



INFORMATION PACKET MEMORANDUM

To: Members of City Council

From: Jane S. Brautigam, City Manager
Karen Rahn, Director, Human Services
Linda Cooke, Municipal Judge
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Date: September 1, 2015

Subject: Information Item: Update on Homelessness Issues

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This information item provides an update on the homelessness work plan, including current and ongoing initiatives to address homelessness. City Council is holding a study session on Oct. 27, 2015 on the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan, including the stakeholder and community engagement process. This information packet provides updates on current projects and accomplishments, which will be updated at the Oct. 27 study session.

Additional information on homelessness can be found in past [Council Agenda Items and Information Packets on homelessness](#).

BACKGROUND

Homeless Strategy

In 2010, the City of Boulder was one of several local governments and community partners in Boulder County to adopt the [Boulder County Ten-Year Plan to Address Homelessness](#) (Ten-Year Plan). The Ten-Year Plan is organized around six goals, with an emphasis on [Housing First](#), a national best practice with demonstrated success helping people escape chronic homelessness by providing permanent housing with supportive services. In the past five years, significant progress has been made in the City of Boulder, and throughout the county, on Ten-Year Plan goals as highlighted in the [April 7, 2015 Homelessness Update Information Packet to Council](#).

Despite progress on Ten-Year Plan goals, homelessness remains a significant community concern with a need for targeted, innovative city and regional solutions. To address this need, in 2014 city staff, in consultation with local stakeholders, began creating a city-specific homelessness plan to complement the Ten-Year Plan.

Development of City of Boulder Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan

Elements of the Homelessness Strategy, including draft strategies and initiatives, were discussed with City Council at study sessions on [May 13, 2014](#) and [Aug. 26, 2014](#). Development of the plan has also been discussed on an ongoing basis with members of the Boulder Homelessness Planning Group (BHPG), comprised of representatives from several city departments, homeless service providers, Boulder's housing authority and the faith community.

A draft City of Boulder Homelessness Strategy Framework (Framework, **Attachment A**) was introduced in the [April 7, 2015 Information Packet](#) to council. The Framework identified a vision statement, guiding principles and goals to formalize and clarify the goals and role of the city in addressing homelessness, based on prior council feedback.

The Homeless Action Plan (HAP) contains specific strategies and initiatives previously discussed with council and stakeholders to implement the Homelessness Strategy. HAP is proposed as a nimble, flexible action plan that is a "living" document and can be updated as opportunities arise. The City and community partners have been initiating and advancing strategies identified in the HAP.

Council provided feedback on the Framework and Homelessness Strategy development process, at the [April 28, 2015 Human Services Strategy Study Session](#).

PROGRESS ON KEY INITIATIVES

At previous study sessions, council directed staff to further explore several strategies and initiatives. Progress on these is included below.

Strategy 1 – Strengthen Regional Partnerships

1. Consortium of Cities Permanent Supportive Housing Study – Although more permanent supportive housing (PSH) is needed to house the estimated 300 chronically homeless people across the county, there has not yet been a comprehensive PSH needs analysis for the entire county or a plan of how to best meet that need. To address this issue and further the goals of the Ten-Year Plan, the Ten-Year Plan Board proposed a countywide PSH study to assess needs and gaps in housing acquisition and develop recommendations for PSH, for consideration by the members of the Consortium.

All members of the consortium have now committed funding to the study, with funding amounts based on community population. On April 21, 2015, council authorized the city manager to allocate up to \$20,000 to fund the city's portion of the study cost, estimated to be \$60,000-75,000. The City is a member of the Ten-Year Plan Board and is partnering with the county on coordinating this study. A Request for Proposals (RFP) for consultant services to conduct the study will be released by the end of August, with a report expected before the end of the year.

