



LEWIS & CLARK  
DEMOCRATIC  
CENTRAL COMMITTEE

**LCCDCC November 9, 2021 VIA ZOOM**

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### **Call to Order and Introductions: Tonia Bossell, Chair**

- **Tonia** called the meeting to order at **7:00 PM** via Zoom, welcomed all, and asked for introductions. In attendance (by Zoom identification): **Rep. Mary Ann Dunwell, Vice Chair Shawn Whyte, Treasurer Jacob Torgerson, Jan Clinard, Mark and Carole Mackin, Trent Bolger, Thai Nguyen, Kyle Joiner, Kev Hamm, Jeff Buscher.**

### **Speaker: Jeff Buscher (United Way of Lewis and Clark County)**

- **Tonia** introduced **Mr. Buscher** to speak about efforts to provide housing and other services to the unsheltered/ unhoused in Lewis and Clark County. **Jeff** spent most of his career as a youth minister in Montana and Wyoming and college chaplain in Missouri. Now retired as chaplain, he is Community Impact Coordinator for United Way. He is facilitating a coalition of many partner non-profits (God's Love, Good Samaritan, Friendship Center, etc.) working with those needing shelter. **Jeff** shared a presentation on "Addressing the Needs of the Unsheltered". As of January 2021, the unsheltered population has increased 20% in Montana, and 150% locally from the previous year.
- **Jeff** emphasized the "cost of doing nothing". For example, \$4.7 million for medical care and \$1.3 million for law enforcement in Lewis and Clark in 2019. Gallatin County tracked these expenses associated with 8 unhoused individuals in 2016 as an average of \$28,000 per person per year, while annual housing costs would be only \$16,000.
- **Jeff** summarized the current locations and availability of rent subsidized housing. This includes about 400 permanent vouchers for senior/ disabled housing, two Helena Housing Authority (HHA) complexes, vouchers available for veterans, Rocky Mountain Development Council affordable housing (Eagle Manor, Red Alder), etc.
- **Jeff** noted the largest service gap in our area is for emergency housing. For example, in severe winter weather, God's Love has only 25 cots. Camp Child has also been used in emergencies. There is no emergency housing available for those with COVID.
- Regional possibilities to address emergency housing include repurposed motel/ warehouse/ gym/ retail space/ outdoor shelter/ campground. The group made suggestions for possible shelters, including the now-vacant Willis Cruse home (need funding) and an empty building near United Way (overpriced, has asbestos). **Jeff** noted the coalition continues to seek options like empty commercial buildings in Helena, as well as possible motels. None of these are viable options at market rental rates.
- The model for safe, dignified service delivery is "Housing First and Continuum of Care" (see <https://unitedwaylca.org/greater-helena-area-housing-first-coordinated-entry/>). Rapid re-housing is foundational to addressing other needs. Temporary rent grants or vouchers have a national average 75 to 90% success. "Permanent supportive housing" (as with the HHA) has a 98% average success.
- The local housing first coalition shares data and supports a continuum of care to provide client services as needed for domestic violence, mental health, substance use disorder, etc. Some agencies are "front door" to direct clients to appropriate services.
- **Jeff** emphasized that "Homelessness is not a choice, it is a lack of choices", even though "we can't fix everybody". What can we do as a caring community? **Mark** noted that timely public spending could avoid higher costs associated with incarceration. **Mary Ann** noted that much of the current response is reactive. **Jeff** agreed sometimes it's

simply keeping folks alive and out of the cold. A pervasive myth is that local unhoused are transients. Actually, 70% consider Helena and Montana their home. **Kyle** noted that some local unhoused are former state hospital patients without a release plan.

- All this occurs when ALL affordable housing is in short supply, even for the workforce.

### **Redistricting Update: Trent Bolger (MDP)**

- **Trent** observed that Maylinn Smith, nonpartisan presiding officer of the Redistricting Commission, accepted Republican Map 12 (non-competitive for Democrats in both congressional districts). See <https://mtredistricting.gov/> . Lewis and Clark County/ Helena were placed in the extremely Republican eastern district. Trent noted that even his old district in Wyoming was more competitive. Additional issues like prisoner reallocation and racial bloc voting analysis need to be addressed. The commission's work also included drawing new state legislative districts as well as new precinct boundaries. Follow the schedule at <https://mtredistricting.gov/category/meetings/> .
- **Linda** noted that former Republican Governor Marc Racicot spoke in favor of Map 12 at the decisive November 4 committee meeting. He represented that former Senator Baucus also thought Map 12 was the most fair.
- **Rep. Dunwell** provided an update that Democratic commissioner Kendra Miller submitted an amendment at today's (Nov. 9) meeting to include all of the Blackfeet reservation in the western district.

### **New/ Old Business: Group**

- **Tonia** asked for consensus on whether or not to hold a meeting in December. Several suggested that we could meet and do committee work (possibly via Zoom breakout rooms). **Mark** did not want to skip December.
- **Shawn** questioned shrinking meeting attendance. **Kev** noted that "politics is exhausting". **Rep. Dunwell** accurately noted that she and other legislators constantly face abuse and bullying from many of the other party and deserve more support. Trent noted that some central committees could benefit from more support from the state party. Discussion evolved into strategies to increase meeting attendance, precinct representative recruitment, and ongoing organizing activity. **Thai** noted his organizing experience ("we are the party") and willingness to help draft a plan.
- **Mark** adapted a precinct manual from another state, and would like help to improve it.
- **Jacob** suggested outreach to his friend **Alyson Roberts**, executive director of Gallatin County Democrats (<https://gallatindemocrats.com/> ). She has been instrumental in revitalizing communications, planning, and recruitment for that group. **Jacob** said he would invite her (or another Gallatin Dem) to speak at the December meeting.
- There were no requests to fill vacant precinct representative seats at the meeting.

### **Minutes and Financial:**

- Secretary **Linda Beischel** submitted October minutes to the chair, and shared them in Zoom chat for participants to access.
- Treasurer **Jacob Torgerson** reported a balance of \$1602.53 (and \$105 in savings).

The meeting was adjourned with the Chair's thanks at approximately 8:00 PM. **Next meeting Tuesday December 14, 2021 via Zoom at 7 PM.** Respectfully submitted, Linda Beischel, secretary