



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager
Chris Shorter, Assistant City Manager

DATE: January 17, 2020

SUBJECT: Update on Homelessness Initiatives

This memorandum is a continuation of updates on cross-departmental initiatives to address issues surrounding homelessness.

Realignment of the Homeless Strategy Officer and Creation of a Homelessness Services Division

2019 was a year of transition in the City's organizational alignment for how staff works on homelessness initiatives both internally among departments and externally with partner agencies. The year began with the hiring for the Homeless Strategy Officer (HSO) position, which was created as part of the Fiscal Year 2018/19 Adopted Budget. The position was filled in on an interim basis in March 2019 and permanently in September 2019. In the following month, a Priority Area framework was developed to further advance the City organization work on homelessness initiatives in coordination with the HSO.

The individuals serving as HSO, the individuals serving as leads for Priority Areas, the City Manager's Executive team, and countless other City staff have all contributed positively to the coordination of work assignments, roles, and responsibilities. Staff took this period of work assignment stabilization as an opportunity to conduct a review of whether better approaches could be achieved to resource and support the collective homelessness strategies and how else City efforts should be aligned to effectively address the challenges associated with homelessness. As with all new efforts, periodic reviews provide opportunities to adjust so that long-term sustainability can be assured. The review was conducted toward the end of 2019 and included feedback from various City departments and community partners. Key changes resulting from the review include:

- Formalizing the City Manager's Executive Leadership team comprised of Deputy City Manager Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, Assistant City Manager Chris Shorter, Assistant City Manager Rodney Gonzales and Austin Public Health Director Stephanie Hayden. The team will provide a consistent, high-level review of strategic progress through the City's operational work as well as the work performed by the City's external consultants.
- Creating a Homelessness Services Division (HSD) within Austin Public Health (APH) to be led by an Assistant Director-level position and shifting this high-level city-wide work to the Health & Environment/Culture & Lifelong Learning strategic outcome under the purview of Assistant City Manager Chris Shorter.
- Assigning three full-time equivalent staff positions to the HSD for various functions, including administration, data analysis, and best practices/policy research. In addition, assigning one full-

time staff position from the Communications and Public Information Office to the HSD and hiring temporary positions as needed to implement initiatives.

- Utilizing external consultants to assist with high-level strategy efforts. The consultants will assist the City and community partners in addressing and evaluating needs while considering national trends and changes at the federal level.

Scope of Work of the Homelessness Services Division

In addition to serving as the single point-of-contact for homelessness-related activities, the HSD will be authorized to convene and direct, where appropriate, the current Priority Area Leads and community partners to ensure all City efforts are coordinated, aligned and in legal compliance. The HSD will have oversight of project prioritization and resource allocation regarding the City's homelessness efforts in alignment with the priorities established by management and the policy direction set forth by City Council.

Additional scope of work includes:

- Provide city-wide operational coordination of all homelessness-focused services and activities.
- Ensure all work has an equity focus.
- Convene internal and external partners as needed.
- Work with the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO), the lead Continuum of Care agency.
- Research best practices and national trends in homeless service delivery.
- Work with non-profit partners on population specific initiatives.
- Work with national consultants on items such as evaluating contract effectiveness, enhancing diversion system supports, and assistance with other initiatives.
- Coordinate and recommend training for staff.
- Help to build community capacity for housing-focused solutions such as rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing.
- Provide guidance in the resources required for new strategies such as the motel conversion approach, and new service delivery models.
- When applicable, serve as the City liaison with partners for new shelter or encampment areas set up by external entities.

Utilization of External Consultants and Contractors

As mentioned above, external consultants will be hired to assist the City in its efforts. Funding was approved in the Fiscal Year 2019-20 budget for an independent contractor to review current contracts and grants for homeless services managed by the City, and City Council approved a contract with Barbara Poppe and Associates on December 5, 2019 to conduct this review. The contract will assess alignment with the federal metrics while using an equity lens to determine if the investments are directed to the most impactful strategic outcomes and activities. The City is also pursuing a separate consulting contract with a national homeless expert to help coordinate with federal agencies and national organizations to identify resource opportunities and provide ongoing strategic policy support. In addition, we continue working with the National Alliance to End Homelessness on improvements to the homeless crisis response system.

Previously, Mayor and Council were informed that Lori Pampilo Harris, Homeless Strategy Officer, would be transitioned to a consultant role, which was completed earlier this year.

Motel Acquisitions

After performing additional due diligence regarding the zoning and site issues for the MicroTel located at 7704 Metro Center Drive, staff is no longer pursuing this property as a potential acquisition. Staff is continuing its progress on the due diligence leading to the acquisition of the Rodeway Inn located at 2711 S IH 35. Staff continues to research and identify potential properties utilizing the process for selection as provided to Council on November 26th.