2. 25 Cities Initiative Pilot/Regional Coordinated Entry System – In almost a year of this pilot project, at least 34 of the most vulnerable homeless people in Boulder County (23 from the City of Boulder) have been matched with housing resources from a centralized Metro Denver Regional housing list, and 218 have been assessed and entered onto the list for upcoming resources. Boulder County has submitted approximately eight percent of the regional clients and received approximately 18 percent of the regional housing resources (vouchers and units) in the pilot. Although Boulder County people matched with housing resources have primarily been placed in housing within the county, at least four have moved into housing in Denver. Some voucher recipients continue to look for housing in the tight local rental market.

Over the next two months, up to 26 more high-need people from Boulder County are expected to be placed in units in Longmont that have been committed to the 25 Cities system. The system will also continue to match Boulder people with other housing resources made available through 25 Cities.

The Metro Denver region is transitioning this best practice pilot to a full-scale regional coordinated entry system, including additional regional supports to help locate units for voucher recipients, manage relationships with landlords, and get clients ready for housing.

The Metro Denver area was also selected from a pool of more than 100 cities around the world for the IBM-Smarter Cities Challenge grant for consulting services. The IBM team will spend three weeks utilizing their expertise in the development of the seven-county coordinated entry system. The approximate value of the grant is \$500,000. The IBM team is expected to begin work in the fourth quarter of 2015.

In addition to fulfilling goals for housing, coordinated entry and regional partnership, this pilot offers a chance to learn more about the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness locally. The people assessed as part of this effort show significant trauma, mental and physical health issues, and frequent interaction with emergency services such as emergency rooms and law enforcement. This information can help to shape approaches to programming locally.

Strategy 2 – Innovative Solutions to Increase Housing Options

1. Regional Landlord Recruitment Campaign – The Denver Metro Mayor’s Caucus (MMC) is partnering with the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative ([MDHI](#)) on a regional landlord recruitment campaign to increase the number of units available to homeless people. The goal of the campaign is to outreach to regional landlords to encourage and support renting to homeless individuals and families who have secured housing vouchers. Landlords that commit to the campaign are provided financial support for vacancies or necessary repairs for these tenants, along with case management support for any issues that arise needing resolution with the tenant.

To date, 55 landlords throughout the seven-county region have committed to contribute units to the campaign, including one large property management company with units in Boulder.

The City of Boulder has committed \$2,500 to this regional effort, which has now raised \$50,000 from MMC and regional cities to support participating landlords.

2. Planning and Land Use – The Ten-Year Plan Board has convened a countywide planners group to assess and make recommendations on reducing barriers to the development and acquisition of housing for the homeless across the county. The City of Longmont Planning Manager is coordinating and leading this effort and is convening meetings with representation from city and county planning and housing authorities across the county.
3. Boulder County Worthy Cause Funds – In spring 2015, Boulder County released an RFP for Worthy Cause pool funds to expand permanent supportive housing in the county. One million dollars was set aside for a project in Louisville.

Strategy 3 – Improve Local Service Integration, Coordination, Data Collection and Outcomes Reporting

1. Boulder Homeless Services Collaborative – In 2014 The Burnes Institute was contracted by Bridge House (BH), Boulder Shelter for the Homeless (BSH) and Boulder Outreach for the Homeless (BOHO) to analyze services and operations and determine the potential for increased collaboration and coordination among the three agencies. Through facilitated dialogue following the report, the agencies have formed the Boulder Homeless Services Collaborative (BHSC). BHSC’s mission is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of inter-related programs of emergency and transitional services to adults.

The agencies within BHSC are taking steps to improve services available to homeless individuals in the community including:

- BH has implemented a policy which requires a “welcome meeting,” with outreach case management to promote engagement beyond emergency services, within 14 days of a client seeking services;
- BSH opened an additional 20 “First Step” beds, which lead into the transitional housing program at BSH, for the summer season;
- BOHO has year-round overnight shelter programs, the “residents” and “women’s” shelters, for homeless residents with long-term needs and a record of good behavior; and
- BHSC has submitted proposals to Human Services which request funding for:
 - phased steps of coordinated entry and shared data among the three agencies, with the ultimate vision of a system linked to larger regional efforts;
 - expanded services of the Bridge House Resource Center – which provides a “one stop shop” for intake, assessment and case management services – to provide three additional mornings of service located at BSH;
 - expanded day shelter services from five to six days per week and increased space by utilizing rotating faith-based locations.

