



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, SEPTEMBER 11, 2025 – 1:00 P.M.

Committee Members

| | Attendance | Present | Absent |
|--------------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Paula Yukna, Chair | A | 7 | 1 |
| Robin Martin, Vice Chair | P | 6 | 2 |
| Ray Dettman | P | 8 | 0 |
| Michael O'Brien | A | 7 | 1 |
| Amy Schimelfenyg | P | 7 | 1 |
| Colby Williams | P | 6 | 2 |

Staff

Commissioner Ben Sorensen
Sabrina Javellana, Chief of Staff, Commissioner Sorensen
Vicki Gargano, Office of Commissioner Sorensen
Chris Cooper, Assistant City Manager
Luisa Agathon, Neighbor Support Manager
Carole Mitchell, Homeless Initiatives Program Manager
Marie Joseph, Administrative Supervisor - Homeless Initiative Coordinator
Kayla Weinberg, Homeless Initiatives Senior Administrative Assistant
Jorg Hruschka, Chief Service Officer

Others

Carlos Lang
Melissa Bowker
Goldie Weakland
Greg Hunt
K. Cruitt, Recording Secretary, Prototype Inc.

I. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance

Vice Chair Martin called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m.

II. Determination of Quorum

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

III. Public Sign-In

IV. Approval of August 2025 Minutes

Motion made by Mr. Dettman, seconded by Ms. Schimelfenyg, to approve the minutes of the August 2025 meeting. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

V. Agenda Items

a. Welcome Commissioner Ben Sorensen

This item was heard under Open Discussion.

b. City Data and Program Updates:

- i. Overview of Funding to Address Homelessness
HB 1365 – FixIt FTL

Carole Mitchell, Homeless Initiatives Program Manager, provided a snapshot of FixIt FTL statistics, including public camping enforcement, homelessness inquiries, and House Bill 1365 requests. Average resolution time for HB 1365 requests is 30 hours, within the five-business-day target. July and August data show 107 homelessness concerns, 5 outreach inquiries, and 37 HB 1365 requests, with overall trends peaking in January and gradually declining through the summer months.

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

Ms. Mitchell reported that in August, the PD homeless outreach team encountered 231 individuals experiencing homelessness. They reunified three individuals with family or friends, participated in 124 outreach activities, made three referrals to the task force, and conducted 150 property checks, which addresses homelessness concerns on private properties.

Ms. Agathon stated that the outreach data includes connecting individuals to shelters such as the Caring Place in Hollywood. Future reports will include year-to-date data for comparison. It was noted that community engagement was zero for the last two months, though events like Neighbor Support Night or National Night Out are counted when applicable. At Community Court, there were 249 participant visits, with primary needs being housing, food, and identification services. Ms. Joseph shared that the decrease in reported participants and food distribution from July was due to limited volunteer availability, not lack of services, and individuals could still access needed support.

iii. Homelessness Initiatives Program Highlights

This item was heard after public comment.

c. Homeless Advisory Committee

i. Open Discussion

Welcome Commissioner Ben Sorensen

Vice Chair Martin welcomed City Manager Chris Cooper and Commissioner Ben Sorensen to discuss homelessness initiatives (currently being addressed during his monthly Informal Homelessness Working Group) and related challenges in the city. Commissioner Sorensen thanked the team and shared his ongoing efforts, emphasizing coordination with key service providers and tracking progress. He noted that food sharing should occur in designated areas rather than street corners, and Mr. Cooper added that regulations are being evaluated to connect recipients with broader support services. United Way of Broward and other partners are exploring day respite options and the purchase and renovation of hotels and apartments for long-term wraparound services. Efforts are underway to expand beds at existing facilities and partner with providers on programs like safe parking, supported by both city and county funding. Mr. Cooper explained upcoming pilot program targeting families, and Vice Chair Martin emphasized client screening and connecting children to programs like the federally mandated Homeless Education Assistance Resource Team (HEART) school board Program, which ensures continuity of education and services for transient students.

