

THE PROFILE

Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless

Savannah, Georgia

June 2021

Background

The Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless (CSAH), under the direction of its board of directors, is in the process of searching for an executive director to head the agency. This person will occupy the position held by the current executive who intends to retire on or before the end of calendar year 2021. A subcommittee of the board (the Search Committee) has been established as the oversight group for managing the recruitment process. The firm of McMillan and Associate, a local consulting entity, has been hired to assist the CSAH Board and the Search Committee with this important endeavor.

Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless is a not-for-profit entity that receives funding from federal as well as local sources. CSAH began operations 1989 by legislative action of the General Assembly of Georgia. The organization is governed by a board of directors consisting of 9 to 15 people, many of whom are prominent residents of the community. CSAH is considered the lead local agency for coordinating the efforts in addressing homelessness in the greater Savannah area.

The current executive director is retiring after seven years in the position. During this period, the philanthropic efforts to create “Cove at Dundee,” the tiny house project was developed under this leadership. Plans include the production of 24 additional units to the project.

The success of the Authority under the current leadership has created an opportunity to enhance community-wide efforts to address homelessness with enhanced relationships with the area’s various agencies. In the last year, the Authority has expanded its relationship with the City of Savannah, Chatham County, Savannah Chamber and Visit Savannah; Savannah Economic Development Authority; Tourism Leadership Council; Downtown Business Association, Downtown Neighborhood Association, and the Savannah Waterfront Association contributing funding and support to address panhandling and coordination of efforts across the community.

The current director has volunteered to provide informational and technical assistance where requested for the successor.

Overview

This profile is an essential tool of the recruitment process. It establishes what the agency and its major stakeholders view as important qualities desired in the next person to lead the Homeless Authority. In addition, is intended to offer general information on the agency as well as the Savannah area. The profile presented here is not exhaustive but does attempt to establish a broad picture of the community, the agency, and the position.

CSAH asked the consultant to meet with various stakeholders for input. Those stakeholders included a wide range of individuals and groups with an interest in issues relating to homelessness in the greater Savannah area. The stakeholders included the staff, board members, service providers, business community, the homeless community, and representatives of governmental entities. The input of these stakeholders was taken into consideration in structuring this profile.

Two surveys were conducted: one with the staff and board of directors, and the other one among service providers and other stakeholders. Each of these initiatives provided cogent information that allowed for the development of this profile. (The results of both surveys are posted on CSAH's Web Site: www.homelessauthority.org.)

General Information about the Agency



The Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless (CSAH) is the main agency in the greater Savannah area leading and coordinating homelessness efforts. The agency, chartered by the state of Georgia, has been in operations since the late 1980s. CSAH also is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization committed to strategic approaches to addressing the challenges of homelessness... The agency's mission "... is to lead the effort to build and sustain community practices to eliminate homelessness."

CSAH is governed by a board of directors consisting mainly of residents residing in the local community. By charter, some of the members of the board represent state and local governmental entities. The board meets monthly, and periodically conducts strategic planning retreats. The current chair of the board has significant background in the nonprofit social service arena.

The agency employs 17 full time equivalents (FTEs). Before the onset of Covid-19, consideration was given to an initiative designed to address succession. That initiative was put on hold but may need to be resurrected in the future.

CSAH has a five-year strategic plan that has the buy-in of staff as well as the board of directors. This plan was developed in 2019 for the strategic period 2020-2025. It is an extensive and progressive document with 5 broad goals: Goal 1 – **The Crisis Response**; Goal 2 – **Housing Development**; Goal 3 – **Youth Homelessness**; Goal 4 – **Chatham County Homeless Camp System**; and Goal 5 – **Cross-System Integration and Redesign**. A message in the document states: "While driven by the board, these recommendations need key stakeholder participation to ensure success." View the Plan on the agency's Web Site.

The "Tiny House Project" was initiated by the Authority to provide housing for homeless veterans. There are 23 veterans living in Phase 1 of the project. The community includes a clubhouse and a tiny medical clinic. Phase 2 of the project will provide 24 additional units for homeless veterans. The Tiny House project has garnered community wide support and interest.

A fundraising campaign and philanthropists made the project a success, without government funds.

CSAH subcontracts with the City of Savannah to serve 54 households where the primary resident has an identified special need. Using the Housing First Model and a Harm Reduction emphasis, CSAH provides case management and referrals to supportive services. Additionally, this organization supplies rental assistance to residents living in units across the City of Savannah.

The Continuum of Care (CoC)

The headquarter office of Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless is located on Wheaton Street, in the building of Georgia Department of Family and Children Service (DFAC). The CSAH Board has been acting as the *de facto* board for the Chatham County Continuum of Care (CoC), a HUD program that leverages grants to other agencies in the community that total over \$3 million.

To establish greater neutrality among the other homeless service providers, CSAH is in the process carrying over its direct service functions to a new independent nonprofit, Chatham Doorways. This entity will operate several programs not funded through the CoC. These programs include the Tiny House Project, a street outreach program PATH, the housing program known as City 54, and a new housing development program referred to as Horizon Homes.

