



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, OCTOBER 9, 2025 – 1:00 P.M.**

Committee Members

	Attendance	Present	Absent
Paula Yukna, Chair	P	8	1
Robin Martin, Vice Chair	P	7	2
Ray Dettman	A	8	1
Michael O'Brien	P	8	1
Amy Schimelfenyg	P	8	1
Colby Williams	A	6	3

Staff

Chris Cooper, Assistant City Manager
 Carole Mitchell, Homeless Initiatives Program Manager
 Jorg Hruschka, Chief Service Officer
 Porshia Garcia, CSD Director
 Katrina Johnson, CSD Acting Assistant Department Director
 Rachel Williams, HCD Division Manager

Others

Melinda Bowker
 Goldie Weakland
 Greg Hunt
 Joseph Kenner, HOPE South Florida
 Dr. Wesley Julius
 K. Cruitt, Recording Secretary, Prototype Inc.

I. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Yukna called the meeting to order at 1:04 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 Vice Chair Martin, seconded by Ms. Schimelfenyg, to approve the minutes of the September 2025 meeting. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

V. Agenda Items

a. Citywide Homelessness Initiatives Transition/Restructuring

i. Introduction:

- Porshia Garcia, Community Services Department (CSD) Director
- Katrina Johnson, CSD Acting Assistant Department Director
- Rachel Williams, Housing and Community Development (HCD) Division Manager
- Olivette Carter, HCD Division Assistant Manager

Assistant City Manager Chris Cooper shared an update on the City's new organizational structure and budget, which includes the creation of the Community Services Department. This new department brings together several divisions to improve how the City delivers services to residents, focusing on housing, community development, code enforcement, cultural programs, and economic support.

Rachel Williams, Manager of the Housing and Community Development Division, was introduced. With 10 years of service, she oversees key state and federal entitlement programs, such as:

- SHIP (State Housing Initiatives Partnership)
- HOME (Home Investment Partnerships Program)
- CDBG (Community Development Block Grant)

Ms. Williams noted the recent approval of the CDBG Disaster Recovery Action Plan and described the integration of the Homeless Initiatives team into her division as a "seamless" move that will help maximize resources for housing and homelessness services. The homeless initiatives team transitioned to the HCD Division includes Carole Mitchell, Kayla, and Marie.

Porshia Garcia, now Director of Community Services Department, has 11 years of experience with the City, having previously served as Code Compliance Manager and Deputy Director for Development Services. Katrina Johnson, who manages Code Compliance, also spoke briefly, sharing her enthusiasm for the department's future.

Although not present, Olivette Carter, the new Housing and Community Development Division Assistant Manager, was acknowledged for her background with HUD, which strengthens the team's capacity for managing federal housing programs.

The new Community Services Department includes the following divisions:

- Housing & Community Development
 - Homeless Initiatives
 - Community Enhancement / Code Enforcement
 - Economic Development
 - Public Arts & Cultural Affairs
- Customer Support Center

Assistant City Manager Cooper emphasized the synergies among these groups and expressed confidence in the team's ability to work collaboratively to serve the community more effectively.

b. City Data and Program Updates:

i. HB 1365 – FixIt FTL

Assistant City Manager Cooper provided an overview of recent homeless-related service requests submitted through the City's FixIt platform, which allows residents to directly report issues to the City.

Assistant City Manager Cooper explained that staff regularly reviews data collected throughout the year, focusing particularly on homeless-related concerns. He noted that District 2, which includes the Las Olas Park area and the bus terminal, as well as District 4, which covers the downtown core, consistently show higher levels of activity due to visible homeless populations and strong community engagement in reporting.

He also addressed trends since the implementation of House Bill 1365, which took effect in October 2024 with the potential for litigation effective January 2025. While there was a notable spike in service requests following the ordinance's adoption, request levels have significantly stabilized in recent months, particularly by September. Assistant City Manager Cooper suggested that this stabilization may represent a new baseline level of activity moving forward.

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

Assistant City Manager Cooper provided a brief update on the activities of the City's Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) and Community Court for September.

The HOT team completed 4 reunifications, helping individuals reconnect with family or caretakers, and issued 10 Notices to Appear (NTAs) and 34 warnings related to minor infractions like trespassing and public camping.

Community Court activity remained steady, with housing, case management, and food services continuing to be the most requested resources. Assistant City Manager Cooper noted no major changes from previous months.

Although overall HOT interactions were slightly lower than earlier in the year, Assistant City Manager Cooper explained that this may be due to staffing, as new officers have not yet been onboarded.

