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City Council

Options to Fund New or Enhanced Homeless Services

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Agenda Item:

Options to Fund New or Enhanced Homeless Services

Issue:

What new or enhanced homeless services should receive Council Goal Money funding?

City Manager's Recommendation:

Provide staff direction on next steps for consideration of use of Council Goal Money to fund enhanced homeless services.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Anna Schlecht, Housing Program Manager

Brian Wilson, Downtown Liaison/Code Enforcement Officer

Background and Analysis:

At the January 8, 2013 meeting, Council requested that staff develop a framework to support a January 15 Council discussion of options to allocate funds to address homelessness. This request arose during a discussion of a proposal to quickly allocate up to \$35,000 from Council Goal funds to provide immediate services to homeless and street dependent people. This staff report provides a range of options for consideration by Council to determine the best use of these funds.

Staff compiled a list of strategies that have been presented by stakeholders to the Council over the past year to be considered as new or enhanced resources to benefit homeless and street-dependent people who currently seek refuge in the downtown core. Additional information and cost estimates will be presented to Council. Following is the list:

New Shelter - Low Barrier: A diverse group of stakeholders has been holding extensive talks on how to create a new, low barrier shelter that provides the maximum number of shelter beds with the minimum ("low barrier") level of entry requirements while maintaining adequate safety standards for residents, staff and volunteers. Recent examples of low barrier shelter include the Occupy Olympia Camp in Heritage Park and the "Cold and Hungry Shelter" that was located in a quonset hut on Devoe Road prior to the creation of Drexel House. Stakeholders involved in these discussions include the County's new Homeless Coordinator;

Interfaith Works, which administers several faith-based volunteer-run shelter programs; the Emma Goldman Youth & Homeless Outreach Project (EGYHOP), Community Youth Services and others.

Existing Shelter - Expanded Capacity: There are several existing shelter programs that could expand their capacity of available shelter beds or better utilize their existing capacities. These programs include the Salvation Army, which typically runs below 65% occupancy at their 58-bed facility as well as their 28-bed overflow shelter. Other options would be to fund increased capacities at one or more of the faith-based cold weather overflow shelters thereby allowing them to increase the number of shelter beds to be offered.

Day & Evening Center with Public Restrooms: Since the closing of the Bread & Roses Advocacy Center on 4th Avenue and the Cherry Street Soup Kitchen & Drop-in Center, there have been requests for a drop-in center that would offer a welcoming space for homeless and street-dependent people to come in from the streets to sit, get warm, use restrooms, access services. Advocates and service providers underscore the need for a designated place for homeless and street-dependent people where they won't violate any ordinances or trespass on private property. Costs of drop-in centers vary widely based on size, facility use agreements, staffing arrangements and other factors.

Public Restrooms - Stand Alone: As a subset of drop-in center resources, there have been requests for public restrooms accessible to homeless and street-dependent people who currently have very few options. Following is a short list of options:

- 1) Expanded Access to Existing Restrooms: Fund security and maintenance for restrooms at the State's Heritage Park facility or the East Bay Plaza facilities to provide 24-hour access;
- 2) Drop-in Center Restrooms: Fund the security and maintenance for a 24-hour access to the restrooms that are part of a drop-in center;
- 3) New Stand-alone Restrooms: Fund the construction, security and maintenance of new public restrooms in appropriate downtown locations; or
- 4) Porta Potties: Fund the rental, security and maintenance of Porta Potties in appropriate locations downtown.

Housing First: Also known as "rapid re-housing", this model is based on quickly providing housing *first* and services *second* to newly homeless people. This model is a departure from the "Continuum of Care" approach where homeless people enter the system through emergency shelter and progress through transitional housing until they are deemed ready for permanent housing. Many studies show better outcomes by rapidly re-housing newly homeless people, who stabilize their lives more quickly. "Housing first" is typically funded through housing subsidies averaging \$700 - \$1,000 per month or \$8,400 - \$12,000 per year per household.

Wet Housing: This emerging model is a subset of "housing first" in which immediate housing is provided for homeless chronic inebriates who are high users of publicly funded emergency services. Differing from more traditional housing models that require sobriety prior to placement, "wet housing" is designed to take chronic inebriates off the street and get them directly into housing, by-passing "high-barrier" entry requirements. Studies have shown tremendous tax-dollar savings, with a regional example of the 75-bed, 1811 Eastlake Facility in Seattle that provides supportive housing to 75 formerly homeless men and women with chronic alcohol addiction and has saved the City of Seattle up to 75% of previous costs of emergency services. Models for wet housing vary from large and expensive stand-alone residential facilities to rental subsidy based scattered-site group homes situated in residential neighborhoods. Costs per resident of the Seattle facility can be provided at a later date; costs of a voucher-based system would mirror "housing

first" costs with the additional expenses of supportive services.

Once Council designates their priorities and timelines to make these allocations, staff will prepare a "Request For Proposals" or RFP process based on the recent Homeless Prevention Program RFP.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Downtown business community and neighborhood association, other neighborhood and business associations, other bodies of government whose residents may be seeking shelter and services in the downtown core of Olympia.

Options:

Hold a discussion of options to determine how to allocate funds for new or enhanced homeless services.

Financial Impact:

\$35,000 from Council Goal funds.