



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: J. Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager
Chris Shorter, Assistant City Manager
Veronica Briseño, Director, Economic Development Department and
former Interim Homeless Strategy Officer

DATE: August 5, 2019

SUBJECT: Update from the Homeless Strategy Office

The Homeless Strategy Office, along with many other City departments, continues its work on issues surrounding homelessness, which is Council's highest priority. This memo provides an update on several new initiatives which require our focused attention to execute both on-time and with success. Moving forward, it is the intent of the Homeless Strategy Office to provide regular updates to Council.

Homeless Strategy Officer On-Boarding

As announced to Council on Monday, August 5th, Lori Pampilo Harris has been hired as the permanent Homeless Strategy Officer (HSO). Lori's start date is September 9th, and she is eager and excited to work alongside City departments and City partners to achieve transformational results for this complex issue. Although Lori has met most of the City department and partner leadership working on homelessness solutions, she will need some time to fully engage with these individuals and the role of their departments and organizations. A reception will be planned so that Council will have an opportunity to meet Lori, and details for the reception will be provided to Council as soon as they are finalized.

Homeless Strategy Officer Transition

Effective August 1, 2019, Veronica Briseño transitioned to her role as Director of Economic Development Department (EDD). Assistant City Manager Rodney Gonzales continues to be the primary Executive Lead for the City's Homelessness Initiatives, and Assistant City Manager Chris Shorter is in a supporting role as most of the contractual services for these initiatives are under his purview. Kristi Samilpa, Executive Assistant to ACM Gonzales, has been on special assignment to support Veronica during her interim role as HSO. Kristi worked alongside Veronica this entire interim period and will assume increased responsibilities related to homelessness to assist with a seamless on-boarding for the permanent HSO. Kristi is available to be the primary point of contact for Council through this transition period. There are a multitude of City staff who work on various aspects of homelessness services and initiatives to address homelessness. Likewise, many City staff are focused on making more affordable rental housing available for persons experiencing homelessness. Every available resource, including grant funding, is being put toward homelessness initiatives, and the Proposed FY 2019/20 Budget puts forward a significant increase in funding.

Creating Housing-Focused Shelters and Affordable Rental Housing

Collectively, we will devote the bulk of our attention to and prioritize those initiatives which house people experiencing homelessness. As new initiatives are considered, we will ask, “How does this get a person into housing?” before acting on those initiatives. Our goal is to utilize housing-focused shelters to lead individuals into stable housing as quickly as possible. In conjunction with and through bonds and other funds, we will develop affordable housing units to receive individuals from housing-focused shelters. By focusing on affordable rental housing supported by case management and other services, we can reduce the amount of time a person is unsheltered or in a housing-focused shelter.

New Initiative: South Austin Housing Center

The property at 1112 W. Ben White is now under acquisition. As is the case for other housing-focused shelters, Austin Public Health is leading the development of a request for proposal for management services at the new center. The goal is to have the new 100-bed center operational within the second calendar quarter of 2020.

New Initiatives: Salvation Army Rathgeber Center and Salvation Army Downtown Center

On August 8th, City Council will consider one-time funding for two key initiatives between the City of Austin and the Salvation Army. The first initiative is the new 212-bed Rathgeber Center, which is designed to provide emergency shelter, meals, clothing, basic needs, case management, connection to housing resources, employment services, child care, child/family therapy, and assistance with life skills. Families from the Salvation Army Downtown Center will be transferred to the new Center. City staff is proposing one-time funding of \$1 million so that the center can begin operations. City staff is also proposing one-time funding of \$500,000 for the second initiative so that the Salvation Army Downtown Center can expand its case managements services to individuals experiencing homelessness.

New Affordable Rental Housing Units

At the August 8th City Council meeting, new loans will be considered to finance affordable housing for low-income households (at or below 50% MFI for rental and 80% MFI for ownership). In FY 2018-2019, an estimated 722 units of affordable housing will be financed through loans approved throughout this fiscal year. This includes loan agreements to be considered on August 8th, 315 of which are supportive housing and 45 of which are Continuum of Care for people experiencing homelessness. These units are in addition to the existing inventory of nearly 12,000 affordable units that are funded or incentivized by the City of Austin.

New Funding within the Fiscal Year 2019/20 Proposed Budget and Developing a Work Plan

The Fiscal Year 2019/20 Proposed Budget contains a historic \$62.7 million budget to address homelessness in Austin; \$42 million of planned spending from the 2018 affordable housing bond for affordable housing initiatives; and \$14.4 million for the Housing Trust Fund for permanent supporting housing, housing rehabilitation, and land acquisition for affordable housing, as well as other initiatives to fund Council policy priorities. All these spending measures will be critical toward the City’s efforts on homelessness. A work plan for encompassing new initiatives funded through the budget and existing initiatives will be developed so that the community is informed of the City’s efforts and to lay out an implementation schedule. The work plan will be developed with the assistance of community partners, and the key initiatives listed above will not be paused while this work plan is being developed.

In conclusion, the Homeless Strategy Office is committed to solving the issue of providing housing for persons experiencing homelessness, and additional updates will be provided as we continue our work.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Copy: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
 CMO Executive Team

City Directors and Assistant Directors