

Agencies partnering to address homelessness in Clinton Co.

- BY CARLY NEWTON Press-Republican



From left: Town of Plattsburgh Supervisor Michael Cashman; Clinton County Department of Social Services Commissioner Christine Peters; JCEO CEO Nicole Laurin; United Way President and CEO John Bernardi; and ETC Executive Director, Amanda Beaudette held a news conference Wednesday to raise awareness about Clinton County's growing homeless population.

BY CARLY NEWTON/Press-Republican

PLATTSBURGH — The local continuum of care planning body, which coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals, conducted a thorough count of Clinton County's homeless population Wednesday.

The numbers are up.

DATA

"Our goal in doing this is to offer support services to try to get them inside and to see what we can do to help them," Amanda Beaudette, executive director of ETC Housing Corporation in Plattsburgh, said at a news conference there Wednesday.

"This data is important, because it helps us get funding and shows where our housing needs are."

Called the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, the annual initiative, required by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, keeps track of the amount of homeless people in the county on a specific date each January.

During the count, which took place in the early morning hours Wednesday, volunteers from continuums of care such as ETC, NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), the VA (Veterans Association) and community members canvassed the county and visited vacant buildings, parking lots/vehicles, known encampments and checked 24/7 businesses in the hope of identifying homeless persons and potentially linking them with services.

In the 2023 PIT count, Clinton County reported 157 individuals in temporary housing and none reported unsheltered. In 2024, however, that number drastically rose 84% to 289 in temporary housing and none reported unsheltered at the time of the count.

“This year, our numbers are even higher, and we know we have an unsheltered population,” Beaudette said.

“We have been able, since October, to get several of them inside, but we have a few that are still outside. So that is what we are doing today. It’s really important that we gather this information to get this snapshot and show why this is an issue, and what we can do to help our unsheltered population.”

In the 10 days following the PIT count this year, the planning body is also asking for the public’s help in helping them identify any homeless individuals they may know about in the county.

Those who know of anyone can contact ETC Housing Corporation at 518-563-2223 extension 7143 and report the information. No negative consequences will come for the homeless person because of the report.

HOW TO HELP

In addition to reporting, there are many ways the community can help.

However, Beaudette, who was joined at the news conference by Clinton County Department of Social Services Commissioner Christine Peters, Town of Plattsburgh Supervisor Michael Cashman, United Way President and CEO John Bernardi and JCEO CEO Nicole Laurin, advised against approaching any homeless and asking them what they need or attempting to give them supplies.

Peters said oftentimes, agencies like ETC have been in contact with them already and formed a trustworthy relationship.

Cashman suggested the public reach out to these agencies directly and ask how they can help or if they need any supplies or money donated.

“People have big hearts in the North Country,” he said.

“But use the agencies to get the resources to the people, because they are the ones that are the ones locked in the best with what the needs are, with the various individuals that are being served.”

For those who want to donate, the United Way’s ALICE Fund is a good option because it helps “dozens of partners,” Bernardi said. United Way’s website can be found here: <https://www.unitedwayadk.org/>

“These great organizations will also take a direct donation,” Bernardi said, listing off JCEO, NAMI and ETC as some examples.

Asked why the homeless population spiked so much in a year, Peters attributed it to the “increase in housing costs, the increase in serious mental illness, the increase in substance abuse.”

“If you look at our country, we’re seeing an increase in many ... social issues that I think sort of started out during the pandemic and they’ve really burgeoned since then,” she said.

“Inflation has exacerbated a lot of the challenges that families are facing, cost of rent, cost of cost of living,” Bernardi said.

“When COVID happened, and they had the eviction moratorium, that lasted almost two years. So people just stopped paying their rent,” Beaudette added.

“A lot of smaller landlords had to sell their buildings. They weren’t making anything. and so when the eviction moratorium finally lifted, and there was this massive push and people were being evicted, folks who were able to still have their properties, raised the rent significantly, because they had to make up for what they lost. They had to make up for damages that might have been in the unit. and again, with the lack of housing that we have and the deficit that we have, it was significant.”

APPROACHES

The strategy to curb the recent rising trend in homelessness in Clinton County will take a collaborative effort between agencies, Peters said.

Already, a steering committee on homelessness has been formed between many local organizations, including ETC, the United Way, NAMI, JCEO, public housing authority and BHSN (Behavioral Health Services North).

Continuing to ask for funding is part of that strategy, Peters said.

“We need more eviction prevention funds. We need a higher shelter allowance. That’s not something that’s going to change locally, but we do need a shelter allowance — that has not changed in 12 years. and we all know in the past four years ... the cost of housing has increased exponentially,” she said.

“We need any funding to provide support to individuals in support of housing and other alternative housing arrangements. The next thing we need is to strengthen partnerships. We recently had a homeless forum to try to connect and strengthen partnerships, and that’s very important because this is not done by one agency: ETC can’t do it alone; the Department of Social Services can’t do it alone; the county can’t do it alone; the town can’t do it alone. We have to be in this together and have a vision to change our community.”

Peters said it’s important for the public to know the majority of the homeless population are from here.

“Last year when we looked at our PIT count, the population was up in SMI, which is seriously mentally ill individuals, SUD, substance use disordered individuals, and unaccompanied youth. I believe we will see the same population today, and only in higher numbers,” she said.

“But what people should know is that these people are from 129 zip codes. These are our residents. These are not a migrant population. The migrant population has not made a significant increase in our unsheltered or sheltered homeless population.”