

CSP raises concerns about transfer of state hospital grounds and vulnerable programs

After the presentation of the strategic plan, some participants had questions for Pam Howard:

“Is there a plan to really reach out and involve the people that are most impacted by human services?” *Answer: Yes.*

“Will you be reaching out to all the partners for participation in the advisory groups?” *Answer: That is the plan.*

“What’s going to happen to the Carol’s House property?”

An update was given on land planning at Norristown State Hospital. On March 2019 after the state had engaged the land planner to do a feasibility study, the state announced through a press release that the Commonwealth would convey 78 acres of land to Norristown or partner of their choosing, retaining 120 acres of land to allow mental health providers to continue their operations. The Coordinated Homeless Outreach Center (CHOC), Carol’s Place, and two regional program RTFA’s for adults are on the 78 acres of land.

Governor Wolf and the Secretary of Human Services said they will develop a relocation plan as well as identify resources to support the required establishment of a new location to continue services. The update is: *In May 2021, the Department of Human Services and OMHSAS definitively informed the counties that property will not be transferred legislatively but it will be declared blighted and then transferred. Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority will commission a study (voted on in April) to see if land is blighted or not. We are in communication with OMHSAS on how to meet the needs of those people on the 78 acres and where to relocate them. Right now there is not a complete plan.*

Questions and comments:

“Is it true that there is no money to relocate the programs?” *Answer: Conversations are continuing.*

“There is a need for a higher level of care, the RTFAs were providing that, Carol’s Place is so needed for so many people.”

“The process for the land to be considered blighted, what does that mean?” *Answer: As I understand it, it means unsafe or damaged in some way. There is a process through which a municipality can take control of that land for better use for the community.*

“The process of them wanting the land was pre-pandemic, when the hospital announced their closure of beds. I think they wanted to make it office space, mixed use, commercial space. Is

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there any possibility that they even still want it?”

“In terms of advocacy it would be helpful to know who is involved in these higher level decisions. It’s possible that the people making the decisions do not recognize the implications of moving these programs, it would be helpful to know as advocates who to advocate to.”

Answer: None of these programs are going to be phased out. We want Norristown to be a thriving healthy community and work to create a strong tax base for the benefits of its residents AND we want to be sure the needs of people who have been using its supports and services are met. “Can part of the property be blighted?” Answer: Not sure. The process was just commissioned so this will take throughout the summer.

Comment: “We need to do some local advocacy to educate people around this property. The issue is the people who use the services that we are talking about are pretty invisible to the community.”

“What is at the state level that is driving this?” *Comment: Ellen will be doing the SE regional report and Kristen Houser will be coming in July or august. She is the Deputy Secretary of OMHSAS. Maybe we could present something to advocate for this at that meeting. Answer: It would be good to make that request ahead of the meeting so that she (Secretary Houser) is prepared with the most current information. You can also email Tori Bright for information as well as me (Pam Howard).*

Delegate services: *OMHSAS does understand that it would be almost impossible to make a change to something within less than a two-month period, so they offered an opportunity to counties providing delegate services not directly by the county. They need to get a waiver to continue to do that in the next fiscal year starting in July.*

“Can you come back and talk to us more about this? We would like to hear from the county the thought process.” *Answer: Of course, this is part of crisis care, and crisis care is a critical part of our system so your feedback is very important.*

Advocacy Alert!

