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Region's battle against homelessness 'very effective'

LYNN - A year ago, Lt. Governor Tim Murray came to Lynn to listen to the newly formed North Shore Housing Action Group's plans for using state and federal funds to combat homelessness in the region. He returned Sunday night and got an update that had to please him.

Murray took time out of a campaign swing through Lynn to attend a meeting at the Lynn Housing Authority & Neighborhood Development (LHAND), at which representatives of the North Shore Housing Action Group (NSHAG), LHAND, North Shore Community Action Programs (NSCAP) and other partner agencies discussed the gains that have been achieved in the last 12 months.

NSHAG is one of 10 pilot regional networks created last year by the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH). The idea was to coordinate and combine resources in order to provide emergency housing for the homeless population and help prevent others from becoming homeless.

The LHAND and NSCAP were the co-conveners of NSHAG, with LHAND serving as fiscal agent for the regional network.

NSHAG, which serves Lynn and two dozen other communities, received \$686,448 in state funding from the ICHH to be used over an 18-month period ending in September. In the first year, NSHAG has:

- served 1,908 people in 776 households, including 777 children
- provided rapid re-housing for 97 households
- prevented 679 households from becoming homeless
- saved the state \$900,000 in shelter costs

LHAND Director of Planning and Development Norm Cole said there has been a significant impact in Lynn, thanks in part to the city receiving \$1 million in federal stimulus funding to fight homelessness under the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP).

Cole said LHAND has spent \$200,000 thus far, with 57 percent of the money used to provide rapid re-housing for the homeless and those living in shelters and motels and 43 percent to prevent people from becoming homeless.

"The regional approach is working," Cole said. "The two-pronged approach of not only providing housing for those who are homeless, but also keeping others from becoming homeless has been very effective thus far. We are fortunate that Lt. Gov. Murray and Gov. (Deval) Patrick have made this issue one of the priorities of their administration."

In addition to Murray, Elizabeth Curtis, executive director of the ICHH, and Rep. Steven Walsh, chair of NSHAG's Leadership Council, attended Sunday's meeting, along with Lynn's Director of Veterans Services, Michael Sweeney, representing the city, and LHAND Executive Director Charles Gaeta.

"This initiative illustrates that agencies throughout the North Shore can come together and effectively coordinate resources and services for the region," said Gaeta. "We are pleased to be a part of this experience and look forward to strengthening our relationships in the future."

Also participating in the discussion were a number of agencies representing NSHAG and the Lynn PACT (People Acting as a Collaborative Team). LHAND, in conjunction with Lynn PACT, supports more than 250 units of supportive housing to homeless individuals and families in Lynn as well as an array of supportive services.

After the discussion, Murray toured the Lynn YMCA, where 10 of the 38 recently constructed Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units are earmarked for homeless individuals with disabilities. Cole said Murray was interested in seeing how

the city was focusing its efforts to serve this population.

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