

HOUSING-FOCUSED SHELTER / HOUSING CENTER

Frequently Asked Questions and Background Information

The City Council voted to develop a housing focused facility modeled after proven strategies, identified by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, that help people get into permanent housing as quickly as possible. It will be equipped and resourced to help people make a plan for permanent housing as soon as they enter. The focus is on providing housing, social services and other resources to get people housed and not simply offering a temporary bed. The center will provide services for people living there and will not be operated as a drop-in location. People will be fully supported and connected to resources with their needs accommodated in a safe, secure, welcoming environment as they work toward becoming stabilized in permanent housing. This vision and plan, which is transforming other “shelter” concepts, is of a true neighborhood and community asset, offering Austinites an alternative to living under bridges, in greenbelts or alleys.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is housing-focused or housing-first shelter?

Housing-first shelter is a model by which permanent housing is the priority. The guiding principle is that individuals must first have access to basic needs such as food and shelter before they can engage in, and benefit from, social service programs. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) provides additional information on the [Housing First](#) model.

A Housing-Focused Shelter/ Housing Center is:

- Secure, welcoming, and temporary place for people to live that provides the services they need to get into permanent housing as quickly as possible
- Services are provided for 100% of the people living at the center, tailored to their needs
- Services are geared to allow self-sufficiency and meet daily living needs
- This is not a drop-in center; services are only available for people while staying at the center
- Individuals not staying at the center are not allowed to gather outside
- People are referred by agencies serving homeless individuals, with the goal of providing a shelter for people staying in nearby encampments
- There is no drop-in, intake location

2. What factors were considered when recommending a location?

An ideal location is in proximity to areas where individuals experiencing homelessness are living, accessible to public transportation, near major arterials, and with health care facilities nearby. The Council resolution also directed that the location not be directly adjacent to neighborhoods.

3. Will this be the same as the ARCH or is this replacing the ARCH? Is the ARCH moving to this location?

This facility, proposed as the South Austin Housing Center, will operate as a new and separate shelter with the aim of providing housing-focused case management services for 100% of guests. It is considered a best practice to provide multiple housing centers that are geographically dispersed

throughout the city. While both facilities will be owned by the City of Austin, the ARCH is managed by Front Steps.

It is not yet determined which agency will manage the South Austin Housing Center. The City will initiate a procurement process to identify the operator of the South Austin Housing Center and as that timeline is developed, it will be communicated with the community at-large and with nearby residents, neighborhood associations, businesses, and schools.

4. How will this facility accept clients? Is it drop-in or by arrangement? How will the City manage shelter overflow at this location?

This facility will be part of a larger coordinated entry process and will not be a drop-in center. Individuals not staying at the Center will not be allowed to gather outside.

Coordinated assessments will be conducted to help determine which guests will live at the Housing Center. *(There is no intake location, agency staff generally assess homeless individuals' needs at the agency locations, and coordinate among all the agencies)* Housing-first case management services will be reserved for those staying at the Housing Center.

In keeping with best practices recommended by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) to provide case management services to 100% of the guests at the Center; services will not be available for anyone on a walk-in or wait-list basis. Guests will be referred from our partner agencies through the coordinated assessment process.

5. Will there be an increase in panhandling?

We do not expect an increase in panhandling. Guests of the Housing Center will have access to support services needed to exit from the Center and into housing as quickly and efficiently as possible. Services will be geared to allow self-sufficiency and tailored to the needs of the individual.

6. Will this facility cause increased foot traffic to encampments in the green belt?

The location of this property in close proximity to areas where individuals experiencing homelessness reside, including areas such as nearby greenbelts, made this location appealing. The goal of this property is to provide a housing option to nearby encampments, not increase foot traffic.

7. How will facility staff/operators address the issues of camping in the area?

The facility will be private property and trespassing will be prohibited and enforced. The adjacent properties are also private. Additionally, there is limited public right-of-way adjacent to the property.

8. What opportunities will there be for residents and businesses to give input?

It is the City's intent to be respectful of area businesses and neighbors while also respecting the needs of those most vulnerable in our community; as such, we welcome input from all interested stakeholders. The Housing Center will be managed as a good neighbor and restrictions will be placed on the property, including but not limited to securing the property, not allowing camping, limits of no more than 100 beds, and services only for people living there.

9. Who will manage the shelter, how much will it cost, and how will we pay for it?

The Council directed the City Manager to establish a scope of services needed for the shelter, initiate a procurement process for those services, and identify available funds in the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget. The Council will vote on the exact amount as part of the budget in September.

10. Why would we do this now?

We have had numerous recommendations and proposed plans regarding providing Housing-Focused Shelter. National and local experts have weighed-in and provided their understanding and recommendations. Now is the time for action to be taken and for the community to take concrete steps towards solutions.

11. Is this an immediate need? And will those in need of shelter really use it?

There has been an obvious increase in the number of unsheltered people in our community. The design of the shelter will have the greatest impact by being tailored to types of shelter users in our community, and data shows that there is absolutely a large population that will utilize an emergency shelter¹.

