

Message to Continuum of Care members from Shannon McLeish

The purpose of this email is to notice the chair, collaborative applicant, board and general membership of the Volusia Flagler Commission on Homelessness or COH (formerly called the Continuum of Care or COC) that we have not been adhering to the governing policies set forth in our charter or to our intention to be a transparent and inclusive organization. Our governance charter clearly states that all meetings – including all committee/sub-committee/workgroup/stakeholder meetings are to be noticed on the website with their agendas and via email to all members at least 5 days in advance. Further, all minutes of these meetings are to be posted on the web within 5 days after the meeting. All such meetings are to be public, in accordance with our charter. As stated in our charter, decisions made at meetings that are not properly noticed are not binding.

I am formally requesting that the collaborative applicant and/or the board chair who organized the meetings post all the agendas and minutes (including the list of attendees/participants) of all of the meetings that have occurred to date since formal inception of this body, including steering committee, stakeholder, work group, planning, marketing, strategic planning, shelter, etc., in accordance with our requirements, within the next 10 days. Additionally, I have repeatedly requested the funding sources for both the Coalition and the COH/COC detailing how much, what source/grant they stem from, and whether they are city, county, state, or federal funds. I would like that information posted on the web and sent out to the general membership as well.

Please publish a list of all committee members, including the steering committee on the web. As a reminder, steering committee members must be members of the board. Additionally, as we discussed in depth, the purpose of the steering committee is to handle general business that might come up between full board meetings. Planning and governance decisions are not within the purview of the steering committee. All power rests with the full board and the general membership. Decisions made by the steering committee can be overturned by the board. It is my understanding that at the last steering committee meeting, the committee voted itself as the body responsible for selecting the board and may also have voted to reduce the size of the board. Such decisions are in conflict with the letter and spirit of our organization. Our governance charter was developed through consensus and discussions that included all membership and deliberately spreads the power horizontally through the organization, providing checks and balances to avoid concentration of power in a small group. Our decision was to provide full transparency, inclusion, and multiple routes of oversight given the millions of federal, state, county, and city dollars distributed through this body.

No one member speaks for or represents this body except under specific circumstances when so authorized by the board. On such occasions, a full report of the activity should be given afterwards. When our chair or any other member participates in other community, city, or county discussions on shelter and homelessness, it is incumbent upon them to do so with board approval and full knowledge of the board regarding what is said and the purpose of the

meeting. I am very concerned that there has been an appearance of COC/COH support for plans discussed by Ray Salazar, Chet Bell, and Randy Croy. I am aware that the chair of our board has sent Mr. Salazar and or Mr. Bell when he has been asked to attend city or county meetings as a representative of the COH. As Mr. Salazar and Mr. Bell stated in the last full board meeting, they represent themselves and not the COH and their plans are their own and are not endorsed, supported, nor have they even been screened by most members of the COH.

In fact, the COH passed a resolution in support of the fully vetted, community supported plans for a full-service, 24/7, come-as-you-are shelter off of Red John Road near Stewart Marchman (the plan for Volusia Safe Harbor) only about a year and a half ago. The county council recently requested our input and that decision has not been forwarded to them. I am formally requesting that the county council be notified of our support as should have occurred over a year ago. As an aside, it is also my understanding that a recent committee of the COH established by Chair Willett specifically to research the need for shelter, also, again, determined the need for a full-service, 24/7, come-as-you-are shelter with the Red John Road location as the best location.

For board discussion and as an item distributed throughout the membership prior to that discussion, I would like to talk about how we can reach out and encourage more participation in the COH. While Mr. White's knowledge of HUD's rules and abilities as a grant writer are well known and very valuable to the COC, he has not demonstrated an ability to reach out and engage the general membership and board in the process. I certainly understand that it is impossible to be all things to all people, thus we may need a staff person or a volunteer committee to serve as outreach within the COC and the community and keep everyone connected and engaged. Also for our next agenda, elections are scheduled for the near future and we have not discussed it or publicized it. It is my understanding that information on membership and membership applications have been sent to some individuals but not the entire COH/COC. I request that the collaborative applicant ensure that all members are notified when such emails are sent.

While I understand that this is a newer organization and our policies and processes have not yet become familiar, we have veered off the path we set for ourselves. It is very important to our community and to those we serve that we regain our focus and make what changes we need to in order to stay the path.

Yours in service,

Shannon McLeish  
COC/COH board member

From Judge Belle Schumann

Yesterday's message from Shannon McLeish contained some excellent points. She reminds us that the charter and regulating documents for the CoC/COH, which she helped develop, need to be adhered to in order to comply with the fiduciary duty of the board. I am writing to point out that the federal regulations applicable to the operations of the CoC and COH also require many of the same things. For instance, HUD requires the CoC to adopt and follow a written process to select the board (578.7), the CoC must maintain written records of meetings and comply with its governance regulations (578.103), and there are conflict of interest provisions that preclude board members or recipients from participating in or influencing discussions of matters where they or their agency may benefit. (578.95).

Another requirement of the CoC/COH is to conduct an ANNUAL gaps analysis of the homeless needs and services within the geographic area. If this has been completed, it was not put in writing or sent to the general membership. There is no emergency shelter open 24/7 that accepts individuals or families, and so any honest gaps analysis would have to acknowledge that fact. In view of this gaping need, the CoC and various subcommittees of the COH have repeatedly determined a need for a 24/7 come-as-you-are shelter.

The stated goal of building a consensus is a laudable. But there needs to be enough flexibility to accept majority decisions that are not necessarily the preconceived notion of a few. If the entities willing to build and operate an emergency shelter are not looking for any HUD funding, then why is it a matter of concern to this body where it may be located or how big it may be? We need to work together on the common goal of expanding available services for homeless people in our community without ego or expectation of gain getting in the way.

From Nancy Epps

I want to thank both Shannon and Judge Schumann for making these excellent procedural points. Complying with multiple regulations is difficult, and it takes diligence on the part of all participants to ensure that we do not miss something.

We might need to close a few gaps (no pun intended) to make sure we are complying with all the policies and regulations that we are governed by. I know Coalition Executive Director Jeff White is working as hard as he can to keep up, but I believe he might need another staff member to help him. I hope the Coalition board will address that, and please forgive me if I am mistaken about the need.

I support the mission of this body to find both temporary and permanent, supportive housing and I feel a come-as-you-are shelter is the first step and one that can be accomplished much more quickly than long-term housing. This body agreed with that concept many months ago, and I hope we will assist the entities attempting to accomplish this quickly in any way we can.

Nancy Epps

