

# One community

Healthy • Safe • Housed



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# Executive summary

In March 2019, the City of Olympia launched a yearlong planning effort aimed at finding community agreement around how to best respond to the homeless crisis. At the time homelessness in Olympia appeared to be growing dramatically. In the summer of 2018, tents started to appear in Downtown parking lots, growing from 75 in August to over 300 by early October. In January of 2019, Thurston County's annual homeless census counted 394 unsheltered persons, up from 124 in 2017. Many of these individuals were sleeping in Olympia, in the woods, under bridges, in vehicles and on Downtown streets.

Concerns grew about the safety of the individuals, the impacts on the community and the environment. Community members were pleading with the City to take action, yet people saw the problem and solutions very differently.

In the summer of 2018, the City Council declared a public health emergency. Several emergency actions were taken, including opening a tiny house village and a safe camping site known as the Downtown mitigation site, helping fund an expansion at the local youth shelter and incentivizing faith community partners to host temporary emergency housing. At the same time, the City Council recognized a more planned and coordinated long-term response would be necessary in order to have a lasting and sustainable impact.

To engage the public, the City used a Participatory Leadership approach specifically designed for identifying community-based solutions to incredibly wicked and complex challenges. This approach involved creating a Community Work Group made up of 11 volunteers with different life experiences and perspectives. Their role was to deeply listen to the voices of the community to identify the strategic direction.

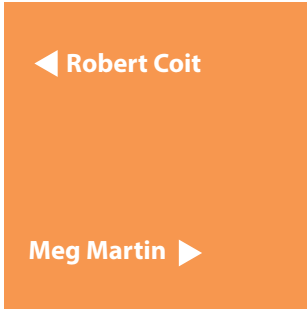
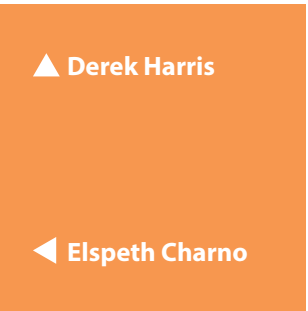
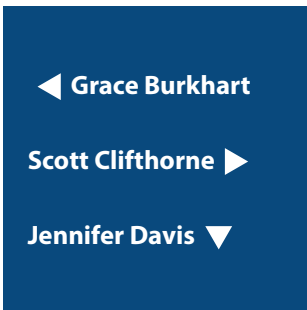
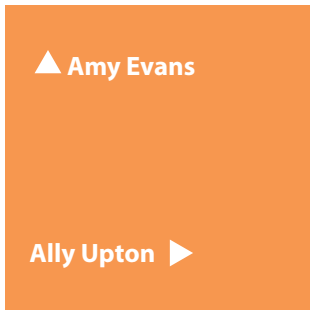
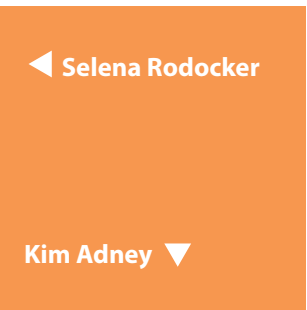
This process included hearing from over 1,200 people through 20 different community conversations and two online surveys. Community members engaged in important civic dialogue, face-to-face with one another and across significant differences. The Community Work Group heard from a wide and diverse cross-section of stakeholders, including people experiencing homelessness, neighborhood residents, faith leaders, business and property owners, Downtown visitors and employees, and people representing social services, emergency services, hospitals and school organizations. Despite what often seems like a polarizing topic, the process uncovered significant areas of agreement about what needs to be done.

**This plan includes strategies for responding to the immediate crisis, as well as long term prevention strategies; it aims to help people experiencing homelessness as well as the broader community**

**Effectively addressing homelessness requires strong and committed regional partnerships. This will be a dynamic undertaking as we measure our progress and learn and adapt our actions based on what works.**

**Not everyone will agree with every aspect of this plan. However, the Community Work Group determined this plan to reflect the voice of our community, and a balanced approach comprised of compassion and accountability, both so strongly expressed throughout the process.**

# Community Work Group



# Letter to the community

*Having a safe place to call home is fundamental to all families' and individuals' ability to thrive. Over the past year, we listened as hundreds of you, our fellow Olympians, shared your deep commitment to this goal, your ideas for how to make this vision a reality, and your fears about what can happen if we don't.*

*Throughout the development of this plan, we heard your stories. You shared stories of survival and strength, stories of giving and deep empathy and concern, and stories of mourning and loss. Our responsibility was to listen, and not to judge or choose winners and losers, but rather to distill your collective voices into a shared and balanced way forward for addressing homelessness and its impact on our community.*

*At its core, this plan is about more than homelessness. It is about how as a community we came together, often face-to-face and despite seemingly significant differences, to discover commonly held values and a shared commitment to maintaining the quality of life in Olympia we so deeply care about.*

*We recognize and honor the many impactful efforts by our community that have made, and continue to make, life-changing differences in the lives of individuals and families. Let us not lose our momentum, but build on our shared experience, and move swiftly to action. Public agencies at every level, residents, businesses, non-profits, philanthropic organizations, and others need to join in this critical work. We know it will not be easy; more difficult conversations will be needed. We know there will be significant challenges and setbacks.*

*And we know we need to continue to be better at intentionally seeking out the voices of marginalized members of our community. While disproportionately affected by homelessness, they are all too often underrepresented in planning and decision-making. There is more we can do to ensure that everyone feels welcome and respected, and has their voice heard.*

*This plan is not meant to sit on a shelf, but to be a living document to rally around; a call for bold, strategic, and innovative efforts. All three elements of this plan are meant to be acted on simultaneously. We recognize that this will take a tremendous amount of work, and that regional collaboration will be critical to making a real difference.*

*We are a strong community with exceptional individuals, businesses, and non-profit organizations; we don't walk away from wicked problems, but instead we lean in with compassion, grace, and a desire for transformative change. That is why we so strongly believe that together, we can continue to make a difference.*

- Members of the Community Work Group

# Participatory Leadership Process

Up until 2018 the City hadn't had much of a leadership role in responding to homelessness. By the end of that year the City Council had taken several significant steps to respond to the immediate emergency but had yet to establish a long-term approach.

To even begin to bring the community together to develop a plan, the complexity of the situation needed to be taken into account. The reality on the ground was shifting rapidly. The regional homeless crisis response system was overwhelmed and lacked resources to respond effectively. Citizens with deeply held core values were seeing the problem and solutions very differently and tensions were high. The City would need to think outside the box; to test, learn, and adapt our response efforts. Also, critical, would be to strengthen collaborative relationships to respond quickly and effectively and develop much-needed regional resiliency.

The City chose Participatory Leadership as the model for the public process because its various tools and methodologies are specifically designed for identifying community-based solutions to incredibly wicked and complex challenges. At the core of this approach is the belief that in order to build trust, confidence and investment in the final outcome, the best and wisest solutions need to come from the community, not a panel of experts or City staff.

While City Council and staff convened the meetings and listened throughout, it was a Community Work Group made up of 11 volunteers who guided the process. Their role was to ensure a diverse and inclusive set of perspectives and experiences were represented and fully integrated into the process and the resulting outcomes. They did this by:

- Inviting a broad variety of viewpoints and life experiences into the process;
- Helping to host conversations and listening to participants;
- Seeking out learning opportunities;
- Reflecting back to participants and community members what was being heard and learned throughout the process; and
- Uniting that input into a strategic direction

Community Work Group members were identified from a series of community stakeholder interviews and conversations held in December 2018 and January 2019.

The Community Work Group heard from over 1,200 community members through 20 different community conversations and two online surveys. Over 50 different community organizations participated. Some sessions were open to the public, others were tailored to specific groups such as people experiencing homelessness or Downtown business and property owners. Also widely included were faith community leaders, residents, representatives from social and emergency service agencies, business owners and employees. A broad range of voices and perspectives were heard and reflected in the outcomes. This highly intentional and inclusive process was necessary for the final plan to set a path forward that would be reflective of our community.

# Launch March 2019



## Learning Phase

During this phase participants were asked to consider what does it look like to successfully address homelessness in our community? What's currently working? What's not?

### Listening Sessions

03/28 Community Resource Partners	06/03 Residents of Plum St Village
04/18 Downtown Community	06/06 Downtown Business Owners
04/20 Public Workshops	06/10 Guests of Community Care Center
05/04 Public Workshops	06/30 Evergreen Christian Community
05/29 City Employees	
05/31 Downtown Property Owners	Online Survey in June - Experiences



## Dialogue Phase

During this phase we shared what we had heard and learned during phase one, and dug deeper into the issues. We asked participants to identify 1, 5 and 10 year goals.

### Public Engagement

07/22 Faith Community Leaders
07/25 Law & Justice Representatives
07/25 Olympia Residents (Demographic Sample)
07/29 Community Resource Partners
08/08 Community Resource Partners



## Identify Strategies & Actions

During this phase we focused on two of the hardest issues:

1. How should we address encampments, and
2. How to address behaviors that make people feel unsafe.

Despite differences of opinion at each table, participants engaged in a rich, civic dialogue to help the Work Group identify a way forward.

### Public Engagement

10/08 Community Resource Partners & Faith Leaders
10/14 Coalition of Neighborhoods
10/26 Public Workshop
11/02 Public Workshop
11/14 Guests of the Community Care Center
Online Survey in November - Strategies and Actions

# Process & partnerships

Through their commitment to this process, the Community Work Group heard and learned much to shape the strategies they identified. It was challenging for them to sift through the many perspectives and to balance the needs of people experiencing homelessness with the needs of a community impacted by homelessness. There were some tough conversations, and even some members themselves do not agree with every outcome in the final plan. However, in the end the entire Community Work Group agreed this plan is the result of a thorough public process, reflects the balanced voice of our community, and when implemented will be a robust and impactful response to the homelessness crisis.

Homelessness is bigger than any single jurisdiction or organization. An effective response will require a coordinated, regional approach that involves Thurston County and other jurisdictions, the State, federal government, social service and medical providers, the faith community, private sector, and citizens coming together to take action.

Not everything in this plan can be implemented by the City of Olympia. The strategies and approaches herein were developed by our community and often point to the types of partnership actions our community would like to see. Throughout the process we also heard directly from a myriad of partners and potential partner organizations whose voices and opportunities for collaboration are represented in this plan.

Partners may be organizations working directly with the City, but often and just as important, they are individuals and organizations doing related work independent of the City. Many of these organizations are already hard at work. Along with reporting its own actions and performance data, the City can highlight the important work of these partners.



# Partners

## Participating Community Resource Partners

- Athena Group
- Boys and Girls Club
- Build A Bus
- Capital Medical Center
- Capital Recovery Center
- Catholic Community Services
- CHOICE
- Community Action Council
- Community Care Center
- Community Youth Services
- Concerned Clergy
- Crisis Response Unit (CRU)
- Dept. of Health & Social Services
- Downtown Ambassadors
- Economic Development Council
- EGYHOP
- Experience Olympia Board
- Faith Communities (various)
- Familiar Faces
- Family Education & Support Services
- Family Support Center
- Habitat for Humanity
- Hands on Children's Museum
- Homes First
- Housing Authority
- Intercity Transit
- Just Housing
- Low Income Housing Institute
- Olympia Downtown Alliance
- Olympia Fire Department
- Olympia Free Clinic
- Olympia School District
- Olympia Police Department Walking Patrol
- PacMT Workforce
- Parking Business & Improvement Area
- PiPE
- Pizza Klatch
- Providence Foundation Board
- Quixote Communities
- Sidewalk
- South Puget Sound Community College
- Stonewall Youth
- The Evergreen State College
- Thriftway
- Thurston County Chamber of Commerce
- Thurston County Food Bank
- Thurston County Homeless Services
- Thurston County Prosecutors Office
- Thurston Thrives
- Timberland Regional Library
- Union Gospel Mission
- United Way Board
- Valley View Medical Center
- Veteran's Administration
- Virgil Adams Real Estate
- Visitor & Convention Board
- WA Business Bank
- West Olympia Business Association
- West Olympia Rotary
- YMCA

**"There is no us and them solution  
Only we as a community, working  
together to create systems that support  
everyone."**



I'M  
HUNGRY AND  
HOMELESS THANK YOU

# A community impacted by homelessness

*There really is no us and them when we're talking about homelessness – only we, only community. We are all impacted by homelessness. Whether it's the individual on the street in crisis, the family living in their car on the side of the road or the business owner struggling to be successful in Downtown. Whether it's the medical facility attempting to attract the most qualified and talented professionals to their practice, the mother and her child visiting a park who find a needle, the visitor to our community who is confronted by someone in crisis or the local government attempting to provide services we are all impacted by homelessness.*

*Recently I had a chance to talk to several new business owners in our Downtown. When you talk to them you realize that to start a new business is a blind leap into the unknown. Of course, a business plan can help, along with advice from friends and other business owners who have been there before, but in the end there's no way to know what it's really going to be like. It sounds like getting on a roller coaster - a powerful mix of fear and excitement.*

*The business owners whom I spoke with talked in terms of excitement about our growing Downtown and the opportunity that new residents create to build a thriving community. They also spoke about the challenge of being part of the Downtown community. They are challenged when a homeless individual who appears to suffer from mental health issues urinates on their front step regularly. When they have spoken to her they have been met with threatening and potentially dangerous behavior. They see this individual and understand their pain and the suffering that they endure, but none the less the urination and threatening behavior impact their business.*

*They spoke in terms of frustration that there doesn't seem to be help for this vulnerable person living on the edge of our society and the edge of crisis. They asked how they can help. They didn't make it about her – they made it about us. They asked what can we do as a community?*

*This short encounter illustrated for me both the simplicity and the complexity of responding to homelessness. Simple in that living on the street creates challenges and conflicts and complex in that there are no easy solutions and not enough resources to address this situation. There is no us and them solution – only we. We as a community, working together to create systems that support everyone.*

- Keith Stahley, Assistant City Manager

# Community concerns

Throughout the process, the Community Work Group heard about the impacts the homelessness crisis has on the broader community. The Community Work Group sensed there is a secondary trauma people experience from seeing people suffer, and from having their personal property, neighborhoods or favorite public spaces impacted by camping activity.

