



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Rodney Gonzalez, Assistant City Manager 
Lori Pampilo Harris, Homeless Strategy Officer 

DATE: October 4, 2019

SUBJECT: October Update to Mayor and Council from Homeless Strategy Office

This memorandum provides an update on cross-departmental efforts to address homelessness that leads to our community's goal to ensure that every person has safe, permanent and stable housing. The Homeless Strategy Office (HSO) will be a hub for cross-departmental efforts already working on this issue. Our Office is becoming familiar with the multitude of contractual relationships between the City and community partners for the provision of housing and services. The HSO has met with many City departments, community partners, and Council offices to discuss our community's successes and challenges regarding homelessness. We have also become familiar with the ECHO (Ending Community Homelessness Organization) "[Austin's Action Plan to End Homelessness](#)" which the City Council endorsed on April 26, 2018 as the blueprint for preventing and ending homelessness in our community. The HSO seeks to provide guidance to the entire system along with providing City leadership with data-driven recommendations to develop best practice-oriented actions.

FY 2019/20 Adopted Budget Allocation

The City Council recently adopted the FY 2019/20 Budget which included \$62.7 million allocated toward homelessness services. This historic allocation emphasizes the fact that preventing and ending homelessness is Council's highest priority. The funds allocated are spread across 11 City departments and through 14 funding sources. As coordinator of City strategies across the organization, one of this office's many goals is to ensure that funding is targeted toward programs which effectively prevent and end homelessness, and to provide services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The coordination of City funding also includes ensuring that City-funded programs and services are aligned with the action plan developed by the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO).

ECHO's "Austin's Action Plan to End Homelessness" - Background

Over the course of 2017, ECHO, the Austin/Travis County Continuum of Care lead agency, convened elected officials, housing and service providers, community stakeholders, and persons with lived experiences of homelessness to develop the "Austin's Action Plan to End Homelessness." The Action Plan aims to ensure that homelessness is a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience. The Action Plan delineates five (5) critical methods and 78 strategies across each method to effectively prevent and end homelessness:

- Outreach services and shelters;
- Addressing disparities;
- Providing housing and support services;
- Strengthening our response system; and
- Building community commitment from both the public and private sectors.

The ECHO Action Plan is a single, community-wide plan to address homelessness which guides not just the City of Austin's efforts to address homelessness, but also other community providers, partners, and stakeholders. On April 26, 2018, City Council endorsed ECHO's Action Plan via [Resolution No. 20180426-030](#) as an evolving blueprint for preventing and ending homelessness in our community, including the nine (9) suggested action steps for the City of Austin to take in support of the strategic plan. The endorsement of the Action Plan also fulfills a recommendation from the December 2017 City Audit, "[Homelessness Assistance Audit Series: Coordination of the City's Homelessness Assistance Efforts.](#)"

A goal of the HSO will be to serve as the City's primary contact for ECHO as they implement the action plan and to guide City programs and services to align with the action plan. When discussions of new City strategies take place, HSO will coordinate with ECHO to assess the alignment of the new strategies with the action plan. Through these efforts, we can avoid duplication of services and provide more efficient services.

Immediate Next Step

HSO recommends that the ECHO Action Plan be the guiding document for City of Austin strategies and investments to effectively prevent and end homelessness. In reviewing [Resolution No. 20190620-184](#), recent [Council Message Board](#) posts, and the draft resolution considered at the September 19, 2019 City Council meeting, it is evident that City Council is seeking a progress update on that adopted plan.

The HSO recommends a work session with Council to receive a progress update of the ECHO Action Plan to ensure that the Action Plan continues to meet the City Council's desired outcomes. This Office's goal over the next 2-3 weeks will be to work with ECHO to provide a joint presentation at this recommended work session. The presentation would include a review of the Action Plan strategies, a delineation of additional investments needed, and updates on implementation efforts.

Measuring Success

ECHO's Action Plan also identified six (6) performance measures to track the progress of effectively ending homelessness in our community. The work session will be an opportunity for Council to offer feedback on those performance measures. Following the work session, the HSO would then work in earnest with ECHO on implementation timelines and responsibilities, as well as recommended strategies from the Action Plan that the City should prioritize and invest in.

Furthermore, we have had preliminary discussions with ECHO and our partners on creating an action plan to address solutions for those experiencing homelessness outside of the ARCH and under Ben White. Through the leadership of the Continuum of Care led by ECHO, and supported by the City, we can identify key agencies to participate within a created action plan and determine how coordination among those agencies will be managed. It is extremely critical that providing adequate time to organize stakeholders and develop an action plan will increase the likelihood of success. During this work session, we will provide an update on that action plan.

Recognition of Current Efforts by Partner Departments

The HSO would also like to recognize the collaborative efforts by our partner departments in addressing the needs of our community. These partnerships have led to successful programs such as:

- **Workforce First** provides temporary employment opportunities for individuals experiencing homelessness, the [expansion of which you approved](#) yesterday. Within its first year of operation, 22 participants in this program were able to be moved into stable housing. It is important to recognize Austin Public Health, Parks and Recreation Department, and Watershed Protection Departments for their efforts.

