

## Long Branch Partners (LBP) Meeting Minutes (7/14)

### ❖ Meeting Scheduled Start (1:00)

#### ➤ Meeting Purpose:

- Share information on circumstances and needs of those affected by the July 27 fire at 8739 Carroll Avenue Apartments
- Share offers of support to meet identified short term and long-term needs of those affected by the fire

#### ➤ Agenda

- Update on Fire from DHHS
- Questions about fire and circumstances and needs of those affected
- Sharing of offers of Services
- Next Steps

### ❖ 33 Attendees

- Bruce B. – CHEER
- Reemberto R. – Silver Spring Regional Center
  - [Reemberto.Rodriguez@MontgomeryCountyMD.gov](mailto:Reemberto.Rodriguez@MontgomeryCountyMD.gov)
- Christopher H. – CHEER
- Theresa L. – American Red Cross
  - [Theresa.lonetti@redcross.org](mailto:Theresa.lonetti@redcross.org)
- Mark H. – Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- Patrick C. - Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
  - [Patrick.campbell@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:Patrick.campbell@montgomerycountymd.gov)
- Melissa F. – Community Action Agency, DHHS
- Sharon S. – Community Action Agency, DHHS
- Rubidia M. – Impact Silver Spring
- Tom H. – Takoma Park Volunteer Fire Department
- Jeff C. – Oak View & New Hampshire Estates Elementary School
- David D-P. – Latino Health Initiative
- Michelle LaR. – CASA
- Claudine S. – Takoma Park Emergency Preparedness Committee
- Cindy S. – Montgomery Blair High School
- Ana M. – CASA
- Maureen L-R. – Community Action Agency, TESS Center
- Pilar R. – Montgomery Blair High School
- George E. - CASA
- Birtucan A. – TESS Community Action Center
- Claudia W. – TESS Community Action Center
- Jenna U. – Manna Food Center
- Lisa B. – CHEER, Direct Support for Immigrants (DSI)
- Lucia Z. – CHEER
- Vanesa P. – CHEER
- Febe H. – Montgomery County Public Libraries
- Pazit A. – A&D and Food Access Call Center
- Pat W. – Community Health Nurse for Montgomery County

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- Delia A. – CASA
- Maria H. – Spanish Speaking Community of Maryland
  - [mherrera@spanishcommunityofmd.org](mailto:mherrera@spanishcommunityofmd.org)
- Shawn M. –
- Barbara M. – Neighbor in Kilmarock
- Daisy D-L. – Latino Health Initiative
  - [Daisy.deleon@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:Daisy.deleon@montgomerycountymd.gov)
- Sara M. – Impact Silver Spring

### ❖ **Sharing of Agenda**

- **Bruce (1:08)**
  - We will share information about the fire and what is going on with the people who have been displaced
  - We will discuss the needs of those impacted by the fire – this information will primarily be shared by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
  - The floor will then be open to questions regarding the circumstances of the fire and then each Long Branch Partner (LBP) will be able to assess what they can offer to aid in the response effort
  - We will then have a final discussion about next steps – how we should organize to integrate the services of the LBP into the response and recovery effort

### ❖ **Description of the Event and Succeeding Circumstances**

- **Mark (1:12)**
  - Patrick Campbell was the first to be contacted from DHHS and has since been the point person for the response effort
  - He has helped the displaced residents get into a hotel in Bethesda, he has set up COVID-19 testing for the residents, and has begun to assess various other needs they may have
- **Patrick (1:12)**
  - The fire began Monday (7/27) night – because of COVID-19 the goal was not open a shelter.
  - Red Cross and the Office of Emergency Management looked to find a hotel that was closer to Long Branch, but the availability to hold all of the residents did not exist at any closer location. Fortunately, they were able to find a hotel in Bethesda that could hold each displaced resident, which is beneficial for bringing DHHS to one location
  - The next day Red Cross began their intake process; Montgomery County also conducted a screening with most of the residents
  - A public health screening was also conducted which consisted of a 20-minute check-up; each individual was given the opportunity to take a COVID-19 test
  - Information on immediate needs was received, from the residents, right away – of the 12 units in the building that were impacted by the fire, it does not look like people will be able to return to their homes anytime soon, so DHHS is looking to re-house people
  - There are varying levels of damage to each apartment, however the roof itself is compromised so the majority of the displaced residents will need new homes