Olympians said they are concerned about people living unsheltered on city streets, in vehicles, in the woods and under bridges. They said they are concerned about individuals' exposure to weather, vulnerability to predation and assault and the lack of access to hygiene facilities. Olympians are also concerned about public health and safety, environmental degradation and the accumulation of trash and needles.

The Community Work Group heard housed and unhoused people alike shared stories of interactions with others that they found concerning, sometimes frightening. They heard Downtown business and property owners discuss a variety of impacts, including people sleeping in their doorways, disruptive behaviors and the loss of customers who will no longer come Downtown. While not everyone shares the same perspective of what is scary or safe, the process made it clear the entire community is impacted.

Several of Olympia's core community values appear to be challenged by the homelessness crisis. These values lead to expected standards for our community that were expressed throughout the process, including:

- Helping ensure all community members can meet their **basic needs**;
- Providing **economic opportunities** for people of all income levels;
- Treating all community members with **respect**;
- Giving **fair and equal treatment** under the law;
- Being good stewards of the **environment**;
- Creating a **safe and welcoming** Downtown and public spaces;
- Working toward **sustainable solutions**; and
- Being **transparent** about the City's actions.

Olympians don't want to lose sight of these values in responding to the crisis. The Community Work Group wove them into the strategies and potential implementation approaches they identified in this plan.

**"Throughout the process participants spoke about being compassionate; doing what we can to help neighbors in need. Participants also questioned the limits of compassion; concerned that too much leads to being taken advantage of or will encourage the arrival of more people seeking sanctuary, exceeding our community's capacity to respond."**

## How much is too much?

Throughout the process participants spoke about being compassionate; doing what we can to help neighbors in need. Other people questioned the limits of compassion; concerned that too much leads to being taken advantage of or will encourage the arrival of more people seeking sanctuary, exceeding our community's capacity to respond.

Participants also discussed accountability; taking responsibility for one's actions and fairly enforcing laws. Other people questioned who should be held accountable – people experiencing homelessness, the City, the County, service providers, police? The Work Group heard concerns that demanding accountability may assume people choose to be homeless, blame them for circumstances that may be outside of their control, and discounts the impact of trauma on an individual's behavior and choices.

They heard from people having experienced homelessness and drug addiction. They heard how important it is to be treated with a level of authentic human compassion and to be supported. At the same time these participants often said that being held accountable in some way was an important step in their journey to recovery.

## One Persons Journey

*"K" is a citizen of Olympia who has a long history of trauma and homelessness. Not long ago K was sleeping in parking lots and alcoves Downtown. K was well known to Olympia's Downtown Ambassadors, Walking Patrol and Crisis Response Unit (CRU) who often responded to complaints about her behavior and her dog who was acting aggressively and biting people.*

*In April of 2019, after numerous warnings, K was arrested for trespassing. But sending her to jail would not create long lasting change for K or for the community. Instead, K's case was referred to Olympia's Community Court, where low-level offenders can have their sentences reduced if they connect to service providers onsite and develop a personalized plan they are then held accountable to. Around this time K was also connected to the police department's Familiar Faces program, to a peer navigator named Melissa.*

*All this led to a chance for K to interview for permanent housing at Quixote Village. While housing is not always immediately available for everyone – in fact, it's a huge gap in our system that this plan seeks to address – K's specific circumstances made her eligible for this particular program. However, because Quixote Village is considered recovery housing, in order to be considered for residency, K would be required to pass a sobriety test. Remaining abstinent while living on the street seemed an impossible feat. But with the help and guidance of her Familiar Faces peer, K agreed to enter into a detox facility that would help her achieve that goal.*

*It was a difficult journey, and K did the hard work with sustained support from her peer navigator Melissa and a network of others who sought her out, encouraged her, took her to appointments, and called every day to find her a treatment bed. They even found foster care for Paco during her stay and helped get him neutered so that his behavior relaxed. K and Paco are now proud residents of Quixote Village.*



Everyone's story is different, and there are no one size fits all solutions. But this story is an example of how our community can achieve success by taking a human centered approach, and a tailored approach that applies both compassion and accountability.

# What we learned

Below are six key findings that shaped the Community Work Group’s understanding of the issue of homelessness based on what they heard and learned throughout the process and their own knowledge and experience. For more information, see the [Thurston County Homeless Crisis Response Plan](#), which provides a good overview of the history and landscape of homelessness, both nationally and regionally.

1

Homelessness is a national and regional issue that is felt most acutely at the local level

Over several years, and despite many notable successes, visible homelessness has increased in Olympia and other cities nationwide.

Each year on a single night in January communities across the United States participate in the Point in Time Census (PIT) to count the number of people experiencing homelessness.

From the 2019 PIT:

Area	# of homeless	Ratio of homelessness
United States	567,715	17 out of every 10,000 people
Washington State	21,577	29.1 out of every 10,000 people
Thurston County	800	27.9 out of every 10,000 people

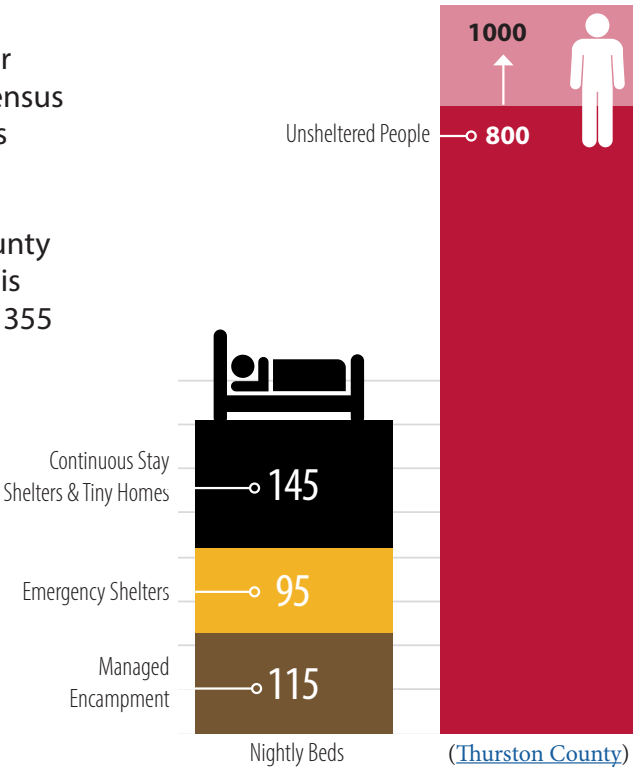
(U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, [Thurston County](#))

In 2019, 800 individuals were counted in Thurston County, including 394 unsheltered, meaning they slept outside, in a car or another place not meant for human habitation the night before. Not everyone experiencing homelessness is able to be contacted or chooses to participate on the day of the PIT count, therefore census administrators nationwide tend to believe the actual number is likely 2 or 3 times higher.

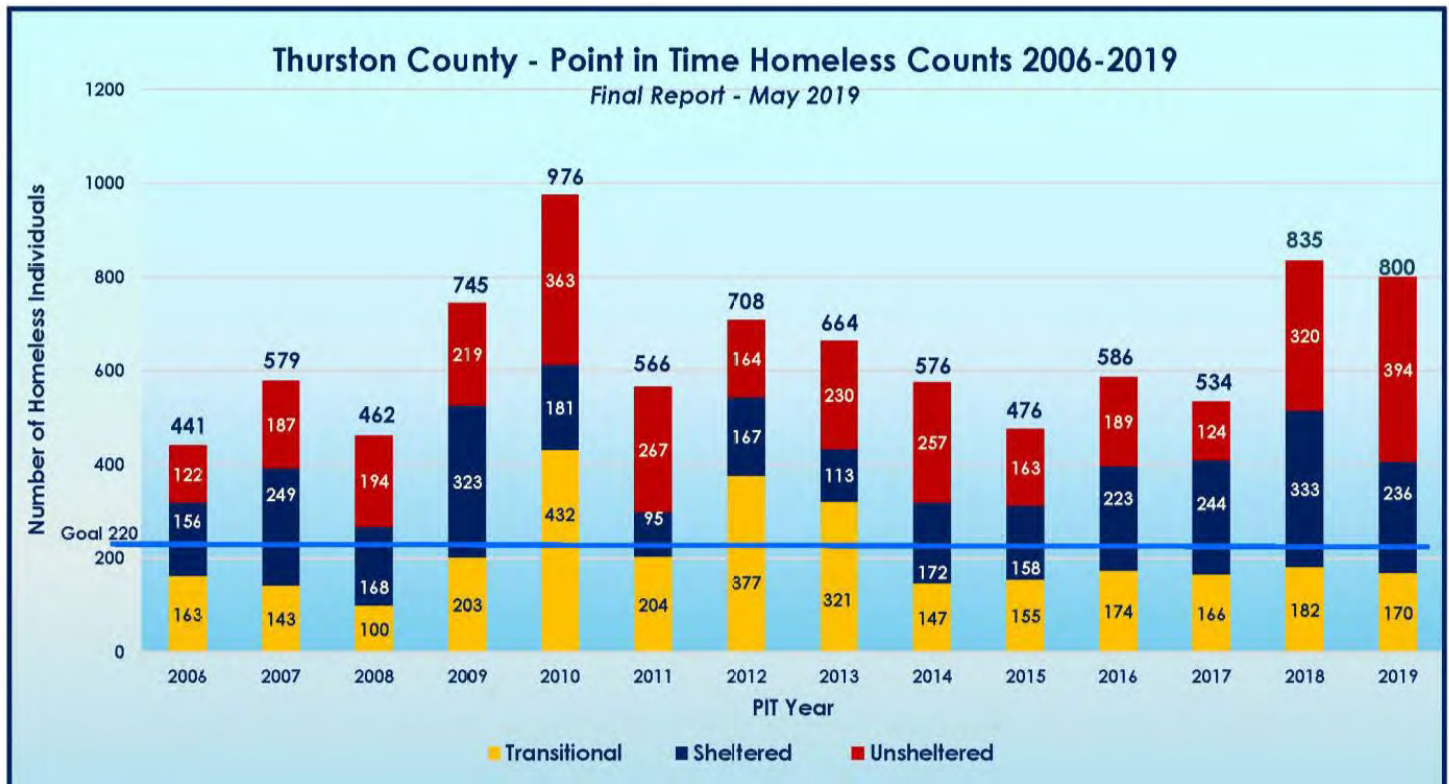
Based on more informal observations in the field, Thurston County posits the number of people who are unsheltered countywide is probably more like 800-1000 individuals. This compares to just 355 nightly shelter beds available countywide (Thurston County).

Thurston County reports there are **more like 800 -1,000 people** sleeping unsheltered countywide.

That compares to just 355 nightly beds available countywide.



# Six key findings



Nationally homelessness decreased by about 15% between 2007 and 2017. There were even higher success rates for specific subgroups like veterans and families with children ([National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)). However, since 2014 *unsheltered* homelessness has been increasing within certain geographic areas of the country. Unsheltered homelessness is more likely to occur in western and southern metro areas (e.g., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Las Vegas, Portland, and Miami). Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness (prolonged homelessness among people with a disability) and unaccompanied youth and single adults are the most likely to be unsheltered ([National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)).