These proposals are being evaluated to assess how to best allocate funding to meet the needs of the community and advance the goals of system improvement, in the context of regional efforts and best practice, to implement for the fall 2015 and into 2016.

2. System improvement requirements for city funding – Homeless services system improvement goals include: integrated data and case management and common assessment and coordinated entry.

Coordinated entry and common assessment

BOHO, BSH and Bridge House have already started implementing elements of coordinated entry, including the regional centralized housing list and a common assessment tool, the Vulnerability Index and Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) for high-need clients through the developing regional coordinated entry system (25 Cities pilot).

Rapid Entry Pilot

One systems improvement option currently under consideration is joining the regional “rapid entry” pilot that started in the spring with agencies in Denver. This pilot provides homeless clients with a homeless services system “rapid entry swipe card” after they go through initial intake at a participating pilot provider. Each time an individual uses a service (shelter, case management, etc.) their card is swiped, with secure data feeding into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), the database required by HUD for homeless programs receiving federal funding. The City and County of Denver is expanding support for more agencies to join this pilot in Denver.

Boulder has an opportunity to join the rapid entry pilot. On July 22 city and county staff and local service providers traveled to Denver to visit a rapid entry pilot site and discuss the system with MDHI leadership.

Potential benefits and challenges are summarized in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1

Benefits and Challenges to Joining Rapid Entry Pilot	
Potential Benefits	Potential Challenges
Linked to regional HMIS system and will ultimately be linked to regional coordinated entry system	Agencies would have to transition to a new database (HMIS) and may not be easy to migrate information from current databases
Integrated (not just shared) data	Resources needed to train staff, educate clients and do intakes/make cards for “core” homeless population
Potential for local service providers to see where clients have sought services, and if they’ve been served elsewhere in region	May require additional staff for intake – regional resources such as peer navigators, VISTAs, may be resources
More accurate data and reduced data collection need for less accurate and reliable Point In Time (PIT) survey	Unclear how this will interface with other databases
Regional lessons learned from Denver pilot and some financial and technical support available from MDHI	HMIS is currently required only for federal grant recipients
Can customize some questions/data fields to add information of interest locally	
Federal government has long-term commitment to HMIS and some providers already required to use it for some programs	
Reduces burden on clients and agencies to do duplicative paperwork	
Improved access for clients - rapid entry with card that can be used at multiple regional locations	
Can “flag” important client information to pop up when card swiped – matched with housing, client issues, etc.	
Multiple reports possible to meet integrated data goals	
Flexibility to design local process – centralized intake, multiple locations, mobile intake team, number days at a service before card required, etc.	

Human Services anticipates implementing homeless system improvement requirements for the 2017 Human Services Fund round, which will take place during the spring and summer of 2016. To prepare service providers for these changes, the department is funding technical assistance, beginning in Fall 2015, to assist agencies to identify and overcome system improvement barriers such as technology, training and staff capacity to support system improvements. Technical assistance may include support for implementation of the rapid entry pilot, or for system improvement projects proposed by the BHSC.

3. High Utilizer Project – Human Services, Municipal Court, Bridge House, Boulder Shelter for the Homeless, and Mental Health Partners recently launched the “High Utilizer Project.” The

purpose of the project is to ensure homeless justice system “high utilizers” are fully integrated into targeted service and housing efforts for high-need chronically homeless people in Boulder to stop the cycle of criminal justice recidivism and emergency services utilization.

The High Utilizer Project group has developed a target list of 54 homeless individuals with the highest number of municipal court violations since 2009 and who are believed to remain in the Boulder area. As the first step in providing more targeted support, project partners are working together to locate people, conduct vulnerability assessments and Permanent Supportive Housing Match assessments, and enter them into the regional coordinated entry system (25 Cities) for supportive housing placement.