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- Clothing is also a major need. Some of the residents were able to recover some clothes, but those items will still need to be washed
- The Latino Health Initiative (LHI) was on-site on Wednesday (7/29) to check-in with residents in order to aid in the recovery process
- Another round of general health checks and COVID-19 tests will be administered for those who could not receive them on Tuesday
- One resident was identified as showing symptoms of COVID-19, so they were moved to the County's quarantine hotel which has nurses to check-in on the people there and social workers in the event that they [symptomatic people] do in fact test positive for COVID-19 (**The displaced resident who showed symptoms of COVID-19 was tested to confirm the diagnosis, however the results of the test were not known at the time of this meeting**)
- In order to prevent congregate settings, Red Cross is delivering meals to each individual hotel room that holds a displaced resident and they are doing continuous follow-ups with the residents that consist of temperature checks
- The TESS Center has been active in the response effort, providing on-site staff, which has been beneficial for communicating with the residents who are only Spanish speakers
- The response from LHI as well as the public health has been fantastic in helping to conduct health check-ups, COVID-19 testing in order to ensure a sense of safety and wellness
- Two principals from two respective local schools stopped by to drop off Chromebooks for the students – there were a lot of younger kids in the damaged building
- **Claudia (1:16)**
  - The TESS Center held a brief meet-and-greet with the residents on Tuesday (7/28)
  - The TESS Center was able to assist with administration of COVID-19 testing
  - Also identifies clothing as an immediate need
- **Patrick**
  - Introduces Theresa Lonetti, she is the new American Red Cross (ARC) representative for our area following the American Red Cross' reorganization – she can provide a point-of-view from the case work that is being conducted in response to this event
- **Theresa (1:17)**
  - There are 17 kids amongst the families that were displaced
  - A big issue has been that there has not been any clear paperwork to identify who actually lived at the property, so ARC has had no other source of information but the individuals who were there the night of the fire
  - ARC responded on the night of the fire, there were about 50 people in the building including a total of 13 people in one apartment alone
  - It took some time to find a hotel that could house everyone – ARC called as many hotels as they could for about 2 hours
  - During that time, some of the displaced residents appeared afraid of what would happen next – a rumor had circulated that the residents would need shots, so some of them left the scene that night.

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- 24 people were placed in the hotel the first night. On Tuesday (7/28), via word-of-mouth, individuals who left previously heard that the hotel placement was comfortable and that there was nothing to be afraid of
- By the end of the night on Tuesday, a total of 51 people has been placed in the hotel (17 children, 34 adults)
- ARC is currently providing 3 meals a day including snacks
- ARC is providing health checks and following up with case workers who are speaking with the families – some social workers are Spanish speakers and are staying on-site at the hotel 24/7
- As far as immediate needs, ARC has heard requests/questions/concerns about clothing because residents have said that the building was condemned (**The landlord had confirmed this as of Tuesday morning but had not returned ARC's calls since**)
- The main concern among the residents is long-term housing – ARC has heard that some residents have returned to the damaged building but is not sure if residents are returning to get answers from the landlord about when they will be able to return, or if they have been able to retrieve some of their stuff
- Everyone seems to be healthy, mental health services are available but there have been no requests for these services from the residents
- **Patrick (1:21)**
  - The County crisis team was on-site at the hotel on Tuesday for precautionary reasons
  - DHHS has been successful in providing Spanish speaking staff in order to provide assistance to the displaced residents in the language they [residents] feel most confident in
  - In addition, all of the residents were provided with reusable and surgical masks
  - In the hotel there is space if any LBP want to send members to communicate with the residents – keep in mind a potential challenge to meeting with residents is that some people have continued to go to work despite the incident, in some cases at 4 AM, so consider the time that you come to see them
- ❖ **Questions About Fire and/or Needs of Those Impacted**
  - **Tom (1:23)**
    - Two things to be mindful of:
      - One, in Central America the fire service is part of the civil defense, which is part of the army, therefore many Central Americans are afraid of the fire service
      - Two, hospitals turn unpaid bills over to collections agencies which can be vicious, at times even threatening deportation in order to scare people into paying unpaid debts. This fear could justify the fear of the rumored shot requirement on the night of the fire
      - **Patrick (in response)**
        - ◆ To reiterate, there was no requirement of the residents to get shots
  - **Vanesa (1:24)**
    - Works closely with Linkages Learning (LL), an entity that works closely with Long Branch community members