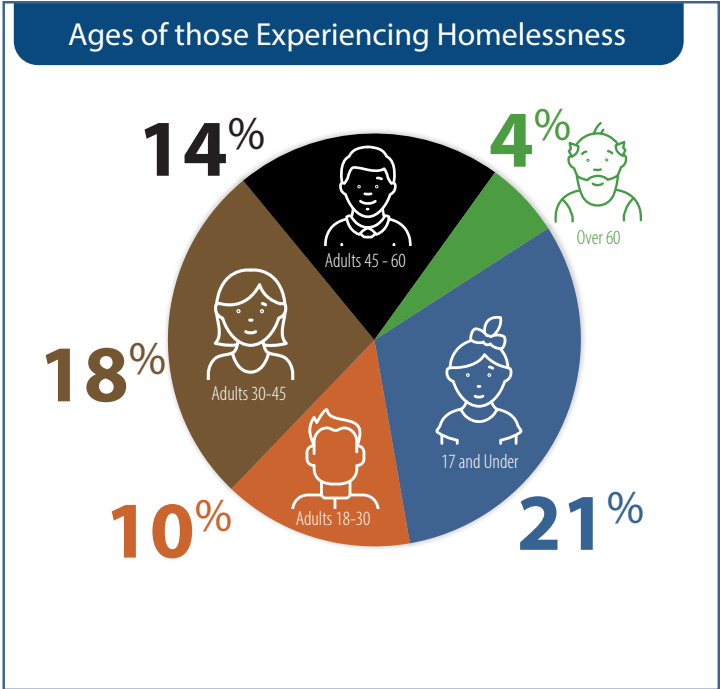
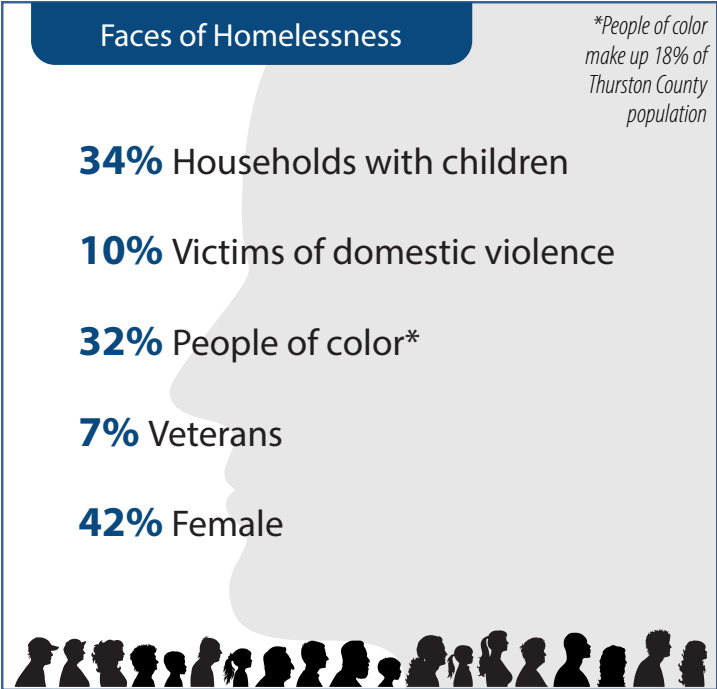
The number of people experiencing homelessness in Washington State fell 3.3% between 2018-19. Still, Washington has the fifth highest count and sixth highest rate in the nation of people experiencing homelessness relative to the general population ([U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#)).

The chart above presents 14 years of PIT data for Thurston County. In 2019 there were 800 homeless people representing an 81.4% increase from the 2006 baseline number of 441. But the number has fluctuated over the years, following the broad economic trends of the past decade - the rise of the recession, a drop during the recovery and most recently a rise that appears to correlate with sharp rent increases in Thurston County ([Thurston County](#)).

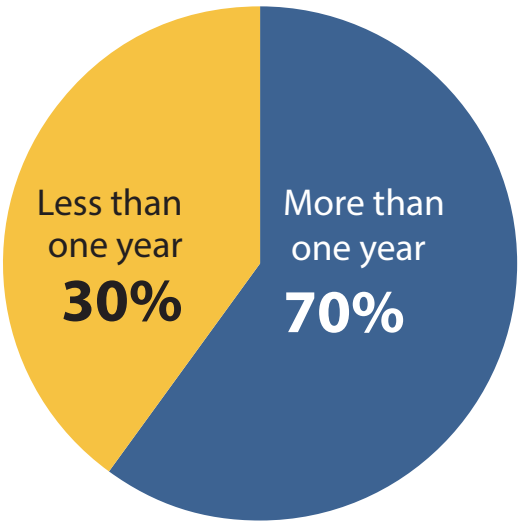
# What we learned

## 2 The homeless population is not homogenous

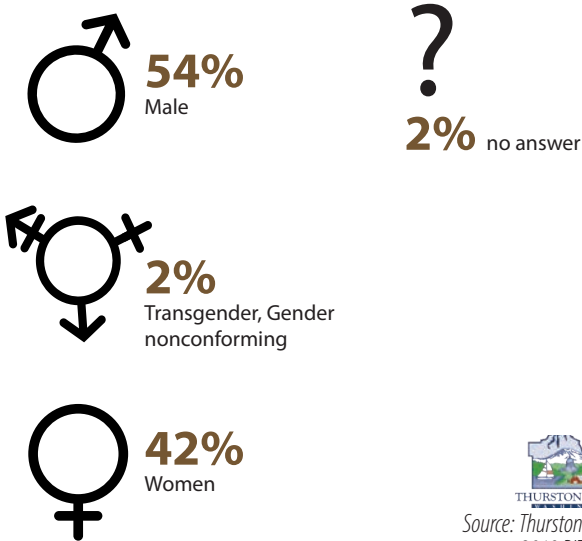
The Point in Time Census shows us that homelessness affects people of all ages and with a variety of characteristics. (2019 PIT, [Thurston County](#))



### Time Unhoused



### Gender Identity



# Demographic data

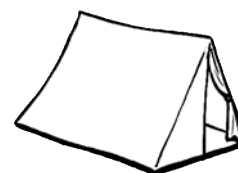


## Where They Slept

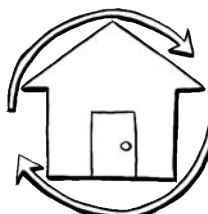
\*1% other



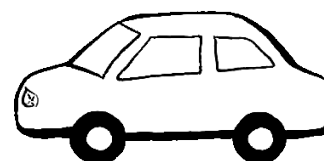
**30%**  
Emergency  
shelter



**34%**  
Out of doors  
(street, tent,  
etc.)



**21%**  
Transitional  
housing



**14%**  
Vehicle, abandoned  
building, other

## Where Lived Before Experiencing Homelessness



**59%**  
Thurston County

**28%**  
Outside WA  
Counties

**13%**  
Other WA  
Counties

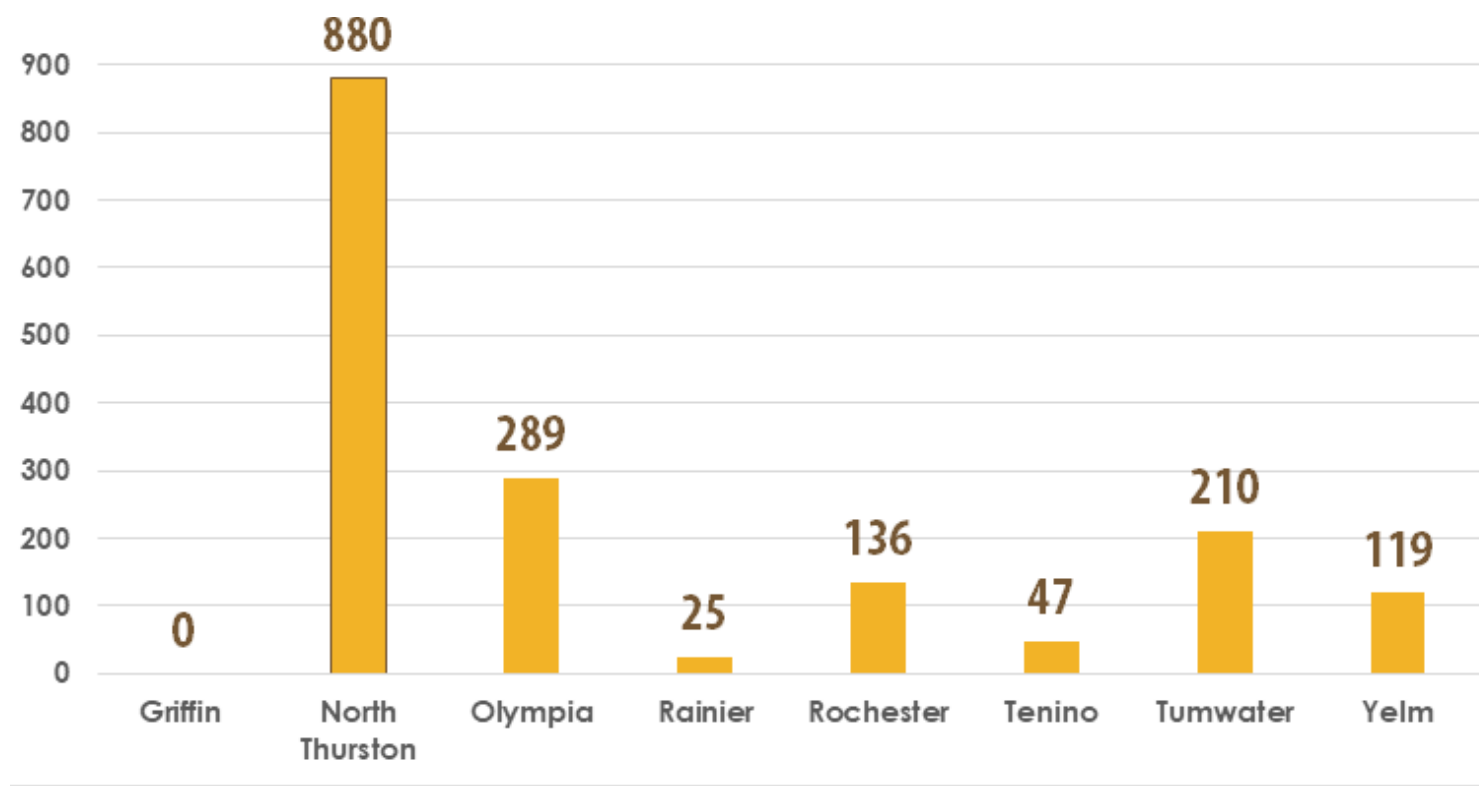
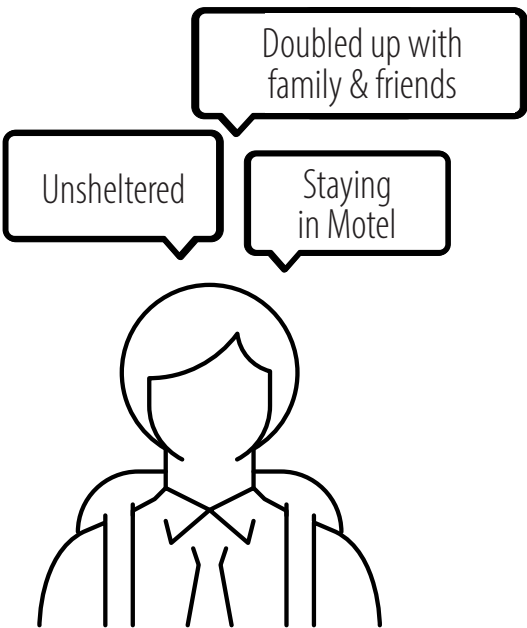


# What we learned

## Students are experiencing homelessness

Another source of data that helps us understand the number of people experiencing homelessness in Thurston County comes from schools. All eight of Thurston County's school districts count the number of students experiencing homelessness throughout the school year. This includes K-12 students who at some point in the year were unsheltered, staying in a shelter, a hotel or motel or doubled up with family and friends.

This is a different timeframe and definition of homelessness than used for the Point in Time Census, which provides a snapshot of who was homeless on a particular date rather than over a year and does not count people staying with family and friends.