In just three weeks, 20 of the 54 people have been assessed and entered onto the regional housing list. Municipal Court trained one probation officer and a law student intern to administer the assessments. They completed 7 of the 20 assessments administered, seeking out homeless individuals on the streets to maximize the number of people placed on the regional housing list. As the project progresses, partners will work together to coordinate additional supports for these high-need individuals and track progress on housing placement, stabilization and recidivism.

Housing First research suggests that supportive housing significantly lowers emergency services utilization, including interaction with the criminal justice system, for high-need homeless individuals. A 2008 evaluation of the Boulder County Housing First Program showed a 78 percent decrease in interactions with the Boulder Police Department for individuals after they were placed in permanent supportive housing.

During the first ten months of the 1175 Lee Hill Housing First project, eight of nine municipal court system “high utilizers” placed in housing have remained housed. Homeless justice system high utilizers are often challenged by mental health and/or addiction or other complex issues. Lee Hill has 31 units. Almost 26 percent of the units are occupied by municipal court high utilizers.

Municipal Court refers homeless defendants to Bridge House for services. In most cases, this includes reduction of selected sentencing conditions in exchange for intake and engagement in services at Bridge House. Probation officers also offer support to Bridge House Resource Center clients seeking assistance with settling ongoing or past legal issues so as to remove them as barriers to stability.

4. Summer population study – Council and the community have expressed interest in learning more about how the city’s homeless population may differ in the summer and the winter. Anecdotal evidence suggests one significant difference is a higher population of “travelers” or “transients” that travel through Boulder during warmer months who are not reflected in the annual PIT survey, conducted in the winter. Homeless services also change locally during the summer, with many winter shelter beds and warming center locations closed.

To better understand the temporary population of people who travel through Boulder in the summer, staff investigated the option of conducting a summer survey of the population.

OMNI Research was engaged to consult on the project and facilitated two “key informant” focus groups of local stakeholders that may have knowledge, or contact with, the summer traveling population, to determine survey feasibility and structure. One focus group consisted of staff from city departments including: Police, Open Space and Mountain Parks, Parks and Recreation, Municipal Court, and Downtown University Hill Management Division and Parking Services. The second focus group consisted of local homeless service provider staff and clients including Attention Homes, BOHO, BSH, Bridge House and First Presbyterian Church (Deacon’s Closet).

Both focus groups raised significant concerns about feasibility of the study, including safety, accuracy of separating “travelers” from resident homeless population, willingness of individuals to participate, and accuracy/quality of the resulting information. Given these concerns, staffs decided not to further pursue the summer survey at this time. Staff will continue to investigate other ways of obtaining information requested about different segments of the summer and winter population, including the integrated data and rapid entry card system solutions previously identified.

5. Project EDGE – In mid 2014 the Boulder Police Department implemented the EDGE program (Early Diversion, Get Engaged), in partnership with Mental Health Partners. Mental health clinicians work out of the police department and respond to calls to provide direct intervention services to community members in need. The program has become an important asset to the police department and to date has been very successful in providing additional services and resources at the time of police contact. More information on program results will be included in the Oct. 27 study session.

Strategy 4 – Improve Community Education and Dialogue About Homelessness

Staff is expanding information available on homelessness through the city website, including release of an issue brief “Do Homeless People Come Here for our Services?” and Human Services Insight episodes on Channel 8. A series of videos with personal stories from homeless people is also in development, with the first video currently in the editing process. The Homelessness Strategy public engagement process described below is also an opportunity for community education and dialogue.

Denver Foundation Research and Campaign

In January 2015, The Denver Foundation began collecting data around perceptions of homelessness and identifying the strongest messages for a public will-building campaign. Across the seven-county Denver Metro Region 812 registered voters (98 from Boulder County) participated in the initial survey. Regional and Boulder County results from the survey are available on the [Denver Foundation website](#).