- **[Navigation Center Outreach Pilot Program](#)**. Within a five-week period, the pilot program assisted over 300 individuals and made over 35 referrals to different organizations and resources. Austin Public Health, Downtown Austin Community Court, and the Office of Design and Delivery helped make this pilot possible. We will be looking at the results of this pilot closely to see how they can help our efforts to tackle homelessness across Austin.
- **[Violet Bag Pilot Program](#)**. The pilot program is focusing on sites around Austin with high volumes of trash. Individuals within the homeless community are encouraged to use these bags to collect garbage for weekly pick-up by Austin Resource Recovery. This pilot includes efforts from Watershed Protection, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and Integral Care. When the pilot ends at the end of the month, the program will be re-evaluated and recommendations will be made about expanding the program city-wide.
- **Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC)**. Earlier this week the DACC celebrated its 20-year anniversary. DACC utilizes a client-centered and housing focused intensive case management model to help individuals experiencing homelessness achieve long-term stability. Through DACC's Community Service Restitution Crews, over 717 acres across the city have been serviced by beautification & municipal purpose projects, to include assistance with homeless encampment cleanups. These crews also help with cultivation of small food crops at DACC's Edgar Fincher III Program Garden which are donated to social service and nonprofit agencies that provide meals to those experiencing homelessness.
- **Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST)**. HOST is a multi-disciplinary team staffed by Austin-Travis County EMS, the Austin Police Department, the Downtown Austin Community Court and Integral Care. Members of the HOST team, which include police officers, paramedics, case managers and social workers, work with individuals experiencing homelessness in downtown Austin and the West Campus area to assist with housing, medical and social service needs. The goal of the HOST team's efforts is to connect individuals that are homeless with services that connect them to permanent housing and improve their health and wellbeing.
- **EMS & Community Care – Street Med Partnership**. A collaboration between Austin Travis County EMS and Community Care Health Center's Street Med team to deliver medical care to the homeless in Austin and Travis County. Through this partnership, EMS paramedics partner with a nurse practitioner, physician assistant or physician from Community Care to provide healthcare services to those that are homeless and living on the streets. Services provided include acute and chronic medical care, case management and linkages to services that work to find permanent housing for those that need it.
- **EMS's [Pop-Up Resource Clinics](#)**. In collaboration with numerous other internal and external partners, these clinics occur every month and offer services such as Veteran's Assistance, printing of Medical Assistance Program (MAP) card onsite, doctor's appointments, Coordinated Assessments for housing, mental health assistance, substance use counseling and treatment/ harm reduction interventions, HIV/Hep C testing, ServicePoint Cards, and pet supplies including microchipping. The program which began in July 2017, is reducing the time it takes to receive these services from 8-9 months to an afternoon. Between 100 and 120 clients are served. Over 2,000 interventions have been completed onsite, and of those 500 were funded through Central Health.
- **ARCH Updates**. APH continues to convene Downtown Strategies workgroup to address the crowd outside the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH). This workgroup includes representatives from Austin Police Department (APD), Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC), mental health and substance use treatment staff, homeless service providers, and others. Four outreach & engagement events were held on the

ARCH patio/sidewalk over six months, engaging individuals in problem-solving conversations and connecting them to services.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness continues to provide consultant services and technical support to Front Steps in the planning and implementation of changes in shelter operations and service delivery at the ARCH. Some changes include:

- Reducing the number of beds/mats and increasing case management to all clients
 - Housing-focused shelter with emphasis on quickly moving individuals out of homelessness and into stable housing
 - Coordinated Assessment administered for all clients
 - Shift from nightly lottery to reservation system to provide clients short-term stability and an opportunity to focus on goals for housing, income, long term stability (effective August 9, 2019).
 - Day Resource Center services available only to shelter clients
- **Underpass Cleanups.** Earlier this year, the City assumed responsibility for cleaning trash and debris at more than 60 highway underpass locations. In previous years this service was provided by the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT). In the spring the City entered into contract with the same vendor used by TXDOT to perform cleanup services. The contract for cleaning services is \$390,000 annually. The clean-ups began in late May and are performed monthly.

The clean-ups are performed by contract workers, not City of Austin staff. While people at these locations may be experiencing homelessness, the City does *not* consider this process “homeless camp cleanups”—these services are focused on removing debris and items in the ROW to ensure public health and safety. These services would occur regardless as to whether people experiencing homelessness were present or not.

Before each cleaning process begins notifications are posted at each site at least 72 hours in advance. No individuals are removed from these locations—only trash, debris, and unattended items left in the public right-of-way. The City avoids removing any personal items and works with any individuals living in these areas to allow proper time to remove tents and other items before cleaning occurs. The City is considering increasing the frequency of these cleanings at certain locations that have seen significant levels of trash and debris.

In conclusion, the HSO deeply appreciates and respects the sense of urgency around this issue. We’ve listened to and understand the urgency conveyed in all voices, including those who are currently experiencing homelessness. The creation of the HSO as coordinator of City efforts is a positive step for our community, and I look forward to working with ECHO and other community partners and organizations to support, co-lead, remove barriers to success and serve as a City point person as they contribute to housing and services to prevent and effectively end homelessness in our community.

CC: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
CMO Executive Team
City Department Directors and Assistant Directors