12. What is the proposed timeline?

Staff will begin negotiations to procure the property upon City Council approval. All due diligence will be conducted to consider the purchase of the property, including but not limited to inspection, appraisal, environmental inspection, etc. Staff will also estimate costs for re-modeling the facility and ensuring it meets all code requirements. The procurement process will initiate to re-design and re-construct the property interior. The zoning process will begin to appropriately zone the property for housing use. It is estimated the zoning and procurement work will occur concurrently over a three-month period once the property has been acquired. The construction timeline will depend on what renovations are identified as being necessary.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

ACTION: The Council voted to approve Housing-Focused Shelter and support services for people experiencing homelessness with the intent of providing a pathway to permanent housing. Council passed unanimously a resolution on January 31, 2019 to begin the process of exploring this solution, and unanimously passed a resolution on June 6, 2019 to implement the program.

The City's next steps include:

- Purchase of property identified by staff for a Housing-Focused Shelter/Housing Center
- Include funding to operate the shelter and services in the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget including funds for a Housing First Rapid Rehousing and/or Permanent Supportive Housing rental assistance and support services program for persons living in the shelter; and
- Initiate the procurement of a service provider to operate the shelter

CHALLENGE: The number of people experiencing homelessness is increasing in our community

- Over 1000 unsheltered individuals in Austin on any given day²
- Over 7,498 individuals who experienced homelessness in 2017³

- 10% increase in individuals experiencing homelessness from 2017 to 2019⁴
- 23.2% increase in number of persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness from 2017 to 2019⁵

Individuals living unsheltered experience exposure, malnutrition, and unhygienic conditions which increases the likelihood of victimization, poor physical and mental health, and public health consequences.

There are not enough emergency shelter beds available to people who need it. Some in need are turned away from emergency shelters because of lack of capacity and barriers to entry, which also discourage others from even attempting to get in.⁶ This issue will not resolve itself and will only get more critical as we have seen from other cities experiencing similar growth.

POLICY AND PLANNING ALIGNMENT: Extensive research, review and evaluation of our current challenges support the need for Housing-Focused Shelter with services necessary for a path to permanent housing.

The *Austin Strategic Direction 2023* identifies homelessness as an indicator of the city's economic opportunities and resources that enable us to thrive in our community. Reducing homelessness has been established by the City Council as the top priority for the city's Strategic Plan.

The *Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint Key Actions* include "Investing in Housing for Those Most in Need", which calls for Austin to adopt a balanced approach to provide affordable housing resources for low-income workers, seniors, people with disabilities and the thousands of people experiencing homelessness.

Austin's Action Plan to End Homelessness states that outreach, shelter and transitional housing are the critical front line of our community's efforts to ending homelessness, helping people meet basic survival needs while helping connect them to those housing resources and other services.

According to the *National Alliance to End Homelessness*, an effective Crisis Response System provides immediate and easy access to safe and decent shelter to anyone who needs it and aims to re-house people as quickly as possible.⁷ A systemic approach to ending homelessness coordinates a process that moves people from homelessness to housing by having shelter and rapid re-housing to scale that is aligned with best practices, creating a flow through the system that balances temporary help with permanent housing solutions.⁸

BENEFIT: Case management and support services are most effective when they can be provided consistently, creating a more direct path to permanent housing. Austin/Travis County dedicates slightly fewer beds to emergency shelter than the rest of Texas and the U.S.⁹ Providing Housing-Focused Shelter to individuals experiencing homelessness is a fundamental step towards ending homelessness.

Homelessness results in a costly crisis center cycle (Hospital stays, ER visits, EMS transport, jail bookings). In 2017 the Average Annual Costs for Top 250 High-Cost Homeless Users of Public Crisis Services in Travis County was \$225,000 per person.¹⁰

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- ¹ “Recommendations for the Re-design of Emergency Shelters in Austin”, National Alliance to End Homelessness, p.8
- ² Austin’s Action Plan to End Homelessness, p.15
- ³ “The Homelessness Crisis in Austin”, Ending Community Homelessness Coalition,
<http://www.austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Homelessness-Factsheet.pdf> , p.1
- ⁴ Ibid
- ⁵ “Homelessness in Austin/Travis County: 2019 Annual Count Results and Plan to End Homelessness”, Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO), p.1
- ⁶ Austin’s Action Plan to End Homelessness, p.15
- ⁷ “Best Practices of Emergency Shelters: The Critical Role of Emergency Shelter in an Effective Crisis Response System”; National Alliance to End Homelessness, p.20.
- ⁸ “The Critical Role of Housing-focused Emergency Shelter in Austin’s Homeless Response System”; National Alliance to End Homelessness, pp.28-36
- ⁹ “Recommendations for the Re-design of Emergency Shelters in Austin”, National Alliance to End Homelessness, p.10
- ¹⁰ “Homelessness in Austin: Current Needs and Gaps Report”, Ending Community Homelessness Coalition,
<http://www.austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/170901-Austin-Homelessness-Needs-Gaps-Analysis-2017.pdf> , p.15.