible to take a two pronged approach and if the top two issues could be addressed as quickly as possible while still creating an office that plans for the rest of the funds.

Comm Rabhi thanked the Comm. Maciejewski for his work on the older persons millage issue. Stated that his 3 main concerns are universality, director and staff of people that can ensure public dollars are spent responsibly, stated his belief that the office should be bigger than the resiliency office. He also agreed that the Board should leverage the resources that the county already has. Third, he wants to focus on accountability and non-profits deliver the services that the county is paying for. At the endpoint, clients need to understand that the county is funding the services.

Comm. LaBarre stated that for 2025 he would like to lean into the entities that are already providing some of these services and stated that he would like to demonstrate to the residents who approved the millage that the board was making the best possible use of the dollars. He stated that the county should be the coordinator that could connect seniors with services that are available. Work done with seniors helps to free up resources for other human services needs.

Comm. Somerville stated that there should be a meeting to get feedback from the community and that a few commissioners could put something together to bring to the Board.

Comm. Maciejewski stated that the policy is still being developed and stated that the Board is being thoughtful and wants the millage to be successful. Once policy is set, then implementation could be started.

County Administrator Dill spoke about the work already happening in OCED. Stated that if the Board was interested, then OCED would provide more information in the future.

Comm. LaBarre spoke about using subcommittees and how they could be used for this issue.

VI. ITEMS FOR CURRENT/FUTURE DISCUSSION

Comm. LaBarre stated that he sent out an email to lay out how meetings would be run, and he praised Comm. Somerville's previous handling of the meetings.

VII. ADJOURN TO NEXT SESSION

Comm. Somerville, seconded by Comm. Rabhi, moved to adjourn. Voice vote - motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 pm

Andrew LaBarre, Chair of the Working Session
Lawrence Kestenbaum, Clerk/Register

By: Ashlyn Poole, Deputy Clerk

Board Approved:

Draft