

WESTERN TIDEWATER COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD

MINUTES

March 18, 2025

The regularly scheduled bi-monthly meeting of Western Tidewater Community Services Board was called to order March 18, 2025, at 9:44 a.m. Attendance is recorded below:

PRESENT

Cindy Edwards, Board Chair

Alysia Pack

Margaret Ann Smith

Rachel Lewis (Emeritus)

Vicki Wiggins-Pittman (Emeritus)

ABSENT

Steven Blunt

Lula Holland, Vice Chair

Randy Keaton

Audrey Lee

LaRhonda Mabry

Sarah Rexrode

Angela Vick

Melvin Wofford

STAFF

Brandon Rodgers, Executive Director

Ross Greene, Board Attorney

Damara Beckett

Carolyn Blackmon

Debbie Dashiell

David Hopkins

Brittany Johnson

Andrew Jurewicz

Latril Mariano

Lara Matthews

Michelle Moore

Natalia Tague

Sara Thuecks

Natalia Tague

Vonda Warren-Lilly

GUESTS

No guests were present.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

MINUTES

Ms. Edwards pointed out there is no quorum today therefore the minutes of the February 4, 2025, meeting cannot be approved. No one present noted any corrections.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Edwards welcomed everyone to the bi-monthly meeting of the Western Tidewater Community Services Board and invited Executive Director Brandon Rodgers to present the business agenda and Executive Director's Report.

BUSINESS AGENDA

Mr. Rodgers began by sharing a publication by Mr. Lou Ward, Jr., Vice Mayor of the City of Suffolk. Mr. Ward has been helping WTCSB in Suffolk and is a champion of the agency's mental health work. He and Mr. Rodgers have had several good conversations. He has personal experience with family. Mr. Ward shared WTCSB's Town Hall flyer with the city and Mr. Rodgers wanted to share Mr. Ward's publication with the Board. Mr. Ward has asked WTCSB to campaign as if running for President to help increase awareness. Most town hall attendees know of the agency, but are not aware of all the programs and services offered. Clinical Directors did a great job of walking through those services; and it was great for the community to see. Mr. Rodgers was walking through a STEP VA expansion grant yesterday and expects that each clinic will receive funding to hire a community stakeholder or community engagement person. That was extra money that WTCSB went after.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

OLD BUSINESS

Compensation Study

Mr. Rodgers provided an update on the compensation study. The RFP has been posted on eVA (Virginia's online electronic procurement system). Once proposals come in, they will be reviewed, and a recommendation will be brought before the Board. Mr. Rodgers feels this comes at a good time as it will be interesting to see if all the raises, reclassifications, bonuses, and other incentives have balanced out agency salaries at all. It's a market that is moving so fast right now, that it's hard to keep up. It will be good to have a base study.

NEW BUSINESS

Agency Snapshots

WTCSB currently has 775 full-time, part-time, hourly, temps and interns employees. There are 120 vacant positions, and 55 new employees have come on board. The question was asked why the 120 vacant positions remain steady. This is because the number of positions continues to increase as the year progresses. As funding comes in, positions are increased. For instance, the new positions for each clinic previously discussed are new positions. Forty-one (41) individuals separated from employment for a variety of reasons as shown on the graph in the handout.

The current time to onboard was 13 days for outpatient counseling, 10 days for mental health case management, and 23 days for medication management. The snow days caused the numbers to creep up a bit. Mr. Rodgers noted that Latril and Damara continue to work hard on psychiatric coverage, especially for children. Mr. Rodgers said this trend is true everywhere. He recently spoke to CHKD, and other providers and children are waiting six months or more to be seen.

Summary of Variances – Revenue/Expense – Financial Review

The agency is at a \$1.3 million positive variance over budget. Revenue variances are a positive \$107,799 and expense variances are a positive \$1,199,164. This is attributed to an increase both in fee revenues and expense gains. There was a positive variance in fee revenue of \$809,000 and a positive variance in personnel costs of \$1.6 million. Estimated revenues, including restricted funds year to date, are \$40 million. That number can sometimes be deceiving. For context Mr. Rodgers explained that sometimes in that revenue number, restricted dollars dedicated for a project are included. For instance, the new youth and adult CTHs (Crisis Therapeutic Homes) revenues are in, but the expenses haven't hit yet, so these instances give the impression of positive revenue.

Crisis Therapeutic Home Property

Mr. Rodgers announced that a suitable property has been identified for the new Crisis Therapeutic Homes. Located in Isle of Wight County, the property is off Yellowhammer Road, near WTCSB's Neighbour's Place ID group home. The purchase price is \$200,000. The property will be subdivided and rezoned for the construction of two homes. An engineering firm will help with the presentation to the county. The project manager is working on the architectural design. It is a 30-acre property. There are no trees on the road frontage so part of the plan will be to create a natural barrier in addition to fencing. This will be a much better situation than the current home in Hampton. Mr. Rodgers noted the property is close to his residence if there is an issue he needs to respond to.

