



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

December 13, 2005

To: Honorable Mayor and
Members of the City Council

From: *PK* Phil Kamlarz, City Manager

Submitted by: Stephen Barton, Director, Housing Department
Fred Medrano, Director, Health and Human Services Department

Subject: "Berkeley Drop-In Center" Status Update

INTRODUCTION

This report is written in response to conditions placed on funding for the Berkeley Drop-In Center (BDIC -- now doing business under its parent organization, the Alameda County Network of Mental Health Clients, or "The Network"). The City's FY2006 budget included a 10 percent funding reduction for The Network, though the funding was restored mid-year. Specifically the language in the resolution states: "Funding contingent on the Center meeting all goals and obligations previously set by Council and staff." City staff visited the site on November 8, 2005 to assess the Network's compliance with the funding conditions. Staff found the Network complied with the City requirements by improving neighborhood relations, delivering services outlined in the contract, and raising funds for the Network to hire additional staff. Program efforts, however, are limited to basic services including information and referral and advocacy support for participants. Even with these changes, the Center is not providing more intensive case management support for clients.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Network's mission is to fulfill an essential need for service in South Berkeley: providing self-help mental health services to people with mental disabilities. Improving Network services is critical, not only to respond to complaints from the surrounding community, but to ensure that those served are receiving appropriate services. The addition of approximately \$40,000 in funding/staffing shifted from another Network member organization, the Oakland Independent Support Center (OISC), could add to services delivered currently. The Network engaged a part-time general services support staff member and is hoping to hire a full-time Substance Abuse counselor soon. Community meetings convened in 2005 have resulted in the creation of a Neighborhood Advisory Committee, in compliance with BDIC's Use Permit, and a grievance procedure to address community complaints.

BACKGROUND

City Council first imposed restrictions on the Berkeley Drop-In Center's (BDIC) funding in June 2003, requiring the agency to make "structural and programmatic reforms" and urging closer

cooperation with the City’s Mental Health Division. BDIC merged under the umbrella of its parent organization, the Alameda County Network of Mental Health Clients (The Network), and Mental Health Division staff has provided technical assistance and now has one psychiatric social worker outstationed at the Drop-in Center. In June 2004, City Council directed that the City’s contract with BDIC (now a contract with the Network) be moved to the Mental Health Division for better oversight. Both the Mental Health Division and the Housing Department have been jointly overseeing the contract this fiscal year.

Neighbors complained in 2004 about BDIC and problematic behavior in the neighborhood to City Council and staff. Staff agreed that some of the complaints were directly related to BDIC and others were attributable to other neighborhood problems. The Network responded to the complaints, with the help of City staff, by calling together regular community meetings; and, in the spring of 2005 a Neighborhood Advisory Committee was formed. It has created a neighborhood grievance process and will continue to meet on a quarterly basis.

Housing Department staff visited the site on November 8, 2005 to assess performance related to the Network’s contract. Housing Department and Mental Health Division staff agreed that particular emphasis during this monitoring visit should be placed on 1) the role of the Network’s Executive Director in overseeing the programmatic work of BDIC, providing supervision to staff and strategic planning; 2) efforts aimed at fundraising for additional resources for BDIC to improve program quality; and 3) compliance with the goals as stipulated in the contract. Housing Department staff interviewed the Executive Director, Program Supervisor and two other staff members and reviewed documentation of services provided. Conclusions based on the visit are: 1) The Executive Director has met regularly with the Program Supervisor to discuss the Neighborhood Advisory Board, fundraising, new staffing and program delivery; 2) \$40,000 in Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services funds were shifted from the Oakland Independent Support Center to BDIC to fund a half-time advocacy staff person and to create a new full-time substance abuse counselor. The substance abuse counselor position will be filled soon; and 3) staff reviewed documentation to confirm that BDIC is fulfilling the contract requirements in providing basic respite, information and referral, mail services, housing advocacy and support, HIV/AIDS testing, psychologist visits, and other support groups. Overall, the Executive Director is making an effort to provide some programmatic oversight and to support the expansion of services at the Center with the hiring of an additional 1.5 FTEs. The Executive Director also plans on looking for funding for a Program Director to provide program oversight over all of the Network’s member organizations, including the Berkeley Drop-In Center.

The BDIC provides front-line, no-barrier information and referral and other support services for the homeless mentally ill in South Berkeley. The City’s goal, however, continues to be improving the quality of case management services that help homeless clients stabilize and access permanent housing and remain housed. BDIC’s client support may not be intensive enough to help homeless clients access housing and remain housed. The Network has also stated that it should be viewed as an alternative mental health provider rather than a homeless program. Shifting its focus from housing services to mental health services is no guarantee that the low

performance issues will be resolved, since the City’s mental health services also emphasize the importance of intensive case management to help people overcome their difficulties in coping and living independently, with a strong focus on housing for homeless mentally ill clients.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

The Network’s contract will be shifted to the City’s Mental Health Division this fiscal year. Future funding will be contingent upon the Mental Health Division’s assessment of their peer-support services to the mentally ill population in South Berkeley.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

To be determined.

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