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- According to an LL representative, legal aid will be key in the response to this incident because residents are being told from the property manager that until the investigation is finished, property management will not claim responsibility
- A member of a family impacted by the fire says they saw the fire start on the roof
- LL representative is telling impacted families and individuals not to sign anything because she can foresee people being coaxed into legally binding deniability on part of the property manager
- Linkages Learning is providing visa gift cards to the displaced families to help them buy nonperishable food
- Displaced families need guidance on what to do as far as potential legal issues with the property manager
- **Bruce (1:28)**
  - Question about duration of the shelter at the Bethesda hotel
    - ◆ Are all 10 displaced families in the same hotel?
  - **Theresa (in response)**
    - ◆ Yes
  - How long is it anticipated that the families will remain in the hotel?
  - **Theresa (in response)**
    - No set date at this point – it will depend on what the families plans moving forward will be and if there is a place where we can transition the families, if not, they will remain at the Bethesda hotel for as long as they need to be
- **Vanesa**
  - Some of the displaced residents are confused about how long they can stay at the hotel
  - Some have heard that they would only be there 3 days, others have heard 8 days. Clarification is necessary
- **Bruce**
  - It was mentioned that many of the displaced individuals are still going to work, how are they getting to work?
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - Some have cars, others are using buses, in other cases friends/families will pick them up
    - Are toiletry and other miscellaneous, everyday use items, being provided by the American Red Cross?
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - Yes, ARC is providing short-term toiletries and also these things are provided naturally by the hotel
- **Sara**
  - How many of the displaced people take public transportation?
  - Explain in further detail how we can share the conference space if we would like to send a member of our organization to the hotel in order to meet with the displaced residents
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - Our focus is on the children's needs, clothing, and rehousing
    - ARC and Montgomery County can only keep all of the families in a hotel for a limited time

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- **Lucia**
  - Are there any immediate needs for the kids that we can provide?
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - Some items have been dropped off for the kids
    - Will work on getting a more detailed assessment of immediate human services needs after health needs are met first
- **Maria (1:33)**
  - How long will displaced residents be at the hotel?
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - Anticipating the residents being at the hotel into early next week (8/3 – 8/7)
    - There is no definitive answer because DHHS and ARC are working on finding permanent rehousing for each family
    - Will work on getting a definitive answer
    - Once ARC can no longer provide housing, the meal delivery service they are providing will cease as well – we would have to work on replacing that service. If it cannot be replaced it will become expensive to keep each individual in the hotel and pay out-of-pocket for their meals
      - ◆ Ex. For the residence that held 13 people, at a minimum cost of \$10 per meal, that would amount to \$130 dollars per meal
- **Claudine**
  - Once we understand what the needs are, where would people bring the items they wish to contribute?
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - That is something the LBP need to figure out
    - The Long Branch Recreation Center is currently being used to house homeless individuals due to COVID-19, so as of now there is not a great facility in the Long Branch area that can be used to collect and store contributions for the Carroll Avenue fire response
    - It would be ideal that an LBP whom normally takes donations would handle the contributions for this response because any additional material that is not used for the response to this event, could be put toward other response efforts that the non-profit is already involved in
- **Bruce**
  - Is there a partner within the Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) that we can work with to look for housing for the displaced residents?
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - We will definitely want to engage DHCD to help find a solution to the rehousing issue
    - It will be important that the displaced residents have a group(s) they feel comfortable with, that will walk the through the process of finding new, permanent housing
    - We also want to engage the landlord of the impacted building to remind them of tenant rights (i.e. returning security deposits, providing residents access to their items still at the building etc.)
- **Bruce (1:38)**

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- Is it possible to allow the displaced residents to choose whoever organizations they feel most comfortable working with? Could LBP organizations and the County possibly share with one another, which one of these families are in their respective database in order to determine which organizations would best be able to serve that family?
- **Patrick (in response)**
  - The best way to do this would be to connect with the American Red Cross because ARC currently is the case management lead
- **Maria**
  - Are there any translation services needed?
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - Yes. Each one of the residents are primarily Spanish speakers with some using limited English to communicate, and a smaller group communicating in English fluently
- **Daisy (1:40)**
  - With the Latino Health Initiative (LHI), on-site at the Bethesda hotel
  - Care kits were provided to the families which included coloring books, crayons for the kids as well as masks and water bottles for everyone
  - One individual reported that they were reusing a single surgical mask, so cloth masks were provided
  - Some of the residents left the site and others have switched rooms so it has been difficult to get an accurate head count of who is still at the Bethesda hotel, but the estimate is 51 which is what Theresa reported previously
  - There is a Spanish speaking member from the American Red Cross, named Hector, who is on-site at the hotel 24/7
- **Sharon (1:42)**
  - Would like to direct the meeting to Maureen to explain how the screening process for determining other needs works in terms of questions about services people need for housing and other resources
  - Various groups that are connected/partnered with DHHS and the Community Action Agency have already sent workers on-site to connect with the displaced residents
- **Maureen**
  - EICM is a database accessible to DHHS that provides names of people who are receiving a service
  - If someone is new to the system, they will be prompted through a screening for other needs (i.e. financial, housing, health and/or mental health etc.)
  - From there referrals can be made to the various DHHS services in order to meet the client's needs and the appropriate office will reach out to the client
  - If a client is already in the system and they need to apply for a new service, their information will already be uploaded and will not have to be reentered
- **Vanesa (1:45)**
  - 10 of the 17 kids in the hotel attend New Hampshire Estates Elementary school
  - Linkages Learning together with DHHS have been working closely to assist the families of these 10 kids (Linkages Learning had been working with these families before the incident)

