

Margarita Inn Listening Sessions
Schedule and Session Notes
Prepared for 9.21.22 Community Meeting

Scheduled Sessions:

***June 14th noon Unitarian Church of Evanston**

Friday July 29th, noon- cancelled because of low attendance

Saturday July 20th 10am- cancelled because of low attendance

Friday August 5th 10am

***Monday August 8th 3:30pm- Beth Emet Free Synagogue**

Tuesday August 9th 10am

Friday August 12th 12pm- Davis Street Business

Saturday August 13th 10am- cancelled because of low attendance

Monday August 15th 5:30pm- Lighthouse Rotary Club

Monday August 15th 7pm

Thursday August 18th 5pm

Monday August 22nd 6pm virtual session

Monday August 29th 6pm cancelled because of low attendance

Tuesday August 30th 12pm virtual session

Wednesday August 31st 5pm- cancelled because of low attendance

Thursday September 1st 9am Downton Evanston Businesses

***Wednesday September 7th 6pm -Virtual Session only Councilmember and City Manager attended**

***meeting notes not recorded**

August 5th, 2022

Are there time limits- how long someone can stay?

What is the criteria for getting people into housing?

Concern is whether MI is providing the services required to move people to permanent housing situation and understanding the types of support that are provided.

Discussion around why patients are released from hospital into homelessness?

Concern in the community that we are only serving chronically homeless, drug users, and possibly not understanding the full scope of who is served.

What is the breakdown of where participants come from?

How do people get on the waiting list?

Question about how this is funded? Concern is the sustainability of funding.

Do the participants keep their social security money they are receiving?

Concern that Connections may have gone around the normal permit process. What has the process been to get the special use permit?

Discussion about homeless people in the neighborhood:

Someone is sleeping in the foyer of the building

What is the best way to handle panhandling?

Concern is whether there are enough rules? Expectations for participants? How they spend their day?

Do we have 24-hour staff?

Someone sitting in the park outside the apartment. Is this a resident of MI? Is there a safety concern? Who to contact?

August 9th, 2022

Comments

- Perception that people move into shelters and can be stuck there for years, little to help people reintegrate into society. There's a perception that the dollars provided to people are spent on things other than ways to integrate back into society.

- As a resident, we've seen Albany care spiral out of control, it's a barrier that will be faced since that's at the forefront of the community's mind.

- Fear comes from the unknown, there's a lot of dis-comfortability and people being unsure of how to interact with people from the Inn

- Possibility of doing an open house every year for the community to come in

- Recognize that we have to try to find a balance between the public can/should know and the privacy of the residents here

- Our rule could potentially be increasing loitering because of restrictions of who can enter/when/etc.

- People are worried that the MI brings more activity to this area than would be otherwise. / An example is a concern by a nearby neighbor that there are people in the alleys of St. Marks. Connections should see how we can mitigate these things

Questions that came up:

What are the benefits of a program like the Margarita Inn?

What services are we providing at the Margarita Inn?

What is the Margarita Inn doing to help people reintegrate into society and live independently?

Is participation in programs a requirement when they are in the MI?

Is 289 days (our average number of days that people live here) average ? Is that the standard?

How does Connections fund operations at the MI and how do we plan to continue funding the program.

What is Connections ability to fund this major property and sustain its ownership? How does this operation fit within Connection's budget

Is 45 residential units an increase, decrease or same number of individuals that we can serve?

Are we still operating Hilda's Place as an emergency shelter?

What community engagement will look like moving forward for this process?

Does a program like this work in an older building like the MI?

How much does Connections integrate with the other service providers in the area?

Are there any programs nationally similar to what we're doing here?