Legislative Updates

The Legislature is in the second year of the Biennium which is generally the thinner budget. Mr. Rodgers reported that as of right now, the budget includes \$23 million for CSBs for the following:

- The full \$1.5 million request for funds to support outpatient restoration to competency

- \$8.1 million of the \$17 million request for substance use disorder (SUD) services
- The full \$8.7 million for onboarding Support Coordinators for ID Waiver slots
- \$4.8 of the \$18 million requested to support Marcus Alert implementation

Medicaid Expansion Monitoring

Mr. Rodgers stated this is his biggest concern. What happens at the Federal level will affect WTCSB at the state level. When the General Assembly passed the statewide Medicaid expansion in 2018, it included trigger language that automatically terminates the program if federal funding falls below 90%. The House budget passed on February 25 included \$800 billion in cuts to healthcare spending that ultimately could result in this automatic termination. As many as 600,000 to 700,000 thousand Virginians could be impacted. WTCSB will be conservative with budget planning going into this fiscal year cycle knowing that risk is there.

Strategic Plan Update

To help the agency assess the services currently provided, WTCSB held five town halls – one in each locality and two in Suffolk. Feedback was solicited and was very consistent. Mr. Rodgers pointed out four top suggestions:

- Engage children and families where they are: school, church, athletic events, etc.
- Homelessness and support for those who are homeless
- Community engagement, better marketing, and better ways to advertise the services we have available
- Drop-in support groups (virtual and in person)

Regarding homelessness, Mr. Rodgers reported a presentation will be provided later in the meeting on WTCSB's Permanent Supportive Housing program. Staff are in touch with the local homeless shelters. Deputy City Manager Azeez Felder has been good at keeping WTCSB in the loop.

Broad, working goals based on internal and external feedback and the current working environment will be reviewed and supported by objectives over the next two months before presenting them for review by the board. These goals include:

1. Broaden community education and awareness efforts to increase public knowledge of available services, support, and opportunities to partner to improve community behavioral health and developmental services.
2. Develop relationships with all local public and private schools to increase prevention and treatment services for children and families.
3. Create and strengthen workforce development opportunities with local high schools, colleges, and universities and expand internal clinical development.
4. Increase diversion from acute psychiatric units and incarceration by enhancing partnerships with stakeholders and development of community-based supports including residential crisis stabilization unit beds.
5. Diversify fee revenue portfolio by expanding service offerings to be reimbursed through commercial insurance and negotiating contracts with payors for enhanced rates.

6. Expand employee benefits by expanding service offerings to be reimbursed through commercial insurance and negotiating contracts with payors for enhanced rates.

Proposed Benefits

Mr. Rodgers has been working with Lara regarding benefits. Each year when health insurance premiums are presented – they usually rise. This year, the agency did not have an Anthem increase. Sentara's plan, however, saw a 21% increase. Some things Mr. Rodgers would like to pursue over the next year include looking at a higher deductible plan with offsets from health savings accounts and similar things. This essentially minimizes the burden of the high-deductible plan by offsetting that with some Health Service Account (HSA) dollars that the agency would contribute on behalf of its employees. Lara will do some strategic work and leverage whatever we need from finance and business development.

Mr. Rodgers asked Lara to present on things that the agency proposes to do this year. Lara began by sharing that the agency has started looking at some ways to improve not only employee health and wellness but focus on retention efforts as well. Staff brainstormed with other CSBs to see what they were doing. Two benefits are proposed to offer this fiscal year during open enrollment. Of course, investing in employees is important for retention and could also lower insurance liability as well. Investing in employees can help increase productivity, reduce stress, boost morale, lower absenteeism, and eventually lower health care costs as well.

The agency proposes offering YMCA memberships to employees. Several other Boards offer this. This will allow staff to increase physical activity and improve overall health which could drive down healthcare costs. The corporate membership comes with education opportunities (nutritional information, financial education workshops, etc.) and provide social connection. Members also enjoy discounts on childcare and swimming lessons. The cost to the agency would be \$516 per year per employee. To utilize this benefit, the employee must utilize the Y four times per month for the agency to continue paying for their membership. The Y provides monthly usage reports. If every employee joins, the maximum cost to the agency would be \$283,000. Lara estimates (and hopes) at least 50% will join, which would bring the cost down to \$141,500 annually. This would keep the agency from carrying dead weight of employees who join, but don't utilize the membership. They could re-engage, but the membership will be dropped if not used. There would be no cost for employee-only. A spouse or child could be added for \$15/month and a whole family would be \$30/month.

Next, the agency realizes that vacations are important. A lot of people don't, for various reasons, feel they have the money to fund a vacation. Taking a vacation benefits both the employees and the agency. It reduces stress, increases productivity, and creates a better work-life balance which improves mental health. A vacation can boost creativity and decrease the risk of burnout, ultimately leading to higher job satisfaction which, hopefully, results in employee retention. This benefit would allow an employee to cash out a portion of their leave, get paid for it, and then actually go on vacation. Even if they choose not to use this money for a vacation, being able to have access to additional money could provide mental stress relief. This money could pay for car

repairs, unexpected home expenses or other needs. Lara looked at four other Boards already providing this benefit and merged the policies to accommodate WTCSB's structure and policies.