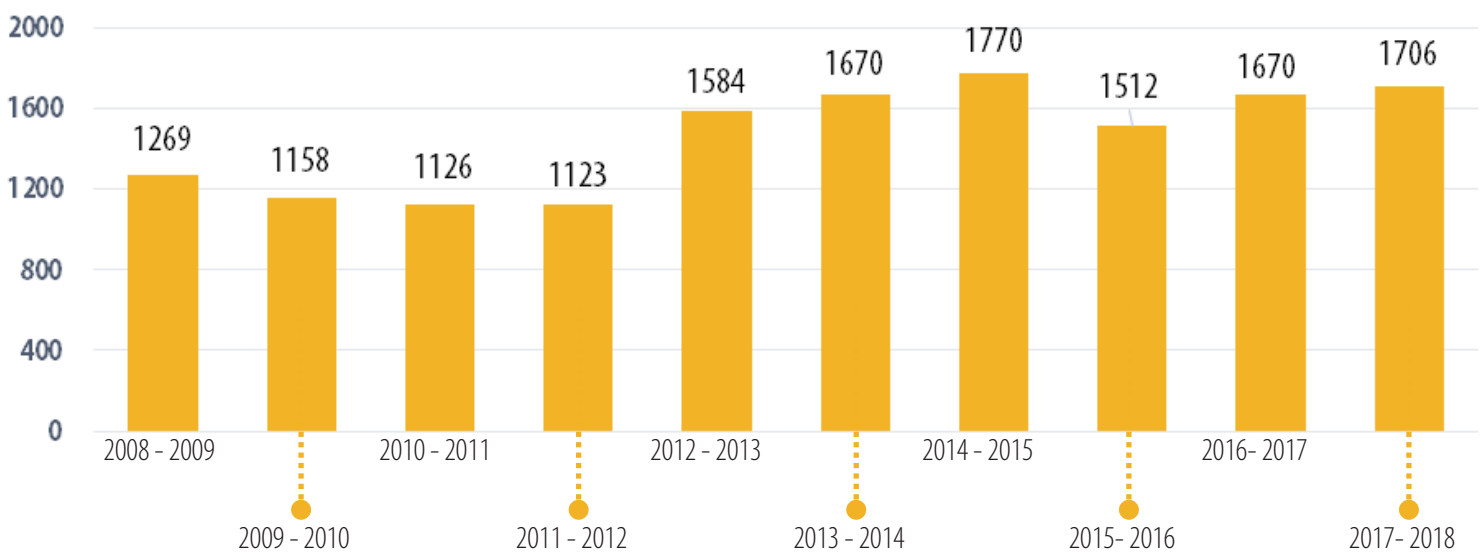


# Homeless students

## 1706 students experienced homelessness in 2017-2018

North Thurston has the highest number of homeless students, but is also the largest district, with over 15,000 students. The Olympia School District is about 2/3 that size.

The chart below shows 10 years of data with the total number of students experiencing homelessness in Thurston County. The total in 2017-18 was 1,706 students, or about 4% of all students.

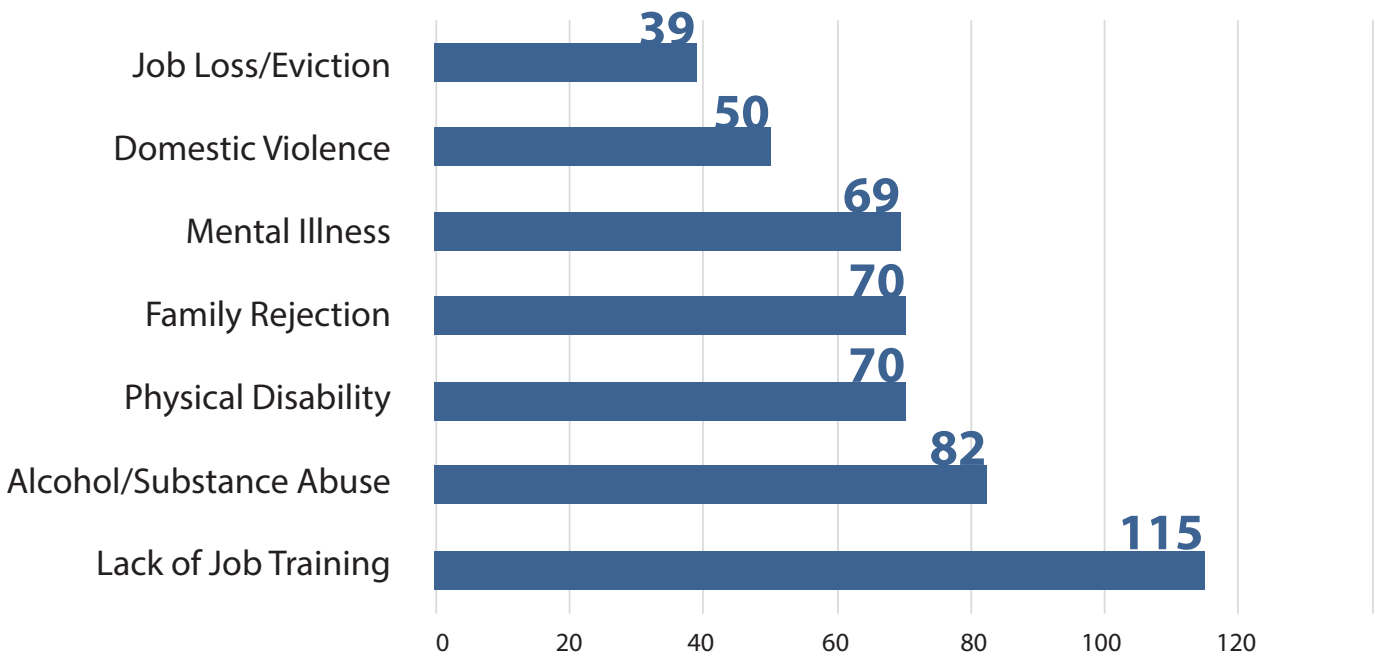


# What we learned

## 3 Causes of homelessness are varied

For most, homelessness is not a choice, but the result of circumstances including adverse childhood experiences, disability, job loss, inter-generational poverty, rent spikes and other factors.

Of the 800 people recorded in the PIT census, almost 500 responded to the question about the cause of their homelessness.



We can see that the largest self-reported causes relate to economic and family instability. Also, according to the National Coalition for the Homeless, mental illness is typically among the top three causes, as is the case here ([National Coalition for the Homeless](#)).

Throughout the process, the Community Work Group heard concerns about substance use. Participants expressed they largely understand not all people experiencing homelessness use drugs or alcohol, and that drug and alcohol use are not exclusively attributable to people experiencing homelessness. At the same time many observe a relationship between unsheltered homelessness and drug use. Narrowing down accurate and recent numbers on the prevalence of substance use among people experiencing homelessness is extremely difficult.

The Community Work Group heard from people with lived experience of homelessness that it is not uncommon to turn to alcohol and drugs to cope with the difficulties of life on the street. They heard stories about people using drugs to numb pain or stay awake at night in order to protect themselves. While participants expressed differing perspectives on whether homelessness leads to drug use or vice versa, what the PIT data shows and what the Community Work Group heard is that substance use is less likely to be the primary cause of a person’s homelessness.

“...what data shows and what the Community Work Group heard is that substance use is less likely to be the primary cause of a person’s homelessness.”

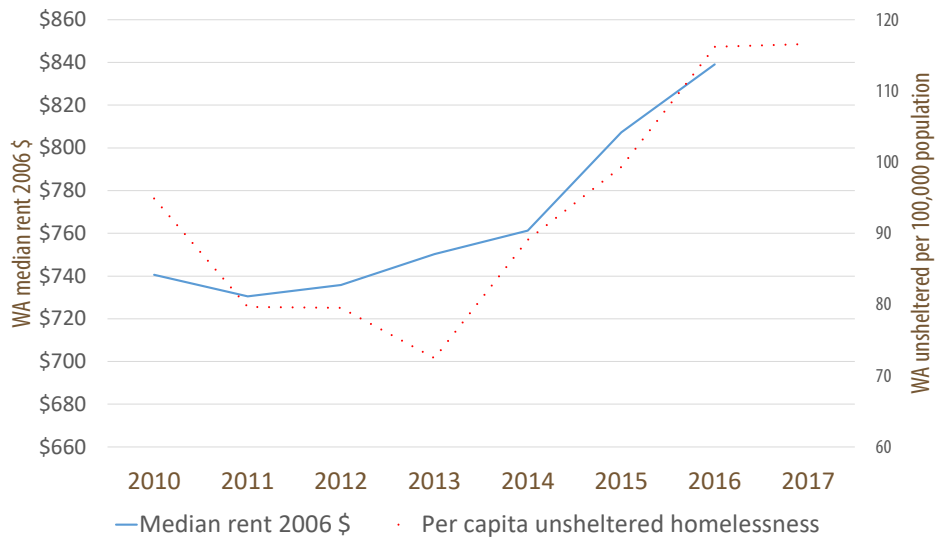
# Causes & Housing

## 4

### Housing affordability is a key factor in homelessness

Studies find significant connections between the rate of homelessness and housing market variables, such as the cost of rent, ratio of rent to income and vacancy rate. National research has found that communities where people spend more than 32% of their income on rent can expect a more rapid increase in homelessness ([Zillow](#)). And an oft cited study from the Journal of Urban Affairs found that for every \$100 rent increase, homelessness increases by 6-32% ([WA Department of Commerce](#)). As it stands, several of the metro areas with the highest counts of unsheltered homelessness are among the highest cost rental markets in the nation (Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, New York, Miami) ([National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)).

Although homelessness in Washington State has declined since 2017, extensive data analysis by the Washington State Department of Commerce found a rise of homelessness in the state between 2013 and 2017 was overwhelmingly correlated to growing rents. The chart to the right demonstrates a correlation between median rents and unsheltered homelessness in Washington State.



Rent: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey one-year estimates for WA State, B25058, inflation adjusted using Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI-U. Homelessness: WA point in time count, adjusted by: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey one-year population estimate for WA | 1 - Journal of Urban Affairs, New Perspectives on Community-Level Determinants of Homelessness, 2012 2 - Dynamics of homelessness in urban America, arXiv:1707.09380

Housing costs are rising in Washington as demand for housing is outpacing supply. As a result, people living on the margins are less able to compete for lower cost units and may be pushed into homelessness. According to a recent report, an additional 225,600 homes should have been built in Washington State between 2000 and 2015 to keep up with job and population growth ([Crosscut](#)). Thurston Thrives estimates about 2,000 new housing units are needed each year to accommodate the population growth in Thurston County. Over a six-year span leading up to 2018, new units built fell short by about 30%, under-producing approximately 3,600 units ([Thurston Thrives](#)).

Over the past decade, the cost of housing in Thurston County has increased faster than household incomes. Between 2010-2018:

- Average rents rose 5% per year, and
- Median household income rose 2.8% per year

([Thurston Regional Planning Council](#))

# What we learned

## Minimum wage and housing

Housing is considered affordable when it costs no more than 30% of a household's income. In 2019, the average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in Thurston County was \$1,208 ([National Low Income Housing Coalition](#)). In 2019, minimum wage in Washington State was \$12/hour. Thus, a person working full time at minimum wage would have earned \$1,920/month, spending an average of 63% of their income on housing alone.

**"Housing is considered affordable when it costs no more than 30% of a household income."**

## 5 For many the root cause of homelessness can be traced to earlier adverse experiences

Childhood trauma compromises neurological development and increases the risk for long-term adverse health outcomes, poverty and homelessness. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) include abuse, neglect, domestic violence, poverty, discrimination, household mental illness or substance use and other traumas. ACE's can occur at the family or community level. Significant associations between a high number of ACE's and negative health outcomes are consistent across all populations and socio-economic levels. Adults who are homeless are highly likely to have experienced a high number of ACE's in their lifetime ([National Health Care for the Homeless Council](#)).

Throughout the process, the Community Work Group heard that homelessness itself is a traumatic experience that endures sometimes beyond the point when a person is housed. They heard this is why it often takes multiple attempts for a person to transition out of homelessness. And why trauma-informed approaches are so critical as we move forward.

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Average rent for 2-bedroom apartment = \$1,208



Minimum wage (full time) = \$1,920 a month

Result is **63% of the household wages are used for housing**



**Homelessness itself is a traumatic experience that endures sometimes beyond the point when a person is housed**

# Causes & Housing

## 6 Housing stability is key to recovery

Housing First is an approach that prioritizes permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness. Services and support are part of Housing First. The idea is that housing provides a foundation from which people are better positioned to take advantage of services, seek employment, pursue sobriety or store medications for improving health. Denying people housing until they take advantage of services is found to increase an individual's length of time being homeless and create more harm and barriers to housing. Another tenant of Housing First is that participation in services is not mandated because services are found to be more effective when a person chooses to engage. A growing body of evidence shows the Housing First approach is an effective solution to homelessness ([National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)).

Two common program models follow the Housing First approach:

- **Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH):** Targeted to people with high needs related to physical or mental health, developmental disabilities or substance use disorders who have experienced long-term or repeated homelessness. Long term rental assistance plus supportive services.
- **Rapid Re-Housing:** Intervention that helps individuals or families with low to moderate service needs who are newly homeless or on the verge. Provides short-term resources to quickly get back into housing, increase self-sufficiency and remain housed. Examples include help locating an apartment, rent and security deposit assistance.

A Housing First model, including both Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing approaches, are integral to the regional homeless crisis response system and the strategies in this plan. Most households in need of housing services in Thurston County can be helped with Rapid Re-Housing programs. However, there are hundreds of chronically homeless, unsheltered individuals in our county who will need Permanent Supportive Housing solutions to end their homelessness ([Thurston County](#)).