August 12th, 2022

Comments and Suggestions:

- Concern for physical safety and safety of employees, particularly in the alleys
- The good neighbor agreement will be important
- There is evidence of panhandling, littering, defecation with no outreach for 2 years
- Feels like a revolving door, police called, they're picked up, they're dropped back off.
- As a police agency, it's hard to not know specifics at the moment such as if a person who they received a complaint about is a resident at the MI. there are things around here that attract a mix of people, and it's hard when there are orgs like the MI who can't or won't say if it's one of their constituents. It's not beneficial for the police or community to just have the answer be, "we can't say"
- There's nothing in the binder about being a good neighbor, not panhandling, so that could be improved - being more conscious about what is going on and a conditional acceptance here
- The issue is that some of these concerns may be blamed on Connections because people don't have identification on them that says whether or not they're from MI
- Children nearby can see what is happening, and sometimes see people outside who are screaming profanities, people drinking and smoking. Don't know if some of the rules that are required for daycares are applicable to here since they are a recreation facility, but it's a concern. Sometimes kids have to stay inside because they don't feel safe outside. When we are trying to locate police, it's hard to, possibly because they can come here so quickly.

Questions that came up:

- Will the good neighbor agreement be a legal document? Or will there be a way to communicate if things are not being followed?
- Would connections be willing to have ramifications if agreements aren't adhered to?
- How many residents are there?
- What is the average length of stay?
- Do people have jobs/employment?
- Do we receive information when complaints are filed against residents?
- If a person is alleged to have committed a crime, and someone sees them enter the MI, what would happen?
- Of the 15% who have been removed from the program, how long has that been?
- Validity of our stance on privacy and what we can tell the police
- Are we keeping our other facility?
- How are residents sent here?
- 15% of people involuntarily removed, where do they go?
- What are meals and activities like here?
- Is one mental health professional enough?
- Is alcohol allowed in the rooms and what is the reasoning behind that?

August 15th, 2022

Comments that came up

- Some people feel less safe in the neighborhood when people are standing out on the sidewalks in front of the building
- I've heard rumors of panhandling but have not personally seen them
- People in my building didn't know that there was a shelter here for 2 years

Questions that came up

- What is the nature of the emergency response calls that have come to the MI?

- Do you think that the proximity to Davis Street may account for some of the calls that are happening?
- How should people address the issues around the conflation of the work at the MI and the general issues of panhandling
- What is the average stay at the MI?
- Is there a timeline for the development of the program and how it will integrate into the community?
- How far along is the program in Oak Park compared to here?
- How does opposition compare in oak park and rogers park?
- Is there any indication of how the MI impacts property values in the neighborhood?
- How are the clients at the Y different than the MI?
- What were some of the concerns of business owners?
- When someone comes in, this becomes their address?
- Do people have some form of identification when residents of MI?
- Are we seeing reductions in the costs associated with social services provided to those experiencing homelessness
- Do you anticipate any roadblocks in getting permitting and the other city processes?

August 18th, 2022

Comments that came up:

- It was a relief to walk by the Margarita at night, as it's the most well lit spot in the area.
- There is a place to put cigarette buds in a trash receptacle in the patio but not the front entrance, so there have been some left in the front
- Loop has an aggressive outreach program to go out and help people in the moment.

Questions that came up:

- What goes do residents have once they have been accepted into the MI?
- How are we expanding resident's life skills?
- How do we fit in with other services providers in the area? What model do we use for the operation for this facility?
- What happened with the discrepancies in police data between the police department and Connections?
- Do we know what is causing the original increase in emergency services and what the current reasons are?
- How are rooms assigned, particularly for women and families?
- How do we prioritize who can live in the MI?
- What criteria do we use besides the sex registry to screen people before being residents at the MI?
- What kind of contract do you have with residents when they live here?
- What are vaccination requirements?
- How do we handle panhandling?
- Do we at least ask about health and vaccinations even if we can't necessarily access their records
- Is there a requirement for jobs or training if they do not have a job or SOI?

