



Ad Hoc Committee on Housing Affordability

Homeless Services System and Affordable Housing Options Briefing

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Title

Homeless Services System and Affordable Housing Options Briefing

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to Committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive a report on current needs, resources and gaps in the homeless services system and affordable housing options.

Report

Issue:

Whether to receive a report on the current needs, resources, and gaps in the homeless services system and affordable housing options?

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Presenter(s):

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Background and Analysis:

The Council's Ad Hoc Committee adopted its initial work plan at its first meeting, held March 10, 2017. That work plan called for a number of staff reports on 1) available resources; 2) needs data; and, 3) a gap analysis of the Homeless Services System and Affordable Housing Options as they exist today. Efforts on all three goals are underway via a number of current initiatives as identified below.

1) Downtown Strategy - Homeless Action Plan On a parallel track, the Olympia Downtown

Strategy final report included a Homeless Chapter that identified two primary action steps:

- a) **Downtown Homeless Action Plan:** “Convene a broad group, including social services providers, business owners, housed and homeless downtown residents, Downtown business patrons, agency/City/County representatives and other relevant stakeholders to develop an action plan leading to a more coordinated response to homelessness and street dependency and the impacts to Downtown.”
- b) **Regional Dialogue:** “Initiate a discussion with regional policy makers about future social service siting, funding and support needs throughout the region.”

2) Ten-Year Homeless Housing Plan The County has facilitated the update of the Thurston County 10-Year Homeless Housing Plan as required by the State’s Homeless Housing and Assistance Act 2005. Reconfigured as a Five-Year Plan, this plan will examine current homeless needs and resources and present strategies to increase housing capacities; standardize best practices, and a new approach to fostering regional public policies on homeless and affordable housing. This draft is not ready for release; however, County representatives will present an overview of the goals and strategies in a separate presentation this evening.

3) 2017 Homeless Census Report The County anticipates that the State will finalize the 2017 results of the Point in Time Homeless Census soon. This report will present the County’s progress in reducing homelessness to date. This effort has monitored homeless each year since 2006, when 441 homeless people were counted, spiking up to 976 in the year 2010 and then coming down to 586 in 2016. It appears that homelessness is once again on the rise in Thurston County after several years of modest reduction.

4) Homeless Service System Gap Analysis The most current formal needs assessment is presented in the “Homeless Service System Gaps Analysis”, dated 2013, which was completed by former Thurston County Homeless Coordinator Theresa Slusher. This document will serve as an excellent starting point for an update. Some of this work will likely be undertaken in efforts identified below.

Other points of reference include two charts that represent the total shelter capacity, “**Olympia Area Homeless Shelters**” shows that there are a total winter/cold weather capacity of 210 emergency shelter beds with a year round inventory of 138 shelter beds, some of which are designated for specific demographic groups. The chart titled, “**Olympia Area Shelter Capacity and Utilization**” shows that while the year-round shelter capacities is used at a 90% efficiency rate, the winter / cold weather shelter capacity is only used at 44% efficiency.

One of the presentations you will receive this evening will be from the Interfaith Works Warming Center on their operations over the past winter season. Most notably, their average number of participants was 165 people daily, with a one time high point of 260 participants in one day.

Initial Gaps In the absence of a more formal gaps analysis, there are several key gaps impacting

single adults that are readily identifiable:

- 1) **Warming / Day Center** For the past several years, an ad hoc effort headed up by Interfaith Works provides a critically needed respite. However, in the shift to emphasizing “Housing First,” a warming center or other day center facility has not been a funding priority at the regional level.
- 2) **Emergency Shelter** As identified above, all the available data suggests there are at least 200 unsheltered people for whom there is a lack of any current capacity, either shelter or housing, to accommodate.
- 3) **Coordinated Entry** The current scheme of coordinated entry relies upon a specific agency to coordinate access to housing and services for each of the three key demographic groups - Community Youth Services for youth; Family Support Center for families with children; and, SideWalk for single adults. Yet, due to the lack of funding, SideWalk’s hours of operation are limited, which in turn limits the access for single adults.

Balanced Analysis The previous reports and studies described above reveal there is a “triple impact” of homelessness:

First and foremost, homelessness impacts people, disrupting the lives of families and individuals who lose their homes for a variety of reasons.

Second, homelessness impacts local governments of all sizes, requiring public officials to identify and prioritize precious resources to fund effective responses.

Third, homelessness impacts the surrounding neighborhood given that the lack of adequate homeless resources often leaves homeless people to fend for themselves, forcing them to develop makeshift accommodations that may create negative impacts. The Downtown Strategy identified this impact as significant and that it requires new approaches.

Opportunities to Collaborate There are numerous groups and plans that make up the current system of services to those experiencing homelessness. There are opportunities to collaborate and better align these plans and groups:

- The pending Five-Year Homeless Housing Plan is exploring innovative new approaches that will be presented tonight.
- The Thurston Thrives Housing Action Team’s process to produce the “Housing Pipeline” approach
- The Homeless Housing Hub is moving into a more active role as the Continuum of Care committee.
- The Providence Community Care Center will bring an entirely new approach to service street

dependent people in the urban hub.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Affordable Housing has opportunities to coordinate with these and other groups toward a stronger policy development focus to homeless coordination.

The City of Olympia can work with regional partners to develop a more current and comprehensive gaps analysis that could frame a regional approach to addressing services to those experiencing homelessness.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

All Olympia neighborhoods are impacted either directly or indirectly by homelessness and the need for more affordable housing.

Options:

Receive a report on current needs, resources and gaps on the homeless services system and Affordable Housing Options.

Financial Impact:

There are numerous financial impacts of homelessness identified throughout this staff report. They include City of Olympia funding for housing, facilities and services to people experiencing homelessness; emergency response to incidents and encampments; and support for downtown businesses affected through programs such as Downtown Ambassadors and Clean Team.

Attachments:

Interfaith Works Warming Center Survey