Studies indicate permanent supportive housing has a long-term retention rate of up to 98%. And a variety of studies have shown that between 75-91% of households remain housed a year after being rapidly re-housed. ([National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)). Studies also show supportive housing reduces public costs by reducing the use of publicly-funded crisis services, including shelters, hospitals, psychiatric centers, jails and prisons ([United States Interagency Council on Homelessness](#)).

The evidence-based programs to connect people to tailored solutions exists in our county. One major challenge is that there is not enough housing – either vacancies in affordable apartments or permanent supportive units – to connect people to. That is why a major focus area is to build more housing of all types to support the housing needs of our community as quickly as possible and over the long-term.



# Alignment with Thurston County

Thurston County oversees implementation of a 5-Year Homeless Crisis Response Plan (5-Year Plan) which guides policy, funding and practices of local service providers who make up our region's homeless crisis response system. The 5-Year Plan aims to swiftly move unsheltered individuals and families into permanent housing solutions. Olympia's plan is an extension of the 5-Year Plan and supports its implementation. Olympia's plan is also larger in scope. While both are aimed at helping individuals experiencing homelessness, Olympia's plan also addresses the impacts the homelessness crisis has on the broader community.

Many of the strategies herein align with the objectives of the 5-Year Plan, including improving and expanding:

- Data quality and reporting;
- Temporary shelter;
- Affordable and supportive housing;
- Access to employment;
- Treatment for mental health and substance use;
- Trauma informed outreach workers; and
- Community engagement about homelessness.

Each year, the County administers a process whereby federal, state and local funding sources are pooled and awarded to local service providers. In 2020, these pooled funds were close to \$6 million. However, this amount will not cover all the needed improvements and expansions identified above.

Many of the City of Olympia's recent and planned actions advance implementation of the 5-Year Plan. In 2020, the City will spend close to \$4 million on housing and homeless related services, plus close to \$1.3 million on outreach services including crisis response, peer navigators and Downtown Ambassadors. But Olympia does not have the resources to reinforce the regional system on its own.



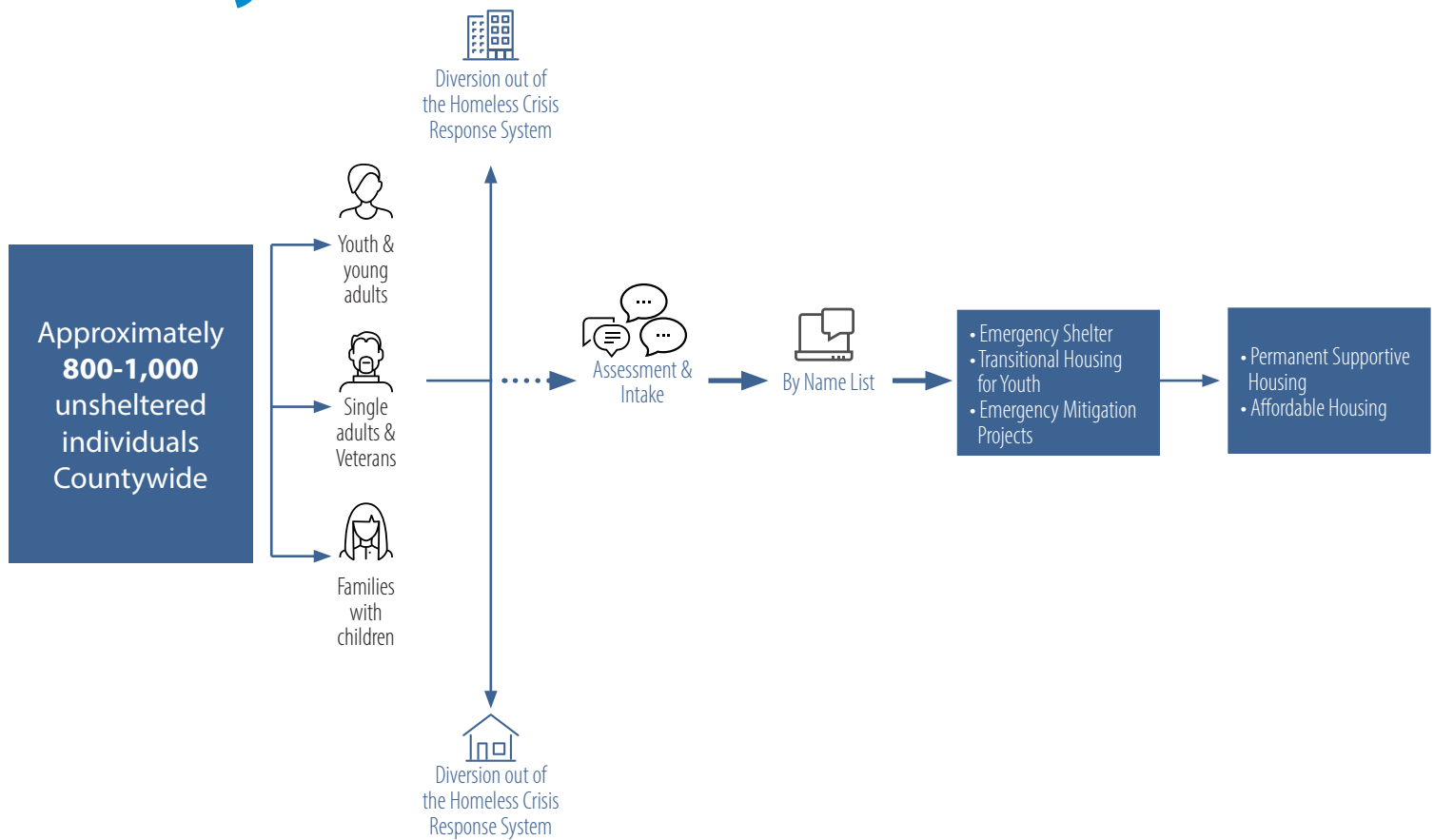
## Coordinated Entry

Through a system called Coordinated Entry, individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness are referred to local housing and other service providers. Between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018, a total of 2,517 Thurston County households (representing 3,456 distinct individuals) were served by one of our region's housing programs.

Some people can be housed with just a little help, like money for a down payment on rent (Rapid Re-Housing.) But other people, such as those with physical or developmental disabilities, or issues related to behavioral health or chronic homelessness, may need wrap around services in order to sustain their housing (Permanent Supportive Housing).

A fundamental problem is that not enough housing or shelter options exists to serve the number of people in need. Many people enrolled in Coordinated Entry are years away from receiving assistance due to lack of funding and other resources to support the system.

# Coordinated Entry



## Overview of Coordinated Entry Program

In Thurston County, people in need of housing related services will connect with one of three agencies:

- **Community Youth Services** for youth and young adults aged 12-24
- **Community Action Council** for single adults, couples without children and veterans
- **Family Support Center** for families with children

The first thing the agency will do is try to divert an individual from entering the homeless system (a form of homeless prevention called diversion). For example, the agency will try to help connect people to a relative or friend they can stay with. If diversion is not possible, the agency will assess their circumstances and needs and place them on a list. The agency then tries to connect the individual or family to appropriate tailored housing and services within the community.

## Major system gaps

- Affordable and supportive housing
- Shelter and other supported sites
- Access to mental health treatment
- Access to treatment and moderation for substance use
- Outreach/case workers
- Dedicated funding for prevention programs

# About the plan

The One Community Plan is organized around three focus area goals identified as important to the community:

**Focus Area #1:** Streamline and enhance rapid response and wrap around services



**Focus Area #2:** Expand affordable housing options and homelessness prevention



**Focus Area #3:** Increase public health and safety



Under each focus area are strategies and possible implementation approaches. These were identified by the Community Work Group after having listened to the community. The City of Olympia will identify specific actions it will take to implement these strategies each year, which will be included in a separate insert.

This is a dynamic plan. Measures of success have been identified for each focus area, which will help track our effectiveness and report on progress. Actions will evolve as we learn and adapt and new opportunities arise.



# 1 Learning Phase

During this phase participants were asked to consider what does it look like to successfully address homelessness in our community? What's currently working? What's not?



# 2 Dialogue Phase

During this phase we shared what we had heard and learned during phase one, and dug deeper into the issues. We asked participants to identify 1, 5 and 10 year goals.



# 3 Identify Strategies & Actions

During this phase we focused on two of the hardest issues:

1. How should we address encampments, and
2. How to address behaviors that make people feel unsafe.



## Public Participation

20 Listening Sessions Held  
Over 700 Meeting Participants  
640 Online Survey Respondents  
8,425 Unique Online Visitors



# Overview Focus Area #1

## Streamline rapid response & wrap around services

### What we heard

Olympians strive toward a healthier community where all members have their basic needs met. They believe people should not have to live outside; there should be safer options for fellow residents, and pathways to longer-lasting economic opportunity and security. Olympians do not see encampments as a long-term solution due to the impacts on the overall community. And they want more communication and transparency from the City about its actions.

Throughout this process, Olympians said they want a stronger regional response to homelessness. Participants do not want Olympia to act alone; they want to see other jurisdictions contributing to regional solutions. Many participants said that not all shelter and services can be accommodated in the Downtown; they feel other locations in the county with access to transit should be considered.

Many participants, in particular those representing the private sector and faith community, said they felt they could assist more but need to understand how their actions would fit into a broader plan. Participants asked for the effectiveness of programs to be measured and reported on, as they are more willing to support programs with proven solutions. The Community Work Group often heard 'tell us the help that helps' - or tell us how our resources can best be leveraged to create long term change for individuals and the community.

### Key challenges

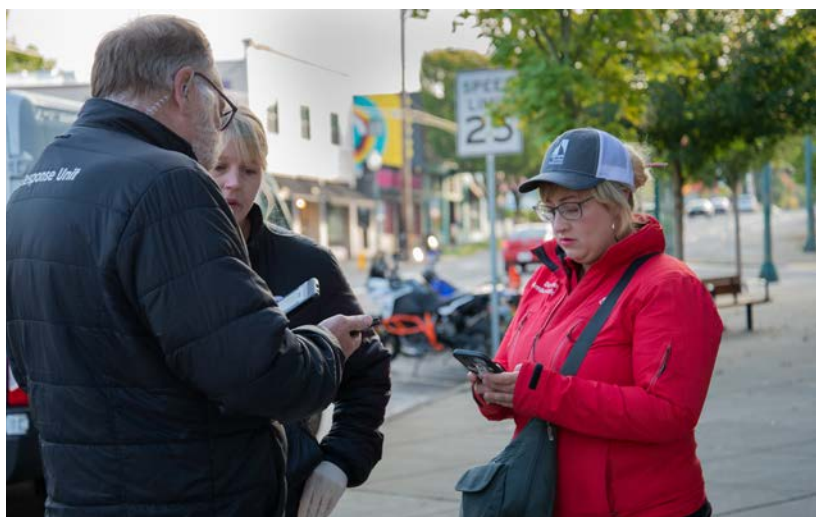
Thurston County's Homeless Crisis Response System is designed to swiftly move unsheltered individuals and families into permanent housing solutions. But this system is severely strained; there are not enough shelter beds or housing units, coupled with other significant gaps in critical services. In 2019, Thurston County estimated there were 800-1,000 people sleeping unsheltered countywide, compared to just 355 nightly beds available. Nearly all of the shelter

beds to serve the entire Thurston region are located in Downtown Olympia.

In the short term, as we work to build more permanent housing solutions, our region needs a rapid response that helps individuals meet their basic life needs, including emergency shelter, personal safety and hygiene. But the regional crisis response system lacks the resources necessary to meet the level of need. While the County and all its urban jurisdictions contribute, strong coordination among these entities has been lacking. Compounding this challenge, many of the region's unsheltered population locate in Olympia, putting more pressure on Olympia and less on other jurisdictions to act. But the City of Olympia simply does not have the resources to bolster the regional system on its own.

### The City's role

Strategies and actions in this section were developed with acknowledgement of what the City has already been doing. While Thurston County Public Health leads the countywide response to homelessness, the City of Olympia also plays an important role: coordinating with regional organizations, implementing actions and sharing what is being learned with peer jurisdictions. Since 2018, the City has taken significant steps, including: increasing temporary shelter by opening a tiny house village and a mitigation site, helping the youth shelter expand its 24/7 operation, and working with faith communities to host temporary emergency housing.





## Approach to encampments

The Community Work Group found encampments to be the hardest issue. During the process, community members expressed deeply held values and beliefs about how these should be approached, and agreement was hard to come by.

Ultimately the Work Group agreed the goal is that people should not have to live outside because there should be safer options and because encampments are not a long-term solution for Olympia due to their overall impact on the community. The Work Group identified four strategies that work toward this goal:

### 1.3: Expand temporary shelter or other supported site capacity to transition people out of encampments

This is recognizing that although the ultimate goal is to connect people to permanent housing solutions, housing will not come on-line fast enough to meet the need. In the short and mid- term more regional shelter options are needed. There is widespread agreement among Olympians that additional shelter should not be located in Downtown, and they would like to see other locations within the county considered.