August 22nd, 2022

- **How is public safety and crime currently being addressed?** – Connections is holding regular meetings with the Evanston police department to assess data on emergency service calls. calls to the Margarita Inn have steadily decreased since the start of 2022, vast majority of calls are health-related rather than behavior-related.
- **Could you provide more in-depth information on the eligibility and intake process?** - Case managers at Connections' drop-in sites refer participants to be place on the Margarita Inn waiting list, we do a background check (no person on the sex offender registry is allowed to stay at the Margarita Inn), review any incidents, if any, that occurred, and make a determination if we can serve them at

the margarita, to-be residents receive the participant handbook and must agree to following it, and must be willing to work towards a permanent housing solution

- **What is the length of time people stay at the margarita?** – The average stay is 289 days, or around 10 months, during this time participants are working with their case manager to find and secure a permanent housing solution.
- **What is the substance use rules?** - Nothing that is illegal is allowed at the margarita inn, we address behavioral issues behind substances, use a harm reduction approach rather than requiring abstinence.
- **Who is eligible?** – The Margarita Inn serves all individuals, including families and women-identifying people, with vulnerability serving as a primary evaluation factor.
- **What are the requirements for participants to reach permanent housing solutions?** – It depends on what the individual needs. It may be rapid rehousing (2-year rental assistance and supportive programming), or permanent supportive housing (added to wait list, getting participants document ready which means working with case managers to gather proper documentation). Connections for the homeless is not limited to just this shelter, we offer drop-in services, temporary shelter, youth programming, aftercare program for those who just exited homelessness, etc.
- **What is the anticipated timeline of Margarita Inn oversight tools?** –

3-Legged Stool:

1- good neighbor agreement (informal understanding between agency and surrounding neighbors) will continue to be edited and updated on an ongoing basis,

2- special use permit (our operation falls under the definition of a rooming house by the zoning board, and therefore we need a permit to operate a rooming house) is waiting on a letter from the current owners to complete the application, which will then make its way to the city council for a vote

3- licensing agreement, which includes formation of possible licensing structure (things like necessary services, hours of operation, etc)

- **How is connections funding the purchase of the margarita inn?** - We currently pay for the rooms on at a nightly rate. We are funding the purchase of the Margarita Inn through private fundraising. The ongoing operation of the Margarita Inn will be funded through a combination of private funding and state and federal grant programs.

- **How can the community best support connections and the margarita?** - having conversations with neighbors about what the margarita is and spreading the word! future need for community support as we continue the process of purchasing the margarita, monetary donations, donating your time at our volunteer programs like packing lunches, assisting in the clothing room, etc.

August 30th, 2022

- **COMMENT:** I am excited for the Margarita Inn and its positive impact on our community.
- **QUESTION:** How do the services that Margarita Inn offers fit in within Connection's broader services, and the plan to serve those within our community as a whole?
- **COMMENT:** I am appreciative of what the margarita inn will provide, but there is still need for housing for folks within Evanston.
- **QUESTION:** If the margarita inn's permit/license is created, will it be easier for other organizations to create or operate shelters within the region?
- **QUESTION:** What is the good neighbor agreement/what does it have in it?
- **COMMENT:** Dislikes amount of trash in the neighborhood
- **COMMENT:** Would like to feel more of a sense of cooperation between all neighbors, not just between margarita and neighbors but between all neighbors in general, looking for ideas for community building... block party??
- **COMMENT:** People using public-ways as bathrooms, doesn't know if that's margarita inn or because of lack of services for houseless people in the area, understand it's complex, in theory if we had adequate housing some of these incidents would not be happening, neighborhood watch/policing?
- **QUESTION:** What kinds of services does margarita inn offer?

September 1st, 2022

- QUESTION: how many registered homeless people in Evanston are collecting services to date?
 - CONCERN: Worried about negative reviews of people saying there's panhandling outside their business - Pandemic was difficult for many people. How could we all work together to address these issues?
 - QUESTION: what kind of services are offered at the Margarita? how many people have left successfully?
 - QUESTION: is there separations between gender?
 - QUESTION: where do people go if they get discharged?
 - QUESTION: Who they can talk to about panhandling?
 - QUESTION: Who do we call if there's someone being belligerent?
 - QUESTION: What is the average stay for residents?
 - QUESTION: Why the margarita inn?
 - COMMENT: Having problems doing business here every day because of constant panhandling and people tussling etc.
 - QUESTION: How to handle panhandling?
 - QUESTION: How does the housing first model differ from our previous model?
 - CONCERN: Hotel sheltering during the pandemic highlights Evanston as a place for homeless people and imports them all here.
- CONCERN: People who live at the margarita inn who are drinking and "just having a party" and "being gross" on the street.