In terms of housing support:

- 121 individuals are currently on the housing list
- 31 have been housed or reunified
- 50 declined services offered

At The Caring Place, the City's emergency shelter partner:

- 83 people were referred
- 56 stayed and engaged in housing/employment plans

Assistant City Manager Cooper clarified that service denials reflect individuals' declining help, not the City withholding it. Staff also explained that some referrals come through Community Court, not just the HOT team, accounting for discrepancies in data.

iii. Homelessness Initiatives Program Highlights

Assistant City Manager Cooper shared a comprehensive update on the City's evolving approach to addressing homelessness. He noted that, in alignment with the Mayor's State of the City address, the City has restructured its homelessness response efforts to better coordinate services, eliminate gaps, and make more efficient use of existing resources and partnerships—without impacting the City's overall budget.

The restructuring brought together three existing internal teams under phases defined as Street Outreach, Intensive Outreach, and Program Services. In addition, five full-time positions previously underutilized in other departments will be added to enhance the city's priority on addressing homelessness. Three Park Ranger positions will be added to the existing Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) consisting of six police officers.

These staff will be trained and deployed with the HOT to work directly with unsheltered individuals. In addition, within the Intensive Outreach Team, the Fire Department's Mobile Integrated Health Unit has been asked to take a more active role in addressing homelessness-related health concerns.

To further enhance the response, the City has engaged two internal police psychologists and a police co-responder team, licensed clinician, to assist with mental health-related cases to prevent gaps in services and ensure the proper level of care.

Ms. Williams, and the Homeless Initiatives Program Services team, will be tasked with grants, funding, ensure contracts are management well, and ensure Community Court staffing and programming. , The other two positions (of the five previously mentioned) will be filled by individuals (to function similar to Case Managers) who will help connect individuals to services, be more hands-on with obtaining documents, and ensure follow-up and tracking.

The program's overarching goals are to close service gaps, promote self-sufficiency, and encourage better engagement with individuals experiencing homelessness.

Key highlights include:

- Street Outreach Team previously expanded to six dedicated officers will be complimented by 3 Park Ranger staff upon hire.
- Mobile Integrated Health Unit deployed for both proactive and reactive support
- Mental health professionals available on-call, including the co-responder team consisting of police psychologists and a mental health clinician
- Two Case managers will be hired to support navigation and service tracking
- EPIC system integration underway to improve coordination with hospitals and service providers
- Uninsured individuals will still receive emergency care until stabilized

During the discussion, Advisory Committee Members raised several important questions. Chair Yukna asked about services for the uninsured; Assistant City Manager Cooper clarified that emergency care is provided regardless of insurance status. Advisory Committee Member Shimelfenyng inquired about the availability of mental health support, and Assistant City Manager Cooper explained that professionals are on-call as needed.

Advisory Committee Member O'Brien praised the effort and asked what prompted the restructuring. Assistant City Manager Cooper noted that the new fiscal year and the

desire to better leverage internal resources drove the changes, adding that the City evaluated best practices from other cities. Advisory Committee Member O'Brien also expressed support for the fact that the effort was undertaken without additional budget increases.

Other topics included coordination with Broward Health and the development of hospital discharge protocols. Cooper acknowledged ongoing work with partners like Broward Health and Holy Cross Hospital and said that the Mobile Integrated Health Unit would help fill in gaps when individuals are released without a plan for continued care.

Finally, Assistant City Manager Cooper highlighted new homeless initiatives, including the recent County funded "parking lot program" which will officially launch in early November at Mt. Olivette SDA Church, via Hope South Florida (HSF). Mr. Kenner, HSF CEO, advised that the program will provide temporary shelter for up to 25 families at a time. Approximately 600 families in Broward County are currently considered homeless. The City plans to spread awareness through its existing systems and may work with the school board to identify and reach families in need.

iv. TaskForce for Ending Homelessness – Service Agreement Update

Assistant City Manager Cooper provided an update on the City's service agreement with the TaskForce for Ending Homelessness, noting that the contract has expired (effective 9/30/25) and was not renewed. He explained that the City and the TaskForce were unable to reach agreement on the contract terms, and with the City's new homelessness structure being implemented, leadership opted to pause and reevaluate future service needs.

Assistant City Manager Cooper clarified that the original contract with the TaskForce was valued at \$315,000 per year, and while that specific agreement ended, the County contract with the TaskForce remains active. He emphasized that clients can still be served through the the Homeless Helpline as an alternative point of entry.

Advisory Committee Members expressed concern over the sudden termination:

Advisory Committee Member Schimelfenyng asked whether there is now a gap in services without a unified entry point.

Assistant City Manager Cooper responded that coordinated entry remains in place through county systems.

Vice Chair Martin highlighted that four experienced outreach workers were recently let go by the TaskForce and questioned the abruptness of the City's decision. He suggested that a six-month extension might have been a better transition.

Assistant City Manager Cooper acknowledged the concern and said the City is still evaluating a possible new agreement.

