



3rd Draft
MEETING MINUTES

**CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
HOMELESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (HAC)
TOWER 101 – 101 NE 3RD AVENUE
SUITE 1100 CONFERENCE ROOM
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA 33301
THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2025 – 1:00 P.M.**

Committee Members

	Attendance	Present	Absent
Paula Yukna, Chair	P	4	0
Robin Martin, Vice Chair	P	3	1
Ray Dettman	P	4	0
Michael O'Brien	P	4	0
Amy Schimelfenyg	P	3	1
Colby Williams (Arrived 1:34 p.m.)	P	3	1

Staff

Chris Cooper, Acting Assistant City Manager
Marie Joseph, Administrative Supervisor-Homeless Initiative Coordinator
Kayla Weinberg, Homeless Initiatives Senior Administrative Assistant
Jorg Hruschka, Chief Service Officer

Others

Vicky Gargano, Commissioner Sorenson
Antonio Docal/Hope South Florida
Goldie Weakland
Greg Hunt
K. Cruitt, Recording Secretary, Prototype Inc.

I. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Yukna called the meeting to order at 1:08 p.m.

II. Determination of Quorum

Roll was called and it was noted a quorum was present.

III. Public Sign-In

IV. Approval of April 2025 Minutes

Motion made by Mr. O'Brien, seconded by Ms. Martin, to approve the minutes of the April 2025 meeting. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

V. Agenda Items

a. Homeless Advisory Committee

i. Revision to March Minutes – HAC extension date

No revisions were discussed.

ii. Open Discussion

Chair Yukna opened the discussion by expressing concern that despite the committee's regular meetings and dedication, there seems to be little tangible progress between sessions. She emphasized the importance of identifying actionable items to present to the Commission and acknowledged the challenge of understanding what the Commission expects from the committee.

Ms. Schimelfenya and Mr. Dettman briefly commented, with mention of larger political issues, such as the governor's support for eliminating property taxes. Mr. Dettman noted that despite hearing about these changes in the media, some issues still seem unresolved.

Chris Cooper, Acting Assistant City Manager, spoke about a city presentation later on the agenda, which would include monthly data on community engagement and updates relevant to ongoing initiatives, culminating in a discussion about a "safe parking" program.

A suggestion was made—supported by Vice Chair Martin and others—to adjust the meeting agenda in the future so that city updates occur earlier. This change would allow the Committee to have more informed discussions afterward, especially if city efforts overlap with or already address committee concerns. For example, the Committee learned that food is now being provided at Community Court, which may influence how they approach related issues like community feeding programs.

The Committee members agreed with the idea, and confirmed they would adopt this structure moving forward.

b. City Updates:

i. HB 1365 – FixIt FTL Data

Mr. Cooper began the city update by reviewing recent data on public service requests related to homelessness. He explained the distinction between two categories:

- Public camping requests, which are reported in accordance with state statutes.
- Homeless concern service requests, which involve reports of individuals believed to be unsheltered and potentially in need of assistance.

He noted that while these categories sometimes overlap, the past month showed more homeless concern requests than public camping ones. District 2, which includes the beach and areas north of Sunrise Boulevard such as Middle River Terrace, saw particularly high activity.

ii. Community Court and PD Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) Data

Mr. Cooper provided an update on Community Court, highlighting that the City Commission had approved a lease for a building near 1st Street and the downtown bus station (adjacent to McDonald's). This lease secures the program a home for at least three years, with the option to relocate to a city-owned facility in the future. He emphasized the significance of this agreement, noting that Community Court had experienced several disruptions over recent years due to the City Hall flood and the COVID-19 pandemic. The new location offers stability and consistency for the program in the near term.

He went on to review current data, which remained consistent with previous months. Housing continues to be the primary reason people attend Community Court, although other services are also available on-site, including food, employment support, medical and hygiene assistance, and help with public benefits. These services are offered weekly on Wednesdays beginning at 9 a.m.

Mr. Cooper then presented Task Force data for the fiscal year to date (October 1 through April 25) and for the month of April. In April alone, 91 individuals were encountered, and seven people were reunited with family or support networks through the city's bus ticket program. He also mentioned the "red tag" initiative for debris removal, and ongoing property inspections that are often requested by the public. Updates were also shared from the "Fix It FTL" (See Click Fix) system.