### 1.4: Provide interim oversight and support for existing encampments

This is recognizing that encampments are not going to disappear overnight, meanwhile there are people suffering in camps and they should not be ignored. Impact of camps on the environment and surrounding neighborhood should also be addressed. The Work Group agreed the most important aspect of support is expanding the ability of trauma informed outreach workers to build relationships and try to connect campers to services. Other types of potential support, like garbage and porta-potties, were brought up. The City has more work to do to identify what appropriate stewardship and support from the City looks like.

**The goal is that people should not have to live outside because there should be safer options and because encampments are not a long-term solution for Olympia due to their overall impact on the community**

### 1.5: Follow a fair and orderly process for removing encampments

This is recognizing that some camps will need to be removed. In doing so, the City should be transparent about why, when and how this will be done. Steps should be taken to minimize re-traumatization during camp removal.

### 3.4: Prevent and remove new encampments before they establish.

This is recognizing there are many strategies in this plan that reflect the public's support for investing in housing and services to help people experiencing homelessness. At the same time the Work Group heard the public is feeling overwhelmed. There are questions about how much Olympia as a small community can do, and desire for other jurisdictions to stand up because Olympia can't take it all on alone. Olympians want to see public property managed for its intended use, and assistance for private property owners with encampment activity.

# Strategies Focus Area #1

## Streamline rapid response & wrap around services

### **1.1 Coordinate with peer jurisdictions to implement Thurston County's Homeless Crisis Response Plan**

- a. Leverage resources and assign clear implementation responsibilities.
- b. Identify performance measures and communicate progress to the community.
- c. Identify appropriate, region-wide locations for services outside Downtown.
- d. Continue to support emergency response services and mitigation sites.
- e. Align funding sources and jointly lobby for more state and federal assistance.

### **1.2 Simplify and increase use of the coordinated entry system to improve our ability to track, identify solutions and ensure successful outcomes**

- a. Ensure partners are accurately submitting data in coordinated-entry.
- b. Provide coordinated-entry training for agencies and distribute analysis results.
- c. Increase resources to expedite and expand coordinated entry enrollments.
- d. Improve data collection, analysis, management and reporting.

### **1.3 Expand temporary shelter or other supported site capacity to transition people out of encampments.**

- a. Locate additional emergency and temporary shelter sites outside Downtown.
- b. Increase wrap-around services at mitigation and other supported sites.
- c. Develop a 24/7 navigation center with onsite support to facilitate individual solutions and access to temporary shelter or permanent housing options per guidelines in Strategy 1.1.
- d. Establish a respite center for the ill or those unable to care for themselves.
- e. Work regionally to establish clear zoning code pathways (and remove other barriers) to allow for siting and establishing temporary shelter.
- f. Increase access to hygiene services (bathrooms, shower, laundry, etc.)

### **1.4 Provide interim oversight and support for existing encampments**

- a. Expand the ability of outreach workers to monitor and actively build relationships with people in encampments to connect them to safer shelter options and other services.
- b. Prohibit and respond to predatory behavior, open fires, environmental pollution, structural damage, and waste accumulation on public and private property.
- c. Identify appropriate campsite support and/or steward options.
- d. Establish expectations/consequences for temporary encampments.
- e. Consider a permit pathway for private property owners to temporarily allow people to shelter on their land.

### **1.5 Follow a fair and orderly process for removing encampments**

- a. Develop, adhere to and communicate transparent criteria for determining if and when camps must be removed, and consistent step-by-step procedures for removing encampments.
- b. Minimize re-traumatization during camp removal.
- c. Ensure people in encampments are engaged by organizations that provide shelters, transitional and rapid rehousing options.
- d. Provide ample advance warning, and consistent communication and procedures so people have an opportunity to relocate their belongings.
- e. Provide additional secure storage space so people can protect belongings.
- f. Enforce the City's RV camping management policy.
- g. Coordinate with State to facilitate management, clean-up, property clearing.

### **1.6 Increase access to substance use and mental health treatment facilities and services locally**

- a. Seek opportunities to establish treatment facilities in all major Thurston cities.
- b. Seek state and federal assistance to develop treatment facilities.
- c. Pursue public-private partnerships to increase treatment facilities.
- d. Create dedicated place(s) where emergency responders can bring people to safely detox or de-escalate from a mental health crisis.
- e. Provide ongoing recovery support services for individuals during and after treatment to reduce relapse rates.
- f. Align treatment programs and procedures with State and local Opioid Response Plans.

### **1.7 Prioritize pathways to economic opportunity that help people find longer-term security**

- a. Provide case management to help people overcome barriers to employment – e.g. securing an ID card, addressing outstanding warrants or fines, obtaining a high school diploma or GED.
- b. Coordinate with Workforce Council, Chambers, Colleges and other partners that can help connect people to training and/or employment.
- c. Leverage abilities and insights of social service agencies to develop pathway programs and identify appropriate strategies for connecting target audiences.
- d. Ensure programs are inclusive and appropriate for diverse populations, ages.
- e. Reduce panhandling by creating low-barrier, creative employment opportunities that helps people earn income without impacting other community members.

### **1.8 Identify and promote opportunities for organizations and individuals to contribute to priority homeless response needs or projects**

- a. Develop a central web portal that links potential donors and volunteers with local organizations.
- b. Identify programs that provide basic needs that are priorities for public giving.
- c. Provide skill-building, de-escalation and other related training to the community.

# Results Map Focus Area #1

## Streamline rapid response & wrap around services

By following the strategies identified in this plan, the City and partners are taking essential steps toward our goal of a healthy, safe and housed community. We will use the following measures to track and report on our progress to the community.

We do this/so that...	What we measure
The City participates in regional crisis response efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$\$ Spent</li> <li>• Seats on coordinating committees</li> </ul>
so that...	
We add to and increase the effectiveness of limited resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$\$ Leveraged (e.g., grants, partnerships)</li> <li>• Project capacity</li> <li>• Cost/unit</li> </ul>
so that...	
More individuals and families are quickly connected to shelter, housing and services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of people served/year</li> <li>• Percent connected to Coordinated Entry</li> <li>• Percent exits to permanent housing</li> <li>• Percent exits to unsheltered homelessness</li> </ul>
so that...	
Homelessness in Thurston County is a rare, brief and one-time occurrence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average/range length of stay in a housing program</li> </ul>
so that...	
Olympia is one community: healthy, safe and housed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total experiencing homelessness</li> <li>• Rate of unsheltered homelessness</li> <li>• Ratio of people experiencing homelessness to population</li> </ul>



One  
community

Healthy • Safe • Housed

# Overview Focus Area #2

## Expand affordable housing options & homelessness prevention

### What we heard

Olympians want a sustainable solution to homelessness, and broadly agree that our community must build more housing of all types for all incomes. There is also broad support for developing policies and actions that help currently housed people stay in their homes, and many said these efforts should balance the needs of both renters and landlords. Olympians support prevention programs that help people at risk of homelessness receive emergency assistance. Olympians also advocate for a focus on longer-term prevention, including education, training and economic development strategies that address all income levels.

### Key challenges

The ultimate goal is to connect people to permanent housing solutions. When people are stably housed, they are better equipped to pursue challenges and opportunities in life. But the critical lack of affordable and supportive housing in our region makes it hard to connect people experiencing homelessness to housing. It also means more and more individuals and families living on the margins are at risk of falling into homelessness. Since a lack of adequate housing supply is the primary driver of rising housing costs, a concerted regional effort is needed to increase the overall size of the region's housing stock.

Assuming an affordable unit is available, most people seeking housing assistance can be helped through Rapid Rehousing. This program provides people who are newly homeless or on the verge with quick resources, such as money to pay a security deposit or first month's rent. However, other people have higher needs related to physical, mental health or developmental disabilities. They often need Permanent Supportive Housing with wrap around services and intensive case management in order to stay housed.

The need for permanent supportive housing in our region is high. Hundreds of people who are unsheltered or staying in shelters experience compounding physical and mental health factors. The lives of these individuals are threatened by the lack of appropriate options to help them exit the street. These individuals also have significant impacts on City and regional services as well as collateral impacts on businesses and neighborhoods Downtown and citywide.

### The City's role

In 2018, Olympia residents passed a Home Fund sales tax levy to build permanent supportive housing. Between 2020 and 2025, Olympia aims to build 300 units of supportive and affordable housing for those with extremely low incomes. The first project with 60 units will break ground on Martin Way in 2021. The goal is to over time shift resources from emergency responses to long-term supportive and affordable housing as these facilities are developed.

The City of Olympia plays an important role in the development of housing across the continuum. City policies and codes influence the location, density and cost of housing. Through its Community Development Block Grant, the City has long assisted with development of new affordable housing and rehabilitations. Coupled with the Home Fund, the City now has strong financial tools to do even more.

While most housing has traditionally been built by the private sector, non-profits working in partnership with the City will play a larger role in building more units for low income households. Completion of a regional Housing Needs Assessment for Olympia, Tumwater, and Lacey is the first step in creating housing action plans for each city. This work is underway in 2020 and will include a projection of housing needs by income level.



**Over the next five years, the City aims to build 300 units of supportive housing, along with other steps to incent development of more affordable housing**

# Strategies Focus Area #2

## Expand affordable housing options & homelessness prevention

### 2.1 Build a continuum of housing to meet diverse needs and income levels

- a. Develop a community-wide affordable housing action plan.
- b. Leveraging the City's Home Fund, build 300 new units of supported and affordable housing within the next 5 years (2020-24).
- c. Over the next five years, create more permanent supportive housing.
- d. Reduce costs and other barriers to building more housing stock of all types.
- e. Incorporate creative housing options (e.g. ADU, shared-housing, boarding, etc.).
- f. Focus on rehabilitation of existing buildings as well as new construction.
- g. Expand housing options that support sobriety (recovery housing).
- h. Expand ADA-accessible housing stock.

### 2.2 Increase partnerships and diversify funding to support construction of new affordable housing

- a. Engage peer cities and key agencies in housing funding and location strategies.
- b. Seek state and federal assistance to increase supply of low-income housing.
- c. Adjust policies and codes to facilitate affordable housing construction.
- d. Develop private sector partnerships to leverage additional affordable housing opportunities.
- e. Host or invite the private sector to innovate (i.e., Issue an affordable housing RFP to solicit creative ideas).

### 2.3 Implement policies that help people locate housing and remain housed

- a. Increase diversion funding to more quickly house those who are able to sustain their housing independently.
- b. Consider rent subsidies, first-month/last-month bridge loans, etc.
- c. Facilitate access to housing for at-risk and marginalized populations.
- d. Develop emergency assistance resources for people at-risk of losing housing.
- e. Increase funding for family reunification to relocate people with home and family.
- f. Work with the Housing Authority to develop strategic housing solutions.



## **2.4 Increase education, training and resources that help people avoid or recover from homelessness**

- a. Remove barriers to transportation and provide transportation where essential.
- b. Increase financial literacy.
- c. Expand access to personal counseling services.
- d. Enhance career pathway education beginning in middle and high school years.
- e. Promote the availability of increased access to college education and technical certification training programs that lead to higher-wage occupations.
- f. Provide landlords and tenants rights information.

## **2.5 Develop an economic development strategy that addresses all income levels**

- a. Expand mentorship programs for youth.
- b. Provide broader awareness about the longer-term costs associated with leaving poverty unaddressed.
- c. Develop and promote employment opportunities for youth.
- d. Consider entrepreneurial programs like “Piece by Piece” operating in Los Angeles.
- e. Support findings and strategies recommended by community partners focused on developing education and training pathways to career development and financial stability for students.

*Community members have different needs when it comes to their housing based on family size, how much they can afford to pay, proximity to employment and transportation, special needs and personal preferences. So we need a range of available housing choices.*

# Results Map Focus Area #2

## Expand affordable housing options & homelessness prevention

By following the strategies identified in this plan, the City and partners are taking essential steps toward our goal of a healthy, safe and housed community. We will use the following measures to track and report on our progress to the community.

We do this/so that...	What we measure
The City studies community housing needs and barriers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rental housing cost survey</li><li>• Income forecast by sector</li><li>• Projection of housing needs by income level</li><li>• Policy/code barriers</li></ul>
so that...	
We identify and implement strategies to increase access to housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• \$\$ Invested</li><li>• Capital \$\$ leveraged (grants, partnerships)</li></ul>
so that...	
All community members can locate and remain in their home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• # of permanent supportive units constructed</li><li>• # of affordable units (80% AMI or below) constructed</li><li>• # of residential units constructed</li></ul>
so that...	
Olympians can thrive and take advantage of opportunities to improve their quality of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Housing wage</li><li>• Fair market rent</li><li>• Area median income</li></ul>
so that...	
Olympia is one community: healthy, safe and housed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rate of cost burdened households</li></ul>



One •  
community

Healthy • Safe • Housed

# Overview Focus Area #3

## Increase public health and safety

### What we heard

Olympians, whether housed or unhoused, want to feel safe. Olympians widely agree that the City should not criminalize homelessness, and there should be a reasonable level of accountability for crime. Olympians express support for justice done with compassion, believing this approach can change lives for the better. And there is broad support for programs that provide one-on-one, personalized support from trained mental health professionals and peer mentors.