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- In terms of finding organizations that have close ties and strong relationships with most of the impacted residents, Linkages Learning is one
- ❖ **Floor Open to Share What Orgs. Can Offer**
  - **Bruce (1:46)**
    - Two major, immediate needs have been identified:
      - Clothing
      - How do we find permanent housing for displaced individuals/families?
    - Would like to open the floor to anyone who has an idea about what they can offer to help address either of the major issues or any other issue that has arisen from this event
  - **Reemeberto (1:47)**
    - There are people who in the broader community who have heard about this incident and would like to help
    - Is there a process/system for people who want to contribute financially to the response for this issue?
    - **Bruce (in response)**
      - This system or structure is not in place at the moment
      - We do currently have a list of LBP's who conduct fundraising activities for other purposes
    - **Reemeberto (1:49)**
      - Will investigate to see if there is a system like this within the County structure; believes a system like this already exists
      - Concerned about putting out a call to action in response to this incident because we may immediately be overwhelmed by the response
      - Attempted to reach out to Mark Bergel at A Wider Circle because they have a reserve of clothing that could be a resource for this response
    - **Mark (in response)**
      - Had a conversation with Mark Bergel on Wednesday (7/29)
      - Mark is aware of the fire and the needs that have arisen in its aftermath
      - We should touch base with him to determine if the displaced residents or representatives from the LBP can go to A Wider Circle to pick up items for the residents or if he would like to go about a different way of doing that – all of this must be done while taking COVID-19 in consideration
  - **Ana (1:51)**
    - CASA has a “solidarity fund” which possibly can be used to provide gift cards to the impacted families
    - CASA has leftover canned food which can be provided to the families
    - CASA has a social services team that is available to help with EARP and other applications
  - **Michelle**
    - Agrees that the solidarity fund and assisting with EARP applications are the best ways that CASA can help with immediate financial needs for the families
    - CASA also has case management capabilities if necessary
  - **Sara (1:53)**



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- Impact Silver Spring will brainstorm to determine what they can do to support families
- Fundraising could be a good option to meet financial needs of the impacted families
- Would like to go visit the families at the hotel
- **Patrick (in response)**
  - If any LBP member organization would like to send a representative to the hotel around dinner time would be best because the likelihood the families would be at the hotel and not at work or out-and-about is higher.
  - There is a conference room where LBPs and the families can go and meet
  - The phone numbers of the displaced residents are stored in a screening tool that is now in the hands of DHHS
    - ◆ Sharon and Maureen will decide when that information can be released
  - The American Red Cross also has a release form, so one of the release forms must be used before that information can be available and the residents of course must sign off on the form
- **Maureen (1:56)**
  - Can we create a form that asks for the residents to identify their clothing size?
  - Before we ask for clothing donations or look to places like A Wider Circle to provide clothing, we should designate someone to manage the anticipated influx of clothing
  - We should reach out to landlord tenant affairs to get a clear understanding of tenant rights
  - We should also check on Pro Bono legal programs so that we can the residents can have access to free legal advice in regard to this incident
- **Lucia**
  - Knowing shoe size would be useful to as well as whether or not the families need diapers.
  - For the long-term, how many apartments are we looking for to rehouse these residents? CHEER can help in this effort
- **Maureen (in response)**
  - Do not have the answer at this moment
- **Theresa (in response)**
  - There is no clear answer because the residents are not sure what they are going to do next for the long-term, so we do not know how long each individual family plans to stay at the hotel; they could be on different time frames
  - As far as units go in terms of how many new places we need to find, the impacted building was a 12 unit building so our first assumption would be to find 12 new places. However, some of the residents have indicated that they are unsure if they will continue to live together or not because they don't know where that will be and whether or not they will be able to afford it
  - Most of the 12 units had 3-5 bedrooms but some units held more than 3-5 people
  - Some units had extended family, for others it was unclear what their relationship was
- **Maureen**

