The meeting was called to order at 12:05 p.m.

Facilities Chair Martin Honigberg explained that this meeting was a follow up to the Joint City/School Board meeting of Friday, November 21. The purpose of the meeting was to identify issues raised by the proposal to use Dewey School as a 100-night homeless shelter for families. Mr. Honigberg pointed out that the meeting was not a community forum to discuss the wisdom or the desire for a homeless shelter for families at Dewey School, as that will occur under the auspices of the city if the plan moves forward. He indicated that the Facilities Committee would not take any formal action at this meeting.

Mr. Honigberg asked those in the room to identify themselves:

**Dewey School neighbors and abutters**: Bob Murphy, Carole Sobelson, Susan Branch, Jeffrey Fetter, Robert and Susan Fielding, Judith Fillion, Brian Phelps, Mary Galatis, Ashton Welch, Bernadette Blake

**City**: Jim Bouley, Mayor; Jackie Whatmough, Concord Human Services; J. Allen Bennett, City Counselor Ward 6; Keith Nyhan, City Counselor Ward 7

**Shelter representatives and advocates**: Rev. Jean O’Bresky, Concord Cold Weather Shelter; Lorrie Dale, Salvation Army/McKenna House; Jean Tewksbury, Friends Emergency Housing; Fred Potter, Chairperson, Concord Christian Academy and Christian Ministries Life (CML) Administration

**Others**: Eric Williams, School Board member-elect; Liz Hager, President, United Way of Merrimack County

Mr. Honigberg identified a series of concerns and questions that have already been raised including whether a shelter can be situated in a school building and whether the Concord
School District charter allows the District to allow a homeless shelter to be operated in a school building. He noted that the District currently rents out its buildings and follows its Policy on Facilities Use to do so. Mr. Honigberg noted that a fiscal agent’s services will be needed; a legal entity responsible for running the shelter. He indicated that the District would expect to see an agreement or series of agreements in which a legal entity leases space from the Concord School District for the purpose of a shelter. He noted several additional issues that had been identified at the Joint City/School Board meeting on Friday:

1. the need for additional or new liability insurance
2. the cost of additional utilities
3. the short-term nature of the plan for this homeless shelter
4. possible additional security and lighting requirements

The following concerns and questions were raised by attendees at the meeting:

Jeff Fetter, neighbor, explained that Dewey School neighbors met this weekend for an informal brainstorming session to help facilitate today’s meeting. Mr. Fetter provided the attendees with two printed lists of questions and concerns. The first list was from Mr. Fetter and Ms. Stewart; the second list from the neighborhood meeting. Mr. Fetter expressed an overriding concern that this project would move forward rapidly without a lot of communication with the community. Mayor Bouley assured the neighborhood that this project would only go forward if the neighborhood is supportive.

Other concerns and questions raised by Mr. Fetter included:

1. Who will be in charge on a daily basis?
2. Will the staff and volunteers be sufficiently trained?
3. What assurance do the neighbors have that this is a short-term plan? What’s the plan for future use of the building? How solid are those plans?

Mr. Honigberg invited the professionals who currently run shelters in Concord to speak.

Jean Tewksbury, Program Director of Friends Emergency Housing, explained that the Friends Program shelter currently services families. A family includes anyone who lives under one roof (e.g. grandparent and child; boyfriend, girlfriend and child, etc). Ms. Tewksbury explained there is a strict screening program that families go through to be accepted into the Friends shelter and proposed that a similar screening program be conducted with families for the Dewey shelter. She further noted that the family shelter does not take domestic violence victims, and indicated that the Friends Program will not lead this shelter but will provide training to the staff and volunteers and provide the screening tool.
Lorrie Dale, Director of the McKenna House program, provided copies of state requirements and the tracking system used by the State. Ms. Dale also provided a letter from the director of Woodside School testifying to the lack of problems that they have experienced as a next-door neighbor of McKenna House.

Rev. Jeanne O’Bresky, director of the Concord Cold Weather Shelter held at the First Congregational Church, also indicated that neighbors have had no problems with its shelter. Rev. O’Bresky explained that a shelter at Dewey would enable her to refer families to Dewey School so that individuals who were not appropriate for the Dewey site could be housed at the First Congregational shelter.

Mr. Honigberg invited the city to speak about the current need for additional shelter space.