Vice Chair Martin raised a question regarding a possible data inconsistency involving The Caring Place. The report indicated that 41 individuals were served in April, while only 39 were listed from October through March—an apparent contradiction. Vice Chair Martin suggested the April figure might more accurately be closer to 10, unless it referred to current occupancy rather than monthly service. Mr. Cooper acknowledged the confusion and indicated that the issue might stem from a reporting error.

Following this exchange, The Committee discussed the Bloomberg Harvard Fellowship. Three candidates were interviewed and ranked, and the final selection will depend on mutual feedback. The fellow is expected to start by late summer, with relocation likely.

Mr. Cooper reported on a joint \$500,000 funding request with United Way to purchase or rehab a building for supportive housing. The proposal is still under consideration as the state budget has not yet been finalized. Chair Yukna asked about feasibility, and Mr. Cooper confirmed financing is involved and some progress has been made.

Chief Judge Tuter is retiring at the end of May. A recognition event is scheduled for May 16; Marie Joseph, Supervisor - Homeless Initiative Coordinator, will share details.

Mr. O'Brien raised concerns about the underutilization of the Community Court building. Mr. Cooper said the city will manage the majority of three buildings and is open to suggestions for their use, pending neighborhood input. Mr. O'Brien asked how many people seek and receive help. Ms. Joseph said about 60% of walk-ins request housing, and services like food and showers are provided weekly. Shelter placements are coordinated through The Caring Place and the HOT team, depending on availability and client needs.

Mr. Cooper mentioned ongoing collaboration with Broward Partnership to expand shelter capacity to 300 beds and noted a zoning amendment proposal. Mr. O'Brien inquired about future city funding, and Mr. Cooper said more information is forthcoming.

Vice Chair Martin recommended expanding access to showers and noted community concerns about service frequency. She also reviewed December 2024 task force data: 357 people placed in emergency shelters, 44 in long-term programs, and additional placements in SHAC.

Chair Yukna mentioned the "Showering Love" program. Ms. Goldie Weakland added that it operates weekly at different sites and is seeking a sponsor to offer services on Mondays. The service runs every weekday except Fridays.

Motion made by Mr. O'Brien, seconded by Mr. Dettman, that we, as a committee, support the City's expanded use of the Community Court building—not necessarily for court proceedings, but to increase and diversify the services offered at the site. This expansion should take into consideration the available budget, the interest and availability of service providers, and the concerns of neighboring residents.

Following the motion, Board members engaged in a robust discussion emphasizing the value of involving nonprofit organizations and broadening the range of services offered. Comments included suggestions to involve additional providers such as the DMV, Social Security, the VA, and others, as well as exploring opportunities for new or up-and-coming providers. Members highlighted the importance of having consistent staffing, possibly

including the HOT team, to support ongoing operations. Concerns were also raised about capacity, noting that during a recent Community Court session, 105 tickets were distributed but only 50 to 55 individuals were actually seen due to provider limitations. The potential for offering services on additional days was mentioned, contingent on provider availability.

In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

iii. Safe Parking Discussion

Mr. Cooper presented the draft scope of work for the proposed Safe Parking Program, noting it was shaped by input from local providers and best practices. While not a formal RFP, the document outlines expectations for potential providers and encourages collaboration between the City, County, and service agencies. He clarified that providers would propose their own sites and program models, with flexibility to serve different household types, including families or individuals, as long as safety is addressed.

Committee members discussed the importance of hygiene access, suggesting the language be updated to require restrooms while making showers preferred but not mandatory. There was significant debate around background checks for participants. While checks for staff and some volunteers are standard, applying them to clients was seen as a barrier due to cost, time, and legal limitations. Committee members expressed concern about balancing safety, particularly when families and individuals might be served together, with accessibility to the program.

Security presence, case management, and clarity around the length of participant stays were also discussed. The program is planned as a six-month pilot with potential for extension. Examples from other jurisdictions were mentioned as potential models. Overall, Committee members emphasized flexibility, safety, and the need to reduce barriers while ensuring responsible program design.

Motion made by Vice Chair Martin, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, to approve the scope of the Safe Parking Program, including the level of sanitary services, TaskForce prioritization of participants, and the review and evaluation of participant selection to ensure safety and protection are maintained. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Cooper noted that city-owned garages, such as the one at City Hall, may not be ideal locations for the Safe Parking Program due to existing usage agreements that require the spaces to remain available, even if not actively used. These agreements, along with peak downtown activity and special events, present logistical challenges. Despite this, several Committee members expressed interest in evaluating garage usage during off-peak

hours, suggesting that areas of these facilities—particularly after 7 p.m.—could potentially accommodate the program without significant disruption. There was also interest in analyzing usage data to determine availability and considering participation from the business community, whose garages are often unused overnight.