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- Let's work together [CHEER and Community Action Agency] work together to find a solution for this need
- **Vanesa (2:00)**
  - How beneficial is it, from a mental health standpoint, to have allow of these organizations, whose intentions are good, approach the families right now and bombard them, for lack of a better word, with assistance at this time?
  - Is anyone from LBP offering legal help?
  - **Maureen (in response)**
    - Until we [LBP] get true legal guidance, the best advice we can give the residents is to not sign anything, don't talk to anyone, and wait until we can find professional legal help
  - **Vanesa**
    - The building next door began evicting its residents so if we can help these displaced residents advocate for themselves that would be ideal
  - **Bruce (in response)**
    - Helping the residents understand their rights falls in line with finding long-term housing. We n
    - We need more guidance in this area - this is something that CHEER can work with the TESS center on to understand what those rules are
- **Tom (2:04)**
  - Does anyone know if the building was condemned by the Department of Permitting Services?
  - This will be an issue for reentry
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - The building is condemned but they are allowing overnight access
- **Jeff**
  - The school can provide Chromebooks, wi-fi hotspots, gift cards
  - It is good for the kids from a social-emotional perspective to have some control on the clothing items they want rather than us choosing
  - Oak View & New Hampshire Estates Elementary School are not monitoring what the families do with the money they are given; they are not requiring the families to submit receipts to them
  - School staff put together "fun kits" which consisted of games that they know the kids like
- **Maria (2:06)**
  - The Spanish Speaking Community of Maryland can assist those who are looking for employment
  - Will coordinate with Maureen and Bruce on this effort
- ❖ **Next Steps (2:07)**
  - **Bruce**
    - Suggests forming two committees to address the two major needs
      - First committee should address the rehousing issue
        - ◆ CHEER can work with the TESS Center to identify the needs and rights of tenants and to help them navigate the housing process
        - ◆ If anyone else wants to participate, you of course are welcome

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- The second committee should focus on a fundraising initiative
  - ◆ There should be a dedicated fund set up for the displaced residents
  - ◆ Sara and Reemeberto each individually expressed an interest to make this happen or mentioned this idea so if they are interested in spearheading this effort that would be great
  - ◆ CHEER will also be involved with this effort
  - ◆ CASA is welcome to participate
- Suggests setting up a follow-up meeting to reconvene and discuss progress on the immediate needs
- **Pat (2:11)**
  - What is the name of the hotel in Bethesda?
  - **Mark (in response)**
    - It is the Hilton Garden Inn
- **Bruce**
  - Suggests forming a Long Branch Emergency Preparedness Committee (includes CASA, Impact Silver Spring, the Spanish Speaking Community of Maryland and other LBP whom wishes to attend) to have a separate meeting to discuss the immediate needs and to better prepare for addressing the larger group
- **Maureen**
  - As a reminder, we need to protect client confidentiality and abide by HIPAA law

### ❖ **Next Meeting: TBD**

### ❖ **Information Shared in Chat:**

- **Jenna**
  - Manna can share baby food and formula
  - As families are rehoused, Manna would like to assist with long-term food support
- **Lucia**
  - CHEER can enroll those individuals with diabetes in a one-on-one support program
- **Sharon**
  - Replacing documents lost in the fire is a need that the Community Action Agency is working on
  - Assistance washing clothes at a laundromat is a need
- **David**
  - On the case management front is there/can there be coordination between ARC and HHS to streamline client intake?
- **Lisa**
  - Neighbors from the Long Branch area and people from Adventist Community Services can help with clothing donations
  - Direct Support for Immigrants also has a clothing reserve
- **Tom**
  - Does ARC handle grants to families who are displaced by fire?
- **Jeff**
  - Oak View and New Hampshire States Elementary schools cannot serve as a drop-off site for money, clothing, school supplies etc.
- **Maureen**
  - We can see if the City of Takoma Park will provide guidance for tenant rights

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- **Lisa**
  - From the Flower Branch apartment fire experience, two needs that came up were underwear (falls in line with clothing need) and money for laundromat (falls in line with general financial need)
- **Barbara**
  - Suggests creating a website like this one  
[https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press\\_Detail.aspx?Item\\_ID=16282](https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=16282)
- **Cindy**
  - Could donations be dropped off at Long Branch Community Center and any surplus can be shared with the homeless that are currently being housed there?
  - **Patrick (in response)**
    - No
- **Maureen**
  - Is there a process for emergency medicine?
- **Sharon**
  - The name of the hotel should not be externally broadcast in order to protect privacy and status
- **David**
  - Suggests that another priority should be coordinated communication with the impacted families
  - Right now, there is a lot of incomplete, emerging, and word-of-mouth information being shared
  - If we are coordinated it will help the overall effort