This would be available once per year to employees who have been with the agency for at least five years' continuous service. Pay would be the current pay rate of the employee. The employee would have to maintain a minimum leave balance of 100 hours for future use. Hours permitted to be cashed out would be based on years of service. Less than 10 years would equal 40 hours, 10 to 15 years would equal 60 hours, 15 to 20 years would equal 80 hours and over 20 years would equal 100 hours.

The key benefit for the agency is improved cash flow management and allows for better workforce planning. This can also reduce liability by not having to carry over a large leave balance. Right now, an employee may accrue a maximum of 320 hours. Should they resign, retire, or go out on disability, the agency would have to pay out all that leave. If the agency pays out incrementally, it will reduce that liability on the books. Also, it is paid at the individual's current salary rate versus what they might be making if they retire in five years. Five years is when an employee is vested, and it is an incentive to stick around for that amount of time. The agency currently has a total of 61,000 hours on the books or almost \$2 million dollars. This will not be shared with employees until we determine if the board is supportive. The agency will drop all sponsorship of the Calm app as utilization is very low. Andrew verified that these two benefits are affordable.

Permanent Supportive Housing Update

Mr. Rodgers introduced one of the agency's newest Directors, Michelle Moore, to present on Permanent Supportive Housing. Michelle also oversees Assertive Community Treatment (ACT). ACT and PSH work closely together as individuals in PSH often receive ACT services. Additionally, Michelle oversees Transportation and some ID services.

Michelle began by explaining that Permanent Supportive Housing offers voluntary, flexible supports to help individuals who have a serious mental illness and are experiencing chronic homelessness in the cities of Franklin and Suffolk, and the counties of Isle of Wight and Southampton. The goal is to assist individuals with choosing and obtaining housing that is sufficient, safe, affordable, and integrated into the community. PSH uses the HUD definition of chronic homelessness, which states a person must have a disability and must live in a place not meant for human habitation or in an emergency shelter or safe haven for at least 12 months, consecutively, or experience these circumstances for 12 months over a two-year period.

The PSH team consists of two case managers who assist with linking, monitoring, and coordinating services. A new outreach case manager assists with community education and canvasses for potential program participants. There are two peers who support the case managers; and, there is a housing specialist who also acts as the program manager. PSH goals include providing stable housing, assisting individuals with community resources, budgeting, and daily living skills. Participation in the Assertive Community Treatment is encouraged but is not mandatory. PSH participants must be over the age of 18 and be diagnosed with a serious mental illness. Currently,

only single-family houses are available. PSH; also, works with individuals who are stepping down from the State Hospital or released from prison.

Referrals are received from Tidewater Cove Assisted Living Facility, prisons/jails, and the community. Community referrals could come from community partners such as the crisis receiving center or the same day access team or continuum of care (COC). Another key access point is through the housing crisis hotline. Individuals who call the hotline are connected to available resources which could include permanent supportive housing.

The current PSH census is 40 and there are six pending referrals. PSH offers a 3-bedroom transitional home that serves as a bridge for individuals awaiting permit housing placement. Sometimes individuals will obtain a residence but do not feel it is a good fit and will ask to move. The transition house is used for these situations also. PSH currently collaborates with 13 community partners including apartment complexes and private landlords. PSH also works with two hotels that house clients while they are awaiting permanent residency. Michelle shared pictures of some of the locations. The two hotels are both in Suffolk – The Nest and Brentwood Suites.

Michelle announced that a grant has been received for pre-development funding of supportive housing in the WTCSB region. The project aims to develop 75 rental units with 8 specifically for PSH. Of the 75 units, 25 will be for low-income individuals. Michelle is hopeful that some of those units can be used for traditional case management individuals. The pre-development phase was last year. The construction is supposed to be taking place this year, and hopefully individuals can be placed in 2026. The 25 low-income units will house Section 8 individuals and will have reduced rent. The other 50 units are for the general community. Michelle has a site visit scheduled for March 31.

Hillpoint Trace is comprised of a collective of investors. PSH is life-changing for individuals who stay in unsafe places, couch surf, and are not able to access needed medications. WTCSB worked closely with DBHDS and held weekly meetings regarding slot assignments. Andrew figured out the finances. DBHDS has commented that the WTCSB team understands PSH and does a great job supporting the individuals that are associated with it. These apartments will be nice and will allow participants to create a community. PSH workers are aware of each individual's routine. Some days they may not feel like going to work or getting up to go to the doctors and the team is there to encourage them. There were a few problems along the way. There was a house lost to a fire. There have been individuals who had or were suspected of having weapons and things like that, but overall, this program has been very successful.

Mr. Rodgers stated he is very proud of this program and commended all current and former staff who have been involved and made this program successful.

As there were no further questions, Mr. Rodgers concluded his report.

ADJOURNMENT

As there was no further business, Ms. Edwards thanked everyone for their attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 11:02 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,