The discussion addressed broader housing challenges, including workforce and affordable housing, potential use of city land, leveraging CDBG and disaster funds, and exploring alternative funding mechanisms. Shared living initiatives, modeled on Orlando programs, were highlighted as a potential solution, with standards of care being developed. Mr. Cooper also discussed Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as affordable housing options and supplemental income for homeowners, with pre-approved designs helping reduce costs.

Intersection panhandling and enforcement were significant topics, with challenges due to limited incarceration options and law enforcement capacity. Ideas such as installing signage at high traffic intersections with QR codes to funnel donations to service providers and improved field training for officers were discussed. The Committee also explored city jail and stockade facilities, noting limitations due to standards, costs, and federal requirements.

VI. Public Input

Ms. Goldie Weakland addressed the Committee, emphasizing the urgent need for safe overnight shelter for homeless women. She noted that existing resources, such as the 40 beds at the Salvation Army—half of which are for women—are insufficient, often held by other organizations, and distributed chaotically through the Taskforce. Ms. Weakland described the dangers of sleeping on the streets at night, including theft, assault, and harassment, and highlighted that many individuals' experiencing homelessness are not connected to existing programs. She proposed a pilot program to utilize unused city or county parking lots as temporary safe spaces, equipped with portable restrooms, security, and basic facilities, which could accommodate roughly 100 people and provide immediate safety and shelter.

Mr. Carlos Lang addressed the Committee regarding the subset of homeless individuals who refuse help and engage in disruptive or dangerous behavior. He highlighted concerns about aggressive panhandling, public intoxication, and threats to public safety, citing personal experiences and the recent death of a friend. Mr. Lang recommended increased police presence at high-risk intersections and other "hostile" areas to deter such behavior and suggested a city jail to manage violent or non-compliant individuals, ensuring they receive help or are removed from the streets. He also raised concerns about the effectiveness of the FixIt FTL app and follow-up on reported incidents, urging the Committee and staff to monitor and address unresolved complaints.

Homelessness Initiatives Program Highlights

Mr. Cooper discussed the upcoming city budget, which includes restructuring several city functions. The Homeless Initiatives team will now operate within the Housing and Community Development Department, aligning homelessness efforts with housing and community programs, including federal and state grants. The new department will also include an economic development division. Mr. Cooper will remain involved, and staff liaisons for the Committee will remain, with Rachel Williams and Porshia Garcia overseeing parts of the new structure.

Mr. Cooper previewed the September 29 State of the City address, where the Mayor will highlight homelessness initiatives. These include adding new park ranger positions for better coverage, enhancing engagement with the Mobile Integrated Health Unit, expanding mental health support, and potentially hiring additional case managers. The goal is a more cohesive outreach presence in the community.

Vice Chair Martin emphasized that housing solutions must remain the priority, noting that existing outreach officers are limited without available shelter resources.

Ms. Melinda Bowker, President of the Downtown Fort Lauderdale Civic Association, noted that her group has been closely monitoring the downtown homelessness situation since

June. The Association, along with nine condos and five other Civic Associations, co-signed a community appeal letter addressing the homelessness crisis. She emphasized the importance of county involvement alongside city efforts and invited Committee members to an upcoming community meeting on September 18 at the Stranahan House, where local officials and United Way representatives will discuss the situation. She expressed appreciation for the Committee's work and offered continued feedback and engagement.

Mr. Greg Hunt, shared that he became homeless due to a house fire. He emphasized that he has no mental illness, is fully functional, and is in the process of establishing a business corporation. He expressed a desire to hire homeless individuals, particularly those who are clean and responsible, including veterans, and potentially provide them with housing. He noted that he has encountered difficulties getting support or responses from local resources and expressed frustration at the lack of assistance. He also mentioned potential tax incentives for hiring homeless individuals.

VII. Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Committee at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 2:25 p.m.

THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE HELD ON OCTOBER 9, 2025, AT 1:00 P.M.

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