Throughout this process, the Community Work Group heard clearly there are behaviors happening in public spaces that impact people's sense of safety and the quality of life of our community. The behaviors our community expressed concern about include mental health crisis, drug use, threats, vandalism and various criminal activities. The Work Group heard many participants state that they understand these behaviors are not exclusively attributable to the homeless population. They also heard from people experiencing homelessness who said they often feel unsafe and are regularly the victims of crime.

The Community Work Group also heard about the unique circumstances being experienced by Downtown businesses and employers. They heard about the compounding effects of trying to run a business in an environment that often feels chaotic and where customers, and sometimes employees, do not always feel safe. They heard many community members say they will no longer visit Downtown due to safety concerns. Many business owners and employees spoke with compassion about the people they see suffering, and how they try to do what they can to help but feel overwhelmed by the problem. Many said they can't speak about their frustrations publicly for fear of retaliation in the form of harassment or broken windows.

### Key challenges

People living on the streets with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders are among the most vulnerable members of our community. They also tend to exhibit more impactful behaviors, draw more negative attention, and have a higher rate of interaction with emergency services than other members of the community. For many of these individuals the road to stability is long and complex. Evidence shows that trusted relationships with steady trauma-informed outreach and case workers can help, but this takes time.

Outreach and case workers report significant barriers to helping clients with co-occurring mental health and substance use off the street, including lack of access to health care, medication and available treatment beds. Washington State law prohibits the involuntarily detention of people presenting mental health disorders unless they are posing a direct threat to themselves or others, and that bar can be high. Many individuals lack trust in the system and therefore decline to voluntarily ask for help.

The complex challenges surrounding homelessness make addressing behavior and safety concerns in the Downtown very challenging. While the process made clear perceptions of safety vary widely among stakeholders, the volume of people who share the perception of Downtown as unsafe limits success of Downtown goals. It will take a coordinated and sustained effort to reshape that perception which goes beyond the strategies contained herein.



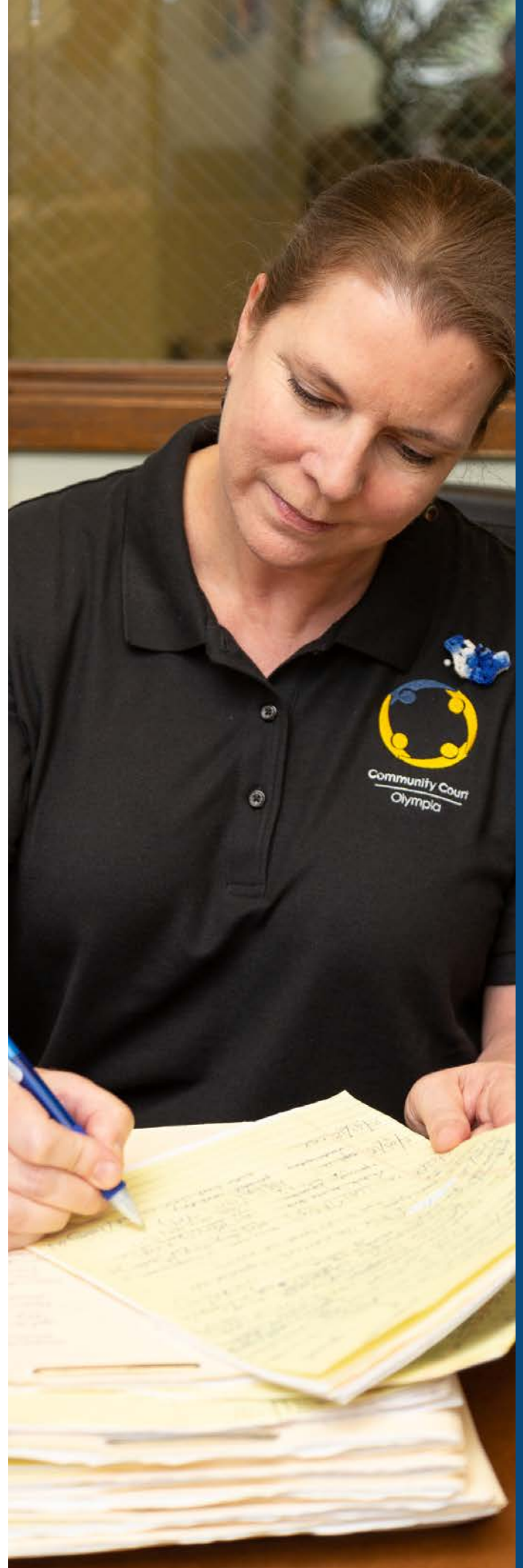
## The City's role

The homelessness crisis has compounded an already complex challenge with regards to addressing public health and safety. This complexity requires a multi-pronged and more informed approach that moves away from a law enforcement that relies primarily on arresting and jailing offenders. The Olympia Police Department has over the last several years evolved its approach, launching and partnering more closely with new programs at the City to better equip officers and the court system to respond appropriately to the people and situations they encounter.

In the Olympia Police Department's experience, jailing people who commit low level crimes due to circumstances such as homelessness or mental health (camping, trespassing, public urination, littering or disorderly conduct) is not effective at deterring repeat offenses. As an alternative, Olympia's Community Court offers a pathway to more effective, practical, and personalized solutions. In this therapeutic court setting low-level offenders can have their sentence commuted if they connect to service providers onsite and develop a personal plan that they are then held accountable to.

In response to concerns about Downtown, the Community Work Group identified several potential implementation approaches to address adverse behaviors such as graffiti, vandalism and litter while also recognizing these are caused by housed and unhoused individuals alike.

*In 2019, at least 15 different local service providers worked with Olympia's Community Court. This model has proved effective; out of the 156 Community Court graduates between 2016-2019, 82% have had no instance of re-offending. There are challenges, however. Participants from the City and County court system have noted that a lack of client access to treatment for mental health and substance use disorder is a key barrier to fulfilling the goals of their therapeutic court programs.*



# Strategies Focus Area #3

## Increase public health and safety

### 3.1 Increase trauma-informed outreach workers

- a. Focus police on reduction and resolution of violent, property and narcotics crime.
- b. Expand crisis response, peer navigator and outreach – e.g. Mobile Crisis Response Unit, Familiar Faces, Ambassadors et al.
- c. Train peer navigators and volunteers to assist with non-emergency mental health and medical response (including de-escalation).
- d. Ensure coordination and consistency among outreach workers from various organizations.

### 3.2 Enforce laws that are designed to protect our community and all community members

- a. Within authority, enforce person and property crimes through arrest/citation.
- b. Enforce laws within our authority related to illegal substances.
- c. Identify strategies to prevent activities that are or might cause environmental contamination.
- d. Increase police/safety patrols Downtown and other impacted neighborhoods.
- e. Ensure coordination and consistency among police and private security.

### 3.3 Expand therapeutic court system to help rehabilitate low-level offenders while holding them accountable

- a. Develop a Homeless Court, within the Community Court structure, to offer defendants charged with low-level offenses an opportunity to have case dismissed if they link to services and follow individualized plan approved by judge.
- b. Provide court dates at time of infraction to improve accountability, increase opportunities for offenders to connect to services in lieu of jail and reduce warrants that create barriers to housing.
- c. Expand options for immediate drug treatment and detox to increase success of therapeutic courts in dealing with drug related offenses.
- d. Establish mediation for homeless individuals to address minor disagreements.

### 3.4 Prevent and remove new encampments before they establish

- a. Monitor and prevent camps from establishing on city owned property, unless site is specifically sanctioned and supported (e.g., a mitigation site).
- b. Provide technical assistance to private property owners with encampment activity on their property.
- c. Coordinate with public agencies to develop management plans for properties.
- d. Share information and procedures with peer jurisdictions to help create consistent approaches.

### 3.5 Provide support to businesses and property owners to help address the impacts of adverse behaviors

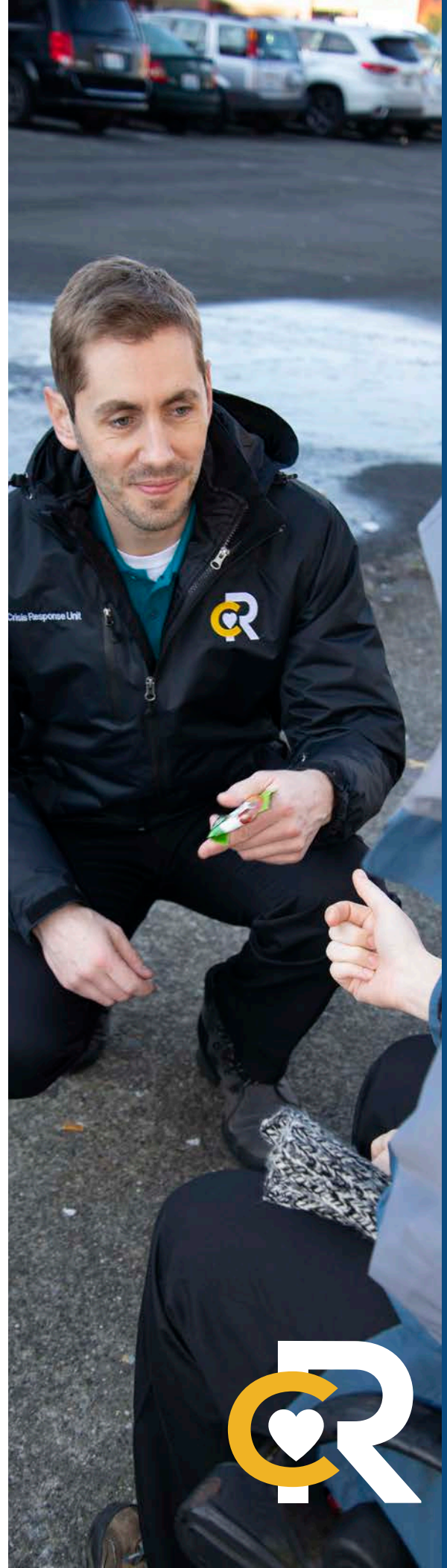
- a. Create a funding program to mitigate impacts of vandalism that is easy and quick to access.
- b. Work with the faith community to support feeding programs while reducing the impacts (e.g., loss of visitor parking, garbage) in Downtown.
- c. Use environmental design to facilitate safety (needle disposal, alley lighting).
- d. Provide training in de-escalation, best practices for limiting adverse behaviors, who to call for help, and trauma-informed care.
- e. Develop tailored good neighbor policies for all facilities that provide homeless services.
- f. Provide opportunities for business/property owners to interact with police, crisis response and outreach workers to build trust and identify solutions.

### 3.6 Establish an inclusive, common set of agreed upon standards for respecting one another Downtown

- a. Include people experiencing homelessness, downtown visitors, property owners, businesses, workers, people uncomfortable coming downtown, law enforcement, service providers, artists, etc. in the process to develop the standards.
- b. Find creative ways to promote the standards and feature artistic renditions throughout Downtown.

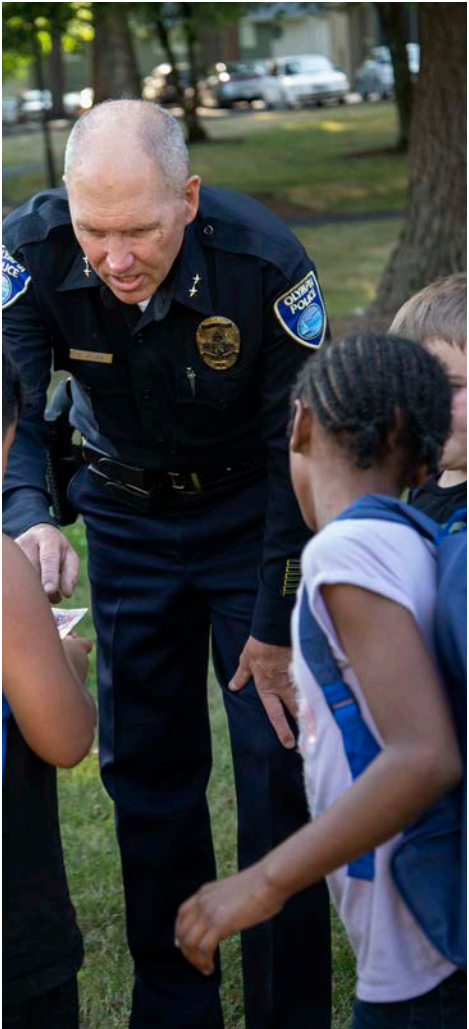
### 3.7 Provide ongoing opportunities for community engagement and education related to homelessness

- a. Report regularly to the community about what is being done and progress being made (i.e., radio, social media, annual events).
- b. Educate on the causes of homelessness and ensure people understand homelessness and adverse behaviors are often separate issues.
- c. Increase government and social service interaction with neighborhoods to share information, build trust, identify solutions and leverage resources.
- d. Provide opportunities for housed and unhoused community members to talk to and learn from each other.
- e. Identify/promote ways public and private sector can address homelessness.



