



# CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

OFFICE OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

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May 2, 2019

The Honorable Darrell Clarke  
City Council President  
City Hall, Room 490  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Dear Council President Clarke:

This letter is in response to the question raised at the April 9, 2019 hearing before the Committee of the Whole on the Fiscal Year 2020 proposed budget for the Department of Public Property. At this hearing, the following question was asked:

**Council President Clarke:** *Provide a plan of action of how to address challenges surrounding the Hub of Hope.*

First, thank you for your support of the Hub of Hope operated by Project HOME. The Hub has been tremendously successful in engaging people experiencing homelessness, especially chronic homelessness in the Concourse area:

- It provides an indoor space where individuals can access needed services during the day such as physical and behavioral health care, temporary housing, laundry, meals, and showers.
- In its first year of operation, it saw more than 80,000 visits. In the first quarter of 2019, the Hub saw an average of 1,992 visitors each week.
- As one of several strategies there has been a decline of the number of people in the Concourse. Since 2016, this number has gone from about 350 to, now, about 90.

While this is still too many, it shows real progress. A copy of The Hub of Hope's most recent quarterly report is attached (Attachment 1).

Further, the working relationship between SEPTA, police, homeless outreach, and Hub of Hope staff has enabled a comprehensive approach to address the issues that continue to challenge us as a city:

- In response to feedback from Municipal Service Building tenants, local business owners, and the public, six City departments joined Project HOME, SEPTA, and District Council 47 (DC 47) to address concerns starting in November 2018. Specifically, issues involving loitering, smoking, using or selling drugs, and other undesirable activities near the Hub of Hope garnered our attention.

- Since then, the Office of Homeless Services (OHS) has convened bi-monthly meetings of this group of partners to develop strategies based on feedback and to stay vigilant and aware of current conditions outside of the Hub of Hope.

Some solutions we've come to a consensus on include increasing the presence of law enforcement and homeless outreach teams, providing public education and engagement, making infrastructure and updating signs, identifying and addressing problematic behaviors exhibited by some individuals.

As a result:

- SEPTA Transit Police are staffing Suburban Station during odd hours between 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and are signing the log book in the Hub of Hope.
- The Philadelphia Police Department has three shifts of officers assigned to patrol the Hub of Hope and the Municipal Services Building (MSB) every day during even hours.
- Scotland Yard security is now positioned at the desk on the lower level of the MSB during business hours.
- Law enforcement is particularly focused on patrolling the MSB staircase at Broad Street and JFK Boulevard from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m.
- DC 47 has worked with members to educate them that reporting incidents to police is vital to get a clear picture of what's going on as well as address those issues.

SEPTA Transit Police have also recently introduced innovative measures to address the specific population they are seeing in the area outside of the Hub of Hope:

- In partnership with the City, they recently hired a mental health specialist to accompany a Crisis Intervention-trained officer in the concourse to encourage voluntary behavioral health treatments and to proceed with involuntary hospitalization when the individual presents a threat to themselves or others;
- In March 2019, the mental health specialist made 89 unduplicated outreach contacts and placed 15 people in treatment or shelter;
- They enacted a new policy that bans repeat offenders from SEPTA property if they have been issued a ticket for a summary offense four times. If they return, they are arrested for a misdemeanor and often channeled to a diversionary social service program. As a result, over the past three months, six people have been banned from SEPTA property and three people been arrested and channeled to diversionary services;
- They introduced the Transit Watch mobile app that enables people to submit information in real time to SEPTA Transit Police about any suspicious activity they observe on SEPTA property, whether that's in the Concourse or on the subway or other modes of transit.

Notably, between the strategy meeting in February 2019 and the one in April 2019, the DC47 Safety Officer reported that complaints have dropped significantly.

To supplement law enforcement's efforts, the City has also hired bathroom monitors to staff the public bathrooms in the lower level of MSB. This has greatly decreased the number of incidents

occurring in the lower level of MSB. The Department of Public Property has also informed their security guards to ask individuals that are loitering in MSB to move along or to call Hub of Hope staff or Homeless Outreach Services for assistance.

Homeless Outreach Services has also increased its presence in the concourse to engage with homeless individuals and offer shelter placements and transportation to shelters:

- Outreach currently has teams in the concourse and outside of the Hub of Hope every weekday in the morning and evening and provide nightly transportation from the concourse to shelters at 10 p.m. and 1 a.m. when the station closes;
- They have added a youth-focused team trained to engage young adults.

In the first quarter of 2019, Homeless Outreach Services made 1,750 contacts at the Hub of Hope and made 652 placements into housing services.

Project HOME staff has assisted with engaging additional homeless individuals in the concourse. In January of 2019, Project HOME opened the Hub of Hope on the weekends from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. in response to the need for a place for homeless and vulnerable individuals in the Concourse to go on the weekends.

Another important element of the plan is to educate a diverse group of stakeholders and invite their feedback on improving the safety and comfort of the area outside the Hub of Hope:

- OHS coordinated three training opportunities for staff at Suburban Station businesses and the MSB to inform them about resources for engaging with those that are homeless and who to call for support.
- Represented entities at the training included the Philadelphia Police Department, Project HOME, the Office of Risk Management, and SEPTA Transit Police.
- Trainers encouraged people to report incidents to police to assist with enforcement.
- The Office of Risk Management will be coordinating public safety training sessions for staff from MSB and Suburban Station businesses as well.

Infrastructure updates and additional signage have been added to the area outside of the Hub of Hope and in the area known as Sherwood Forest to discourage criminal and undesirable activities:

- SEPTA recently installed four “No Smoking” signs in Sherwood Forest.
- Importantly, SEPTA also narrowed the Sherwood Forest hallway to limit the space where people can congregate to increase the police’s ability to patrol.
- SEPTA replaced the outlet covers on all outlets in the hallway outside of the Hub of Hope and Sherwood Forest to reduce loitering caused by use of the outlets.
- Cameras have been installed.
- Cell phone and WIFI capacity were improved for communication purposes.

Cross-departmental efforts continue to be critical in addressing this issue. In February 2019, SEPTA Transit Police, Homeless Outreach Services, and Project HOME coordinated to compile

a SEPTA concourse persons of interest list with the names of 93 individuals and conducted analysis of the list to inform action.

The Department of Public Health will also be offering training sessions to front-line staff on how to engage directly with non-compliant individuals on smoke-free policies.

We continue to engage Suburban Station business owners in ongoing dialogue to improve all these efforts.

The City of Philadelphia, along with our partners at Project HOME, SEPTA, the merchants and DC 47, continue to build upon current strategies to ensure that the space outside of the Hub of Hope and Sherwood Forest is welcoming and safe for everyone who passes through it — whether they are on their way to work, home, visiting Philadelphia, or shopping.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact my office. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Abernathy', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Brian Abernathy  
Managing Director