Guided Path Pilot Project

The Guided Path Pilot began in October of 2019 and was used as a strategy to provide social services and housing options for clients living outside of the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH). The pilot also was designed to reduce the health and safety risks of those living in encampments. APH is bringing five contract amendments to Council on January 23rd to address existing gaps in current programming. The amendments will transition the program to a more comprehensive encampment strategy response with additional resources for rapid rehousing and shelter case management. The Guided Path program will facilitate housing placement options that move the client from homelessness to housing. The five contract amendments total \$612,336 and is recommended as amendments to contracts with the following partner agencies:

- Salvation Army (\$102,056)
- Integral Care (\$204,112)
- Front Steps (\$102,056)
- Family Eldercare (\$102,056)
- Caritas (\$102,056)

Since inception, the Guided Path Pilot results are as follows:

- 18 individuals have been housed (1 was reunited with family);
- 60 individuals are enrolled or pending enrollment into appropriate programs that lead to permanent housing;
- 14 individuals are not yet matched with programs for enrollment;
- 3 individuals have not been seen since the initial survey; and
- 4 individuals are in long-term incarceration.

Storage Options for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

Storage is a beneficial service supporting those who are experiencing homelessness. Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) is taking a multi-faceted approach to creating storage options with a focus protecting assets, client needs and ease of use.

- Single-Site Storage Facility: A best-practice model for providing storage for those experiencing homelessness is using a large facility or structure that can accommodate “curbside cart” containers which are then assigned to individuals needing storage. Currently, there are several successful models in the U.S. being evaluated to support development of the Austin storage program. In the interim, ARR has conducted a site visit at the HealthSouth parking garage to ascertain its potential use as a site to store the personal property of those experiencing homelessness until a long-term facility is built or acquired. If due diligence supports moving forward with use of the structure, we anticipate a late March date to begin use. Elements that are still under review include costs to secure the site, program management and operation.
- Current Storage Cart Support: ARR has provided carts to the ARCH to support personal storage. Purple carts have been ordered and designated exclusively for personal asset storage. The designated color establishes a unique identifier that will be easily distinguishable for the designated purpose, which we believe will be a first in the United States.

- Citywide Lockers: Some individuals experiencing homelessness cannot mobilize for storage. Therefore, creating smaller storage opportunities in strategic locations around the City of Austin will provide a lower level of support, relative to the available storage volume, in exchange for convenience. These units will approximate gymnasium or travel center lockers, and most likely will require some form of staff oversight or third-party support. We are currently working to acquire a set of low-cost lockers to pilot this option.
- Encampment Cleanup Storage: The Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) has purchased a shipping container to store unattended personal items found in City parks. The container will be located at the PAR facility at the Nash Hernandez building adjacent to Lady Bird Lake. The container will also be available to other City departments as space permits. ARR is providing the carts for storage.

Encampment Cleanup Efforts

- Violet Bag Program: The number of sites serviced by the Violet Bag Program has expanded. The program now serves following locations:
 - 183/Cameron Road
 - 183/Burnet Road (*recently added*)
 - Pleasant Valley/Cesar Chavez Street (*recently added*)
 - 71/Packsaddle Pass
 - Interstate 35/Cesar Chavez Street

The previously serviced location at 183/Ohlen was removed as individuals have left this location. ARR is working with Public Works and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) on future expansions. To date, the Violet Bag Program has removed over 4,700 pounds of litter from the Violet Bag sites and has been a useful engagement tool for outreach social workers.

- Under/Overpass Activities:
 - Public Works worked with TxDOT to develop a Memorandum of Understanding/Memorandum of Agreement (MOU/MOA) that will expedite the approval process for trash receptacle and Violet Bag kiosk placement at underpasses in Austin. The four locations that have received approval to place receptacles and are scheduled to begin ARR service in mid-February are as follows: Cesar Chavez/I-35; US183/Burnet; 290/Pack Saddle; and Ben White/Burleson.
 - Public Works adjusted its cleanup schedule after communication from TxDOT. In November, December, and January, Public Works serviced 30 locations not covered by TxDOT. Public Works also added 8 new sites in January.
- Watershed: The department established a list of 20 locations that are cleaned on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Communications

- Dashboard: At the January 21st Council Work Session, staff will present the first iteration of a dashboard focused on homelessness. The dashboard is a collaboration of the Corporate Public Information Office (CPIO), Communication & Technology Managers, and ECHO.
- Storyboards: Staff created a YouTube playlist, [Homeless Programs in Austin](#), featuring ATXN produced stories about homelessness. Below is a status of recently added and soon-to-appear storyboards as well as those currently under production:
 - Recently Added:
 - [Downtown Austin Community Court Highlights](#)
 - [Homeless Outreach Street Team \(HOST\) Team Highlights](#)
 - Coming Soon:
 - Austin Homeless Advisory Council (AHAC): To air January 27th

- Production in Progress:
 - Chalkboard Stories which tells the story of the human element of homelessness by showing the diverse backgrounds and situations of Austinites who are currently or have recently experienced homelessness
 - ARCH Updates
 - Pop-up Resource Clinic highlights
 - Collaboration with LifeWorks on youth success stories
 - Housing First educational video

CPIO staff will continue to package news coverage, social media, and ATXN productions and send them to Council to share with your constituents.

In conclusion, City staff continue to emphasize homelessness as the City's highest priority.

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