Heading Home MN Funders Collaborative

Member Briefing: 2020 Legislative Session Update

Thursday, June 4, 2020 – 9:30 – 10:30 am

An update on 2020 legislative session, upcoming special session, with guest speakers:

* Libby Murphy, Deputy Policy Director, Minnesota Housing Partnership
* Michael Dahl, Public Policy Director, HOMELine
* Rhonda Otteson, Executive Director, MN Coalition for the Homeless
* Ryan Baumtrog, Assistant Commissioner Policy and Development, Minnesota Housing

**Libby Murphy, Deputy Policy Director, Minnesota Housing Partnership**

At the beginning of the 2020 session, there was momentum aligning around housing and bonding and budget projections were strong. Homes for All made a [historic bonding request](https://homesforallmn.org/images//Docs/2020/2020_Bonding_one-pager.pdf) to Walz Administration.

Then, COVID-19 caused major disruption. The Coalition continued to advocate for bonding but recognized a need to pivot to housing assistance, eviction and foreclosure moratoriums, and emergency shelter. The [early ask in March was for $100 M in housing assistance](http://mhponline.org/images/COVID19/FinalWalzCOVID19.pdf), which, after delays due to: debate over executive and legislative authorities, evolving budget projections, and difficulty understanding needs after Federal response, was not funded at the end of session.

There was an expectation to end the session with a bonding bill, but in the final days of session it seemed less likely. Senate Republicans introduced a $998 M bonding bill that did not include funding for housing infrastructure, which doesn’t require a super majority and per republicans, would travel separately. The bill introduced included policy provisions opposed by cities and labor, and so there was no deal.

Special Session: After the murder of George Floyd, House and Senate DFL will be supporting broad police reform, with the Senate GOP not necessarily on board. As a result, will take much longer to see resolution around housing. Bonding will be dependent on a tax bill per GOP.

Housing related, the focus will need to be to be on evictions and housing assistance. With UI support and eviction moratoriums scheduled to expire, July is the “cliff” for a lot of folks. Bonding is critically important; there have been an unprecedented number of pre-applications coming into Minnesota Housing. The development community planned for the $216M bonding from Walz Admin, and if no bonding bill, projects being planned will stall.

**Michael Dahl, Public Policy Director, HOMELine**

HomeLine is a tenant advocacy organization which runs a legal hotline providing free legal advice for tenants. HOMELine also engages in organizing, advocacy, and education for tenants.

HOMELine’s pre-COVID ambitions for legislative agenda included: 15-day eviction notice (Michael noted that Minnesota is far behind on this issue compared to other states); eviction expungement reform (which had been included in a package policy bill passed on party lines); heat and repairs; lease fairness issues (ex. Right to privacy, right to break lease due to infirmity). There was a challenge with meeting with leadership in the senate on these items: lack of interest, and committee chair’s particular view on landlords/importance of homeownership.

With COVID, everything paused, and unable to get issues addressed. So, pushing for all publicly subsidized housing to be covered by the same system: Under the Federal CARES Act, there is an eviction moratorium in effect until July 25 with a 30-day grace period during which a tenant can choose to pay or quit the lease without having an eviction on record. The eviction moratorium in Minnesota ([Exec Order 20-14](https://mn.gov/governor/assets/EO%2020-14%20Filed_tcm1055-424508.pdf)) is part of the peacetime emergency which must be renewed every 30 days, currently set to expire June 12, is causing great uncertainty for tenants. HOMELine is now spending average 40 minutes per COVID related call versus average 15 minutes per call normally.

The future of these issues will depend on elections, committee makeup and chairship. Next year the legislature will have less funding but can work on policy items to alleviate pressure on tenants.

**Rhonda Otteson, Executive Director, MN Coalition for the Homeless**

MCH works in a nonpartisan way with 100 member organizations throughout the state. Its [2020 agenda](https://www.mnhomelesscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020MCH_Leg-Agenda-2.pdf) was informed by tours and listening sessions with member organizations and shelter residents.

COVID required a pivot: [COVID Response Legislation](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DqvKly0LgiNE8tZPS0mEnJsTBMKtQrBQMMlVgqRuWfA/edit) included a huge infusion to ESP, half spent already, which shows both the great need and how underfunded ESP is in general. Funding included for housing supports program for military veterans, food support, and tribal nations grants.

Reiterated how important *preventing* homelessness is. With shelters over capacity already, preventing another wave of people becoming homelessness is critical.

**Ryan Baumtrog, Assistant Commissioner Policy and Development, Minnesota Housing**

Minnesota Housing is thinking aggressively about what it needs from upcoming special session and is not waiting for the legislation to think about how Emergency Housing Assistance (EHA) can be simple to access, just and equitable in how it is delivered. The agency had a proposal regarding expungements which was fairly in sync with HOMELine.

**Questions**

Question to Minnesota Housing: working on something specific related to displacement as a result of civil unrest? No, civil unrest simply amplified existing issues.

Question to HOMELine: logistics of extending the eviction moratorium. Collecting back rent will go through a court process, which is why HOMELine is advocating for one system for all rental units in the state, that follows the same timeline of the CARES Act.

Question regarding latest thinking on the overall size of the budget. The State has a deficit of $2.4 B. New funding requests are targeting Federal coronavirus relief funds, and not the general State fund. We will start to see budget reductions and agendas starting to take defensive positions to protect critical needs.