# Road Map Focus Area #3

Increase public health and safety



## Approach to public safety

Since 2018, the Olympia Police Department (OPD) has been evolving its approach to public safety based on new programs and best practices. OPD also works closely with other teams at the City that have a public safety role. Every situation is unique. With the goal of long-term positive change for individuals and the community, the officers and outreach workers in these programs work closely together to determine the best approach to any given situation. Teams include:

### Downtown Walking Patrol

Funded by the Public Safety Levy passed in November of 2017, this team works seven days a week to build relationships; be visible and accessible; participate in Downtown activities and events; and address criminal activity.

### Community Policing Officers

This team of one Sergeant and two officers works with neighbors to creatively address neighborhood concerns; participate in neighborhood activities and events; and address criminal activity.

### Crisis Response Unit (CRU)

This team of trained professionals address issues of mental illness and substance use with the goal of connecting individuals in crisis to social services and diverting them from jail or hospital.

### Familiar Faces Peer Navigators

The Peer Navigators have shared life experience and provide support to 15-20 of the most vulnerable individuals in Downtown who are most resistant to services and resources.

### Downtown Ambassadors

The Ambassadors provide street outreach, business support and hospitality services to residents, business owners, property owners and visitors to Downtown.

### Clean Team/Rapid Response

The Clean Team is responsible for general upkeep, repair, painting, trash pickup and cleaning in and around public spaces in Downtown Olympia. The Rapid Response Team works outside of Downtown picking up trash and monitoring public property for encampment activity.

### Code Enforcement

This team maintains and improves the quality of our community by enforcing laws and codes targeted to solve specific problems within the community.

### Community Court

A non-traditional approach that works to provide practical, targeted solutions rather than traditional punishment for low level offenders.

### Park Rangers

Work in cooperation with the Olympia Police Department to patrol City Parks and educate the public about park rules to help make our parks safe and healthy for the community.

## Message from Interim Police Chief Aaron Jelcick

*"Based on the feedback we received from our community we know that behaviors related to trespassing, disorderly conduct, littering, pedestrian interference, open alcohol and drug use, as well as other actions that impact quality of life are things our community expects the City to address.*

*However, arrests for low level crimes are a last resort; our staff are really good at finding creative ways to serve marginalized populations. The police department has significantly increased alternatives to arrest by utilizing our Crisis Response Unit and our Peer Navigators to assist and support people with addiction and mental illness. They work collaboratively with our Community Court to help identify individuals who may benefit from the services they offer, whether they have entered the criminal justice system or not.*

*This being said, arrest is sometimes the best and/or the only option available to enhance community safety and provide the individual the best odds to make forward progress. If arrest is the option taken, corrections staff strive to find avenues to further the restorative justice process for the arrestee. Our corrections team works with the Crisis Response Unit, behavior health professionals, peer navigators, community court and other social service providers to increase the odds for successful transition of the individual back into society. This includes helping find pathways to recovery, treatment, shelter, etc.*

*We have countless success stories where arrest was the catalyst for breaking the cycle of addiction and for helping those in crisis find a stable and safe place to begin recovery. The criminal justice system is about helping people; this means all people regardless of what path they are on."*



# Results Map Focus Area #3

## Increase public health and safety

By following the strategies identified in this plan, the City and partners are taking essential steps toward our goal of a healthy, safe and housed community. We will use the following measures to track and report on our progress to the community.

We do this/so that...	What we measure
The City responds to public health and safety concerns using multiple tools and techniques.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• \$\$ invested in each of a variety of programs</li></ul>
so that...	
We can employ the right approach to suit the situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Total Crisis Response Unit (CRU) contacts of presenting problem</li><li>• # of Familiar Faces clients and total contacts</li></ul>
so that...	
We effectively and compassionately protect people and public spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Percent of program staff with trauma-informed care training</li><li>• Number of morning wake-ups</li><li>• Warnings vs. arrests within the Downtown Walking Patrol's areas of emphasis (e.g., sit/lie, trespass, marijuana use)</li><li>• Percent of code enforcement cases (opened, resolved) related to encampment activity on private and city-owned property</li></ul>
so that...	
We create long lasting positive change for individuals and the broader community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of Community Court graduates and rate of recidivism</li><li>• Number of known encampments on public and private property</li><li>• Number of location and duration of live-aboards</li></ul>
so that...	
Olympia is one community: healthy, safe and housed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community surveys of people's perceptions of safety</li></ul>



One  
community

Healthy • Safe • Housed

# Ongoing engagement

Throughout the process, the Community Work Group heard participants want continued opportunities to engage one another around the issue of homelessness. Reducing the stigma of homelessness is seen as important work, and with that there should be more opportunities for housed and unhoused members of the community to talk to and learn from one another.

Participants said it was important for service providers and government to have more interaction with neighborhoods to work together to develop shared investment in solutions, such as good neighbor plans. Olympians also want the City to provide regular and transparent communication about its actions, the progress being made and how it's measured.

The City of Olympia will be working closely with Thurston County to provide engagement opportunities. An objective of the County's 5-Year Plan is to hold annual summits and education opportunities. The City is also committed to tracking and reporting on the effectiveness of its programs using the metrics identified in this plan.

## Stay informed



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Email [homelessness@ci.olympia.wa.us](mailto:homelessness@ci.olympia.wa.us)



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## Glossary

**Affordable housing:** Housing that costs no more than 30% of your total income, including utilities. Affordable rental housing usually has a maximum income limit of 60% of median income. Homeownership programs generally allow up to 80% of median income.

**Behavioral health:** An umbrella term for care that addresses any behavioral problems bearing on health including mental health and substance use conditions, stress-linked physical systems, patient activation and health behaviors.

**Chronically homeless:** An unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

**Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development which funds local community development activities with the stated goal of providing affordable housing, anti-poverty programs, and infrastructure development.

**Continuum of Housing:** Concept used by policy makers to consider the broad range of responses available to help a range of households in different tenures to access affordable and appropriate housing.

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**Coordinated Entry System:** Process required by state and federal funders through which people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness can access the crisis response system in a streamlined way, have their strengths and needs quickly assessed, and quickly connect to appropriate, tailored housing and mainstream services within the community or designated region.

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**Diversion:** Strategy that prevents homelessness for people seeking shelter by helping them identify immediate alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connecting them with services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing. Diversion programs can reduce the number of families becoming homeless, the demand for shelter beds, and the size of program wait lists. Diversion programs can also help communities achieve better outcomes and be more competitive when applying for federal funding. Diversion is very similar to rapid rehousing but is typically faster, lower cost, and targeted to the point of system entry.

**Emergency shelter:** Temporary, emergency intervention for people experiencing homelessness.

**Encampment:** Open spaces where one or more individuals experiencing homelessness have set up unsanctioned camping arrangements along with other forms of makeshift sleeping and living areas. These areas are often unsafe and unsanitary.

**Home Fund:** Sales and use tax allowed by RCW 82.14.530 and collected in the City of Olympia since the Home Fund Levy passed in 2017. The Home Fund provides more than \$2 million in new revenue each year to develop and sustain supportive housing and affordable housing in our community.

**Homeless:** The federal definition of homelessness, which comes from United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD defines homeless as (1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence; and (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:

- A supervised publicly or privately-operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill).
- An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

**Homeless prevention:** Formally, the practice of providing short to medium-term supportive services and rent assistance to households at-risk or at imminent risk of homelessness. Prevention connects people with the care and support needed to maintain their housing and achieve a better quality of life. In this plan, the term prevention is also used more generally to describe long-term strategies, like education or economic development, intended to increase individual access to resources and opportunities in life and reduce instances of poverty.

**Housing First:** Housing First is an approach to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements. Supportive services are offered to maximize housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness as opposed to addressing predetermined treatment goals prior to permanent housing entry.

Housing First is a recent innovation in human service programs and social policy. It is an alternative to a system of emergency shelter/transitional housing progressions known as the Continuum of Care, whereby each level moves them closer to "independent housing" (for example: from the streets to a public shelter, and from a public shelter to a transitional housing program, and from there to their own apartment in the community). Housing First moves the homeless individual or household immediately from the streets or homeless shelters into their own apartments.

**Market rate rent:** The prevailing monthly cost for rental housing based on some combination of what the rental market will bear and 30% of the Average Median Income (AMI). Sometimes called "street rents," market rent rates are set by landlords without government restrictions unless public subsidies require a defined level or period of affordability.

**Median income:** This is a statistical number set at the level where half of all households have income above it and half below it. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Regional Economist calculates and publishes this median income data annually in the Federal Register.

**Mitigation site:** Not a formal term in the homeless service lexicon. In Olympia, this is a temporary safe camping site that includes basic hygiene services (portable toilets, potable water, garbage collection), on-site host(s), orderly set-up and a code of conduct and safety protocols.

**Nonprofit housing developer:** A nonprofit organization with a not-for-profit mission that involves the creation, preservation, renovation, operation or maintenance of affordable housing.

**Permanent supportive housing:** Rental apartments or single-family homes that provide individuals and families with a fixed street address and residence along with a set of supportive services and case management. Permanent Supportive (or Supported) Housing (PSH) combines rental or housing assistance with individualized, flexible and voluntary support services for people with high needs related to physical or mental health, developmental disabilities or substance use.

**Privately developed or for-profit housing:** Housing rents or sells at market-rate and is developed and owned by for-profit individuals, partnerships, or corporations. Also called “Market-Rate Housing,” this housing is typically affordable to people at or above the median family income.

**Rapid Re-housing:** Rapid Re-housing is a housing strategy based on the “housing first” philosophy of “rapidly” providing housing resources to people who are newly homeless or on the verge of homelessness. Rapid Re-housing differs from other housing models by having an immediate and primary focus on helping families access and sustain permanent housing as quickly as possible. Rapid re-housing is funded by a HUD initiative called “Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP)”. It is offered without preconditions (such as employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety) and the resources and services provided are typically tailored to the unique needs of the household.

**Regional homeless crisis response system:** A network of social service and government agencies that provide a range of housing and homeless related services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The system is united under a common framework and principles as described in the Thurston County Regional Homeless Crisis Response Plan.

**Shelters:** Also called emergency shelters, provides temporary overnight living accommodations. Shelters are operated by both non-profit organizations or faith communities, with each shelter being administered under a unique set of rules.

**Subsidized housing:** A generic term covering all federal, state or local government programs that reduce the cost of housing for low- and moderate-income residents. Housing can be subsidized in numerous ways— giving tenants a rent voucher, helping homebuyers with down payment assistance, reducing the interest on a mortgage, providing deferred loans to help developers acquire and develop property, giving tax credits to encourage investment in low- and moderate-income housing, authorizing tax- exempt bond authority to finance the housing, providing ongoing assistance to reduce the operating costs of housing, and others.

**Supported sites:** An informal term coined by the Community Work Group to encompass less traditional forms of shelter, such as a mitigation site or an encampment where residents are supported by a range of services, such as trauma-informed outreach workers and/or portable hygiene facilities.

**Supportive housing:** Also referred to as “Permanent Supportive Housing,” this combines affordable housing with individualized health, counseling and employment services for persons with mental illness, chemical dependency, chronic health problems, or other challenges. Supportive housing is considered a solution to homelessness because it addresses its root causes by providing a proven, effective means of re- integrating families and individuals into the community by addressing their basic needs for housing and on-going support.

**Temporary emergency housing:** In the City of Olympia’s development code there is a permit pathway for faith, social service or government organizations to apply for a temporary use permit to host emergency housing facilities (tents, tiny houses) on property they own or control. The code establishes minimum standards for the use and a one-year permit that can be extended for up to two years.

**Transitional housing:** This housing provides stability for residents for a limited time period, usually two weeks to 24 months, to allow them to recover from a crisis such as homelessness or domestic violence before transitioning into permanent housing. Transitional housing often offers supportive services, which enable a person to transition to an independent living situation.

**Trauma informed care:** Trauma Informed Care is a service model that emphasizes understanding, compassion and responding to the effects of all types of trauma experienced by service clients. By recognizing the intersectionality of multiple traumatic events in the lives of homeless people, service providers can avoid re-traumatizing clients who need support and individually-conscious care.

**Unsheltered homelessness:** Those sleeping outside or in places not meant for human habitation. Distinguished from those who sleep in shelters or transitional housing.

**Wrap-around services:** Wrap Around Services is the term given to the practice of providing, or making available, all the various services that a person might need. In the case of homelessness, wrap around services are provided so to stabilize and house a person.