Committee members highlighted the benefits of parking garages, including shelter, security, and discretion. They emphasized that, if done properly—with clear protocols and oversight—the program could offer a safe, structured environment for people living in their vehicles. This approach would visibly demonstrate the city’s proactive role in addressing homelessness, particularly by utilizing its own property. The initiative was also viewed as a potential best practice, similar to the city’s successful community court, which has been replicated in other municipalities.

In closing, there was general agreement that the Safe Parking Program, along with an expansion of Community Court services, should be recommended to the City Commission for consideration. Members supported presenting the proposal as a developing initiative, with community input and operational details still being finalized. It was also encouraged that Committee members communicate with their appointing commissioners to build early support, while being mindful not to overstep city staff processes.

VI. Public Input

Ms. Weakland shared that the Rotary Club has launched a new initiative providing free bus transportation for homeless individuals to access various service providers across the city. The project, led by Gwyn Beaty, includes approximately 11 designated stops and aims to improve access to essential services. She also mentioned that the VA is actively developing a program to immediately house veterans, beginning with hotel and transitional housing placements and progressing toward permanent housing solutions. Both initiatives are currently underway and gaining momentum.

Tony Docal, a volunteer with Hope South Florida, requested support in addressing a gap in mailing services for the homeless community. He explained that Hope South Florida previously provided mail services for 600–700 individuals but discontinued the program in February. Although LifeNet for Families still offers a mailing address, the process is inconvenient, leading many not to use it. Mr. Docal emphasized that a stable mailing address is essential for accessing food stamps, receiving benefits notifications, social security checks, IDs, and other critical documents. In the interim, he has been using general delivery at the Oakland Park post office, but a more consistent and accessible solution is urgently needed.

Vice Chair Martin proposed using Community Court as a location for homeless mail services, which Mr. Cooper agreed to look into. Mr. Docal noted that Hope South Florida,

which previously served 500–600 individuals with mail services, is seeking a new venue after stopping the service due to neighborhood concerns. Volunteers had run the program 3–4 days per week.

Vice Chair Martin requested that Hope South Florida provide cost estimates and usage details. The Committee acknowledged that existing options like LifeNet for Families are limited and that a new provider or location is needed. The idea will be discussed further in an upcoming provider meeting.

Greg Hunt, a local artist and entrepreneur who is currently homeless, shared his personal experience with homelessness. He emphasized that he often gets unfairly grouped with individuals dealing with addiction or mental illness, even though he became homeless after his home burned down. Mr. Hunt expressed frustration with the lack of tailored support, especially for entrepreneurial goals like launching a clothing business. He mentioned that while he's been directed to various services, none have helped with specific needs such as funding a short marketing course or business startup assistance. Hunt also explained the difficulty of affording rent on entry-level wages and shared his vision of employing other capable homeless individuals. Despite proposing this idea multiple times, he said no one has followed up.

The Committee discussed potential resources, such as programs from the Small Business Administration or local workforce training options. However, Mr. Hunt noted many don't apply to his creative field. Several Committee members promised to provide more targeted contacts and resources to help him move forward.

Vicki Gargano, representing Commissioner Sorenson, raised concerns about the data shown on slide 7, specifically regarding reunification figures. The Committee agreed that the graphic needed correcting and speculated that changes in reunification numbers could be linked to increased outreach staffing in October.

The topic of panhandling at intersections was also discussed. Mr. Dettman asked about funding, and Mr. Cooper explained that grant money is being used for outreach, enforcement, and engagement at high-traffic intersections, with final HUD approvals pending. Mr. Hunt offered ideas based on policies from Asian countries, such as going cashless or exchanging gift cards for community clean-up efforts. This sparked a broader conversation about the City's panhandling ordinance and the balance between enforcement and prevention.

Lastly, the Committee touched on underutilized HUD funds at the County level and discussed ways to better align grant funding with community needs.

Homeless Advisory Committee

May 8, 2025

Page 8

VII. Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Committee at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 2:31 p.m.

Any written public comments made 48 hours prior to the meeting regarding items discussed during the proceedings have been attached hereto.

THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE HELD ON JUNE 12, 2025, AT 1:00 P.M.

[Minutes prepared by J. Burnham, Prototype, Inc.]