The Homeless Community

Chatham County is purported to have the second largest homeless population in the state of Georgia. The homeless population in the Savannah area is substantial and growing. The 2020 data on the unduplicated population is approximately 4,058 of which 610 were cauterized as chronically homeless. There are at least 39 unregulated homeless camps, not including other 1-2 persons sites located throughout the county. The local homeless population seems, anecdotally, to have increased during the Covid-19 environment.

Savannah's homeless community is viewed by some in a negative manner. Much of this is driven by a lack of understanding and stereotypical views of the homeless population. In addition, the increased number of pan handlers has added to the negative views.

In the area there are numerous provider service agencies, in one way or the other, that offer services to the affected population. Many of these agencies were in existence prior to the creation of CSAH. This is in addition to the many groups and organizations that provide ad hoc assistance.

The Position of Executive Director

This position is seen as key in the community and has become increasingly so as of late. The individual who will occupy this position is expected to take the responsibilities of many roles: leader, communicator, facilitator, strategic thinker, relationship builder, among others. The person must be prepared to have a short learning curve before becoming fully engaged in the duties of the position.

An executive director at CSAH will enter an environment that is seeking a new and innovative means of addressing the issue of homelessness. While there is awareness that much has been accomplished over the past years, there is a great deal of expectation as the agency transcends leadership.

The executive director will be expected to bridge and enhance the relationship with service providers. Many among this group feel unaligned with the Authority. Much of this is due to communication and lack of understanding of the role of CSAH.

Two survey instruments were utilized to solicit information from the local. One survey for the board and staff, the other with service providers and non-service provider stakeholders. The results of the survey revealed organizational competencies in the following areas: leadership, consensus builder, communicator; change adaptability; political savvy; strategic thinker, among others. Areas identified as challenging included building and enhancing relationship with service providers; navigating the political climate; educating the public; staff succession; housing for the homeless; clarifying the role of CSAH; and orchestrating uncoordinated community services.

Relationship Builder

Relationship building is a continuous role of the executive. In such, the executive is expected to lead an effort that maintains and enhances working relationships, particularly with the service providers.

Strong Leader

An executive, who can lead a strong and qualified staff, is necessary. One who can create and maintain employee diversity. Effectively communicate expectations and directions without micromanaging the process. A leader who is flexible and knows how to compromise when such is in the best interest of the agency and its mission.

Diplomat

The new executive will have the task of working with numerous independent municipalities to bring them into the process. This necessitates communicative as well as compelling techniques.

Willingness to Listen and Learn

Those with whom we spoke strongly feel the key to the success in this community is willingness and a desire to learn the culture and environment of the community. Most feel that this community is “different”, and a new executive must be able to navigate the environment to be successful. They readily point to other executives who have moved to community and attempted to function without getting this basic knowledge of Savannah’s history or culture.

Strategic Thinker and Leader

The new executive must be one who establishes, with board approval and buy-in, a strategic direction for the agency and the staff. This requires a person who can maintain focus on the agency’s current mission, while at the same time offering guidance for any change that will enhance the longevity of CSAH.

Note: Both surveys are available for review on CSAH’s Web Site: www.homelessauthority.org

General Information about Savannah



Savannah, often referred to as “the hostess city of the south”, has many attractive attributes that makes it a desirable place live and work. It enjoys a good reputation and often considered a destination spot by many around the world. It has a good climate and is located near two major interstates connections (I-95 and I-16).

The economy of Savannah is driven by the ports, the military, tourism, medical, manufacturing, and higher educational entities.

- Chatham County consists of seven independent municipalities in addition to Savannah: Pooler, Bloomingdale, Thunderbolt, Tybee, Garden City, Port Wentworth and Vernonburg. Major growth is taking place in the Pooler area.
- Savannah is the central city for two adjacent counties, Effingham, and Bryant. It is also a major hub for portions of South Carolina.

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- Georgia Ports Authority is a major contributor to the economic and employment base of the greater Savannah, Georgia community. The Savannah port is number 4 nationally and "...trails only New York as an East Coast container port ...". Activities at the port are expected to increase significantly due to a channel deepening project.
- Two major hospital systems provide healthcare for the region. One of the systems, Memorial Health University Medical Center, is a level one trauma center.
- At least five (5) institutions of higher learning serve the community: Georgia Southern University (Armstrong Campus), Savannah State University, Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), South University and Savannah Technical College.
- A great deal is happening in the greater Savannah area. The city has bustling downtown shopping corridor, known as Broughton Street. This newly redeveloped commercial strip is replete with fine stores, restaurants, and other commercial outlets.
- Savannah has numerous arts and musical festivals. The three-week Savannah Music Festival is nationally known for its talented attractions.
- Savannah is a strong destination location for tourists. It is purported to have about 13 million visitors annually.
- The River Street area is a well-known attraction for tourists as well as locals. The area has shops, restaurants, hotels, and entertainment.
- The western part of the county has and continuous to witness phenomenal growth. Much of this growth is in the Pooler, Port Wentworth, and Garden City sections of the county.
- Savannah is approximately a two-hour drive to Jacksonville, Florida as well as Charleston, South Carolina. Hilton Head Island, SC and the islands of Jekyll and St. Simon in Georgia are within a relative short driving distance.

