



OBSERVER REPORT

BOARD OF HEALTH Date of Meeting 11-15-22
League Observer - Thomas Krueger

Members in Attendance - Andrew Petty, Todd Belf-Becker (chairperson), Sec. Andrea Flaxer, Joanne Greer Miller, Helaine Hazlett

AGENDA

1. Marblehead Counseling Center (MCC)

Ruth Ferguson (president of the board of the MCC), Ron Grenier (board member) and Terri McDonough (director of the MCC) came before the BOH asking for ARPA funds that the Select Board had awarded to the BOH for mental health services. Ruth introduced herself as living in the town for 40 years, been a board member for 6, and became president on 7/1. Ron joined the board also in 7/1. Before discussing the request for funds, they were asked to talk about the circumstances and experiences at the MCC over the past few years. Foremost, the demand for services has way exceeded the capacity. The Hobbs center needed many repairs and changes to meet the need. These included many outdoor repairs, making the building ADA compliant (there are many clients who are older or disabled), reconfiguring the first floor so the entrance was there, changing space on the first floor for clinical offices. These all cost about \$80,000, money that was drawn from the MCC endowment.

Then COVID hit, which led to a shutdown of the building and even more people in need of services. IT had to be upgraded with further investment in telehealth capabilities and training. Now the center is open, but the demand has continued to increase. The center is continuing to operate in a hybrid model (in office and remote). With the huge demand for trained clinicians and the competition stiff, it has been difficult to hire and retain staff. The MCC has had to be creative about the issue: allowing greater flexibility in the work environment; moving to have more Fee For Service clinicians, etc.

Since operating expenses are almost twice revenue, the MCC has been looking at insurance providers who remit for services - each company has a different rate. (MassHealth is actually one of the higher ones, and the MCC has a lot of MassHealth patients.) Fund raising campaign has been successful in the past, but there is always concern about the long run.

At this point BOH members asked a series of questions. One question concerned other building repairs, specifically the boiler and the roof. It is unclear whose responsibility this is: the town owns the building, but the MCC has a "lease" which stipulates repairs to the building. (This will be investigated further.) A second question concerned the waiting list. The number is approximately 200, with 70-80% MHD residents (the reimbursement

from out-of-town clients helps the finances of the MCC), and all clients under 20 MHD residents. Previously the list had been 300, but was reduced with more hires. A third question concerned the building capacity. This varies depending on the continued use of the hybrid model. No one is discussing giving up the hybrid model. Clinicians can use telehealth from the center or elsewhere. The building does not seem to be a constraint. (Of note, there have even been some home visits, and thoughts about visits at the school.) A fourth question was whether there was a psychiatrist at the MCC. Yes, so prescriptions can be written. (Also of note, the MCC has a person on-call 24 hours a day, who can identify urgency and level of care needed.) Another question concerned what the wait periods is. All referrals are triaged with MHD residents taking priority and it depends on the clinician's schedule.

At this point the discussion turned to the ARPA requests from the MCC. (ARPA funds have a number of constraints and criteria. One constraint is that the funds can't be used for salaries.) The request fell in to three existing needs - 1. Insufficient and inadequate technology and related equipment and software - request \$50,000; 2. Expansion of clinical office space and building repairs - request in total \$55,000; 3. Highly competitive environment for hiring and retaining mental health professional - request \$40,000 for a bonus pool.

The BOH was awarded \$200,000 to be distributed for mental health services. (A fact that is not often recognized is that MHD town support for a mental health counseling center is unique and the residents of MHD are very fortunate. Many other towns do not have this valuable resource.) The BOH unanimously is supportive of the MCC. They will look at the request and also see if there are any other mental health services they might fund. Mr. Grenier said that the MCC needs the funds soon, and has had for the past 18 months. The MCC has only gotten through this by donors.

Not related to the ARPA request, a brief discussion was held about the funds MCC does get from the town. The BOH gives the MCC \$60,000 each year. Would they like more? Yes. The MCC will return in January as the budget is being created with a detailed request.

2. Mental Health Task Force Update

With the guests still present, Ms. Miller, chair of the MHTF, related that much of the MHTF meetings were about the MCC. She reiterated how fortunate MHD is to have the MCC and how the MHTF is very supportive of ARPA funds going to the MCC. When asked about the MHTF, Ms. Miller said it has operated on "no dollars." Mr. Petty suggested that the MHTF might look to see if they would need funds for further programs. This would give the BOH a complete picture of where ARPA funds could go. The next MHTF meeting is scheduled for 11/28 and 7PM, and a budget could be discussed.

At the last meeting of the MHTF, a discussion ensued of how to decrease the stigma associated with mental health issues. They are looking at ways to actively do this. Another initiative has been one from the MHD Rotary Club, a program called Inner Explorer, one to help students and faculty in mindfulness. A brief discussion ensued about other possible initiatives.

3. Transfer State Update

The next meeting is on 11/16 with the architect for Winter Street Architects present. They are looking at location of the scale house/employee's area, traffic flow, etc. The scale will remain at its current location. In the interim some potholes around the area will soon be filled. One request from a BOH member was that the meetings might be at night. Mr. Petty replied that 3 town officials are part of the meeting so couldn't be there.

4. Waste Bans

A reminder that as of November 1st there is a ban on disposal of textiles in the solid waste stream. Textiles include clothes, linen, curtains, etc.; these can be placed in the bins near the recycling area. These items should be cleaned and placed in plastic bags. The transfer station does get paid for textiles as a bulk. Rugs and carpets CAN go in the solid waste stream.

Also on November 1st, mattresses and box springs can no longer go in the waste stream. These can be recycled at the Transfer Station for \$25 for a mattress or mattress/box springs. This cost may need to go up to \$35 as MHD: they will need to see what other communities in the state are doing, as they don't want out of town use.

5. Director's Report

- A. Paving will be done at the transfer station soon. This will require the TS to be shut down for the day.
- B. Opioid settlement - the town is to receive \$100,993 over the next five years. A budget will be developed for delivering services.
- C. Household hazardous waste day - 12/7. The process (on-line sign up, etc.) will be the same as before.

The next meeting was scheduled for 12/12/22 7PM. (An earlier meeting is scheduled for 11/29/22 7PM to discuss the TS Design Review.)