

Information Regarding Housing-Focused Center in South Austin

ACTION – Establish a Housing-Focused Center and support services for people experiencing homelessness with the intent of providing a pathway to permanent housing. Council passed unanimously a resolution to take steps needed to implement the center. The goal is to have the center operational within the first quarter of 2020.

Steps include:

- Purchase of property identified by staff for a Housing-Focused 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.

GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY – Council has directed City Staff to bring back for Council approval in September an enforceable legal instrument which applies the restrictions to the housing-focused center property and its operation necessary for achieving the purposes of being a good neighbor and using best practices. Through consultation with the National Alliance to End Homelessness and public input, the legal instrument shall establish terms of operational safety and effectiveness, including but not limited to:

- not exceeding 100 beds at the center
- prohibition of drop-ins
- provision of day services only being available to individuals who are living at the center
- prohibition on camping around the facility which means enforcing no trespassing
- additional measures that secure the property
- any other measures necessary for best practice operations.

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

- 1,086 unsheltered individuals in Austin/Travis County on any given day¹
- Over 7,498 individuals who experienced homelessness in 2017²
- 10% increase in individuals experiencing homelessness from 2017 to 2019³
- 23.2% increase in number of persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness from 2017 to 2019⁴

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.⁵ This issue will not resolve itself and will only get more critical as we have seen from other cities experiencing similar growth.

¹ “Homelessness in Austin/Travis County: 2019 Annual Count Results and Plan to End Homelessness”, Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO), p.1

² “The Homelessness Crisis in Austin”, Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, <http://www.austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Homelessness-Factsheet.pdf>, p.1

³ ibid

⁴ “Homelessness in Austin/Travis County: 2019 Annual Count Results and Plan to End Homelessness”, Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO), p.1

⁵ Austin’s Action Plan to End Homelessness, p.15

POLICY / PLANNING ALIGNMENT - Extensive research, review and evaluation of our current challenges support the need for Housing-Focused Center with services necessary for a path to permanent housing. This resolution is informed by local and national studies.

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.⁶ 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.⁷

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 US⁸. 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**.⁹

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who will manage the Center, how much will it cost, and how will we pay for it?

These questions are addressed in the resolution by directing the City Manager to establish a scope of services needed for the center, 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

Why would we do this now?

We have had numerous recommendations and proposed plans regarding providing Housing-Focused Center. 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.

⁶ "Best Practices of Emergency Shelters: The Critical Role of Emergency Shelter in an Effective Crisis Response System"; National Alliance to End Homelessness, p.20.

⁷ "The Critical Role of Housing-focused Emergency Shelter in Austin's Homeless Response System"; National Alliance to End Homelessness, pp.28-36.

⁸ "Recommendations for the Re-design of Emergency Shelters in Austin", National Alliance to End Homelessness, p.10

⁹ "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.