Ms. Williams added that the loss of the contract will not impact local outreach services. Vice Chair Martin also requested that the Advisory Board be included in future decisions about service agreements, especially those with direct service implications.

v. Shared Housing Update – HomesUnited

Carole Mitchell, Homeless Initiatives Program Manager, provided an update on HomesUnited. She addressed questions regarding their policies, procedures, and safeguards, noting that she met with HomesUnited representatives who shared their comprehensive emergency policies and procedures, which will be distributed for review. HomesUnited is currently receiving funding from BBHC.

Vice Chair Martin expressed concerns about the cost of services, noting that the rate seemed high relative to what is being provided. He emphasized that if the City plans to enter into a contract with HomesUnited, it's important to thoroughly review their service providers to ensure funds are used efficiently.

Ms. Mitchell assured that before any referrals are made, there will be a full mental health assessment, medication management, and a criminal background check conducted by the City to maintain safety and appropriateness.

Vice Chair Martin also questioned the partnership model and the cost per bed, noting the \$50 per night rate includes meals but felt the City should demand more value for the cost.

vi. Ordinance Update – Outdoor Social Service Event Application

Assistant City Manager Cooper explained that while food distribution is protected under current guidelines, shower services in some areas have become overwhelming. He welcomed feedback on how to balance allowing essential services with limiting the negative impacts of frequent or large events, such as by capping the number of permits issued.

Advisory Committee Members expressed concerns about the frequency of events, trash complaints, and property issues caused by well-meaning but uncoordinated groups coming from outside the community. Vice Chair Martin felt that allowing only four permits per group per year was too low but agreed that tighter controls are needed, including fines and better enforcement to hold those providing services accountable for cleanup.

Assistant City Manager Cooper clarified that the permit limits primarily apply to events held on sidewalks or streets rather than private property. The group discussed possible requirements like providing porta-potties for events lasting more than four hours and forming stronger partnerships with organizations that have facilities to reduce strain on public spaces. Vice Chair Martin recommended the City consider dedicating a staff member to coordinate long-term initiatives to improve consistency and accountability.

Additional concerns were raised about the impact on churches with schools and the need to address those situations. When asked about tracking the nightly homeless population, it was noted that estimates typically come from yearly Point-in-Time counts or data from the Task Force and HOT team, with numbers appearing to be on the rise.

Overall, the discussion emphasized balancing the need for social services with managing their impact through clearer policies, better enforcement, and improved coordination.

c. Homeless Advisory Committee

i. Open Discussion

None

VI. Public Input

Dr. Wesley Julius, who works with HCA hospitals, has been making special arrangements to prevent patient discharges that could lead to complications. He plans to meet with Mayor Trantalis and Assistant City Manager Cooper, following advice from City Commissioner Sorenson to share his ideas. Dr. Julius is enthusiastic and passionate about addressing inadequate access to care and reducing the high costs associated with avoidable hospital readmissions. He aims to engage hospitals in these efforts and has offered his assistance in any way possible. Vice Chair Martin expressed interest in the outcome of the meeting and suggested following up with Ms. Mitchell via email.

Greg Hunt reviewed approaches in other cities and noted they often separate musicians and artists in their efforts. He suggested creating a CD or other music project to raise funds for homeless people. He also referenced the Mayor's vision to transform the area into a new Monaco but pointed out that there was no clear discussion about who the affordable housing would serve.

Melinda Bowker spoke about the Ordinance update on outdoor social events, emphasizing its significant impact on her neighborhood. She co-signed a letter regarding Stranahan Park, noting 12 food distribution events over a weekend, mostly without permits, with only one permitted. She stressed the need for limits on the number of permits

issued annually, as Stranahan Park is heavily affected by trash and people camping. Dr. Rebecca McGuire is working with food distributors to encourage use of parks with restroom facilities.

Advisory Committee Member O'Brien asked if Ms. Bowker had reported issues to code or FixIt FTL; Ms. Bowker replied she hadn't contacted FixIt FTL because a park ranger has been on site since July 2025, helping manage the situation, although responses from outreach teams and police have been slow. Bowker reports camping violations, and the new ranger helps guide people to obtain permits.

Vice Chair Martin agreed the issue is serious and Ms. Bowker is willing to offer suggestions. Mr. Hunt noted the ranger now asks for permits and assists with compliance.

Additional concerns raised by Goldie Weakland included how discharged individuals contact the homeless outreach team, the existence of empty funded and unfunded shelter beds needing better planning for evening hours, the need for more parking spots, and uncertainty about where people are supposed to go if not to the Task Force. Feedings are especially needed on weekends, and there is a call for permanent locations and porta-potties to support these efforts.

VII. Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Committee at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 2:39 p.m.

THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 13, 2025, AT 1:00 P.M.

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