Jackie Whatmough, director of the city welfare office, spoke about the increasing numbers of individuals and families the city welfare office is seeing this fall. Mrs. Whatmough explained the current process of helping families find housing or pay rent to stay where they are. The last resort is to pay for hotel rooms if the city is unable to find apartments. She indicated that the city financially supports three shelters in Concord: the Friends Emergency Housing, McKenna House and the Domestic Violence shelter. Mrs. Whatmough explained the advantages of referring families to shelters where there are social services available, which are not available when the families stay at hotels. The hotel placement is the least preferred placement.

Concerns and questions were raised about whether the shelter would have to provide services to families who are not residents of Concord and where the children will go to school. School District Assistant Superintendent Rob Prohl explained the legal guidelines used to determine what is in the best interest of the child and the cost sharing that occurs between school districts for transportation and other costs.

In response to a question about the availability of showers, Rev. O’Bresky explained that the YMCA currently partners with the coalition to allow individuals to use the shower facilities at the YMCA in the evening and loan its bus to transport individuals when necessary.

Fred Potter of CML spoke to the availability of resources his organization can provide and that volunteers from Concord Christian School are available. Mr. Potter indicated his organization could cover costs for security and cleaning. He further indicated that his organization does not have the required social services expertise and that, if it were to be the business administrator, it would require a public audit.

Mr. Honigberg clarified that from the school district’s perspective, this is a one-year solution and spoke to the need for city and social service providers to plan for the longer term.
Rev. O’Bresky encouraged the group to think of this shelter as a Red Cross shelter that is opened when a flood leaves people homeless. The “flood” in the current situation is the economy. Rev. O’Bresky reported that they have not seen families coming from out of state. Many of the families are currently Concord residents.

There was discussion about the adequacy (or inadequacy) of current lighting at Dewey School.

School Board president Betty Hoadley raised concerns and questions about the costs involved in running a homeless shelter at Dewey School, including additional heating and other utility costs, the cost of administrative time, legal costs, etc. Under its Facilities Use Policy, the Board expects those who lease any district spaces to pay for all costs involved.

Mayor Bouley explained the prospect of a written memorandum of agreement among three parties: the school district, the city and the Concord Coalition to End Homelessness in Concord. This coalition is in the process of receiving its designation as a 501(c)(3) organization. Mayor Bouley indicated that neither the city nor the school district would be able to pay for this shelter. The costs of operating a shelter at Dewey School would need to be raised privately.

Another question was whether the school would meet all code requirements to serve as a shelter. School District Director of Facilities and Planning Matt Cashman reported that the Concord Fire Department has indicated the building would be acceptable as a shelter.

Mrs. Branch, an abutter, expressed concern that the neighbors had not been notified earlier about the prospect of Dewey School serving as a homeless shelter. Mayor Bouley explained the extensive process the city has been undertaking to identify a suitable building. The first step for Dewey School was to determine whether it met code requirements as a shelter.

Mrs. Branch offered a number of additional questions and concerns including the depth and length of training planned, the possibility of individuals smoking in the neighborhood, inadequate lighting, security, the possibility of individuals “hanging out” in the neighborhood even if they are not accepted into the shelter and the increased crime that might occur in the neighborhood. Mrs. Branch asked that questions and concerns raised today be addressed for the neighborhood group before a final decision is made. That assurance was given. Another neighbor, Mrs. Galatis, asked how long a family would stay in the shelter.

The representatives from the coalition explained the referral process, the plan for security patrols and the length of training. Rev. O’Bresky noted that families would have to go through city welfare or call the homeless hotline to be accepted at a shelter. If someone showed up intoxicated, he or she would be placed at the First Church shelter.
Carol Sobelson, a neighbor, urged the Board and city to hold another meeting in the evening at Dewey School to explain the logistics of operating a shelter there.

It was agreed that the district and the city will develop firm estimates of the costs of operating Dewey School as a shelter. Members of the Coalition will meet with Superintendent Rath and Mr. Cashman to tour the school and outline in more detail a proposal for this shelter. Once a more detailed proposal and budget is developed, the city will host a neighborhood meeting. The Board will not take any action regarding leasing the building until after that neighborhood meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.

Martin Honigberg, Committee Chair (Capital Facilities)
Chris Rath, Recorder