Highlights of results from Boulder County include:

- 74 percent of respondents feel that homelessness is at least a ‘somewhat serious’ issue

- Residents report major responsibility for addressing homelessness falls to: people who are homeless (57 percent), government (56 percent), family and friends of homeless individuals (55 percent), and charitable organizations (54 percent)
- Perceived key drivers of homelessness with highest rankings include: unemployment (63 percent), drug or alcohol abuse (57 percent), mental illness (56 percent), and not enough affordable housing (53 percent)
- Residents perceive that it is highly difficult for people who are homeless to find a home, with 51 percent reporting it as ‘very difficult’ and 17 percent reporting it as ‘nearly impossible’
- Top policy solutions respondents “strongly” or “somewhat” support include:
 - Raise minimum wage – 90 percent
 - Allow additional housing affordable to low-income people to be built in your neighborhood – 89 percent
 - Increase tax breaks for businesses or individuals who donate property or resources to help address homelessness – 82 percent
- Messages about homelessness that respondents found “very” or “somewhat” convincing included:
 - “Can happen to anyone” – reasons for homelessness including financial problems, domestic violence, poor health – 96 percent
 - “Families” – high numbers of homeless families with children – 95 percent
 - “Compassion” – multiple, serious challenges faced by individuals that are hard to imagine for most people – 82 percent

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT ON HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The process of stakeholder engagement on Homelessness Strategy development is ongoing and will expand through the fall of 2015.

To help facilitate a meaningful and efficient public dialogue on both the Homelessness Strategy and Human Services Strategy, an RFP was released in July to assist in the development of a thorough community engagement process, including diverse pathways for stakeholder and public feedback. Thirteen proposals were received by the August 17, 2015 deadline and staff are currently reviewing proposals with the goal of selecting a consultant by early September 2015. An update on the community stakeholder process and feedback to date will be part of the Oct. 27 study session.

OTHER ISSUES

In August 2015 the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) filed a statement of interest in *Bell v. City of Boise et al*, a case being heard in the United States District Court in Idaho related to a Boise ordinance prohibiting camping and sleeping outside. The DOJ filing questioned the constitutionality of that ordinance under the Eighth Amendment.

At this time, this case does not directly affect the City of Boulder’s Camping or Lodging on Property without Consent Ordinance, last reviewed by Council in April, 2010. The DOJ filing and the case have increased interest among members of the public about reviewing Boulder’s camping ordinance. Camping issues are not currently part of the Homelessness Strategy or Action Plan.

NEXT STEPS

- Community engagement consultant contract implemented – Third Quarter 2015
- Online community engagement – beginning Third Quarter 2015
- Community engagement events and stakeholder meetings – beginning Fourth Quarter 2015
- Human Services Strategy/Homelessness Strategy Study Session – October 27, 2015
- Human Relations Commission Agenda – Fourth Quarter 2015
- Council approval of Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan – Second Quarter 2016

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Draft City of Boulder Homelessness Strategy Framework



DRAFT City of Boulder Homelessness Strategy Framework

Homelessness Strategy Purpose

The purpose of the City of Boulder Homelessness Strategy is to:

- 1) Clarify city goals in addressing homelessness;
- 2) Maximize efficiency and effectiveness of city resources in reducing homelessness;
- 3) Engage community partners more broadly in solutions; and
- 4) Provide a strategic road map for city action on homelessness.

Homelessness Strategy Guiding Principles

The Homelessness Strategy guiding principles and goals are informed by national best practices in addressing homelessness, local community needs, and other local and regional policy documents.

- *Consider homelessness in a regional context*
People experiencing homelessness are highly mobile, seeking services, employment, housing and other needs. Policies, resources and strategies in one city, county or metro area impact homelessness among neighboring jurisdictions. Planning and resources should be leveraged regionally.
- *Respect for the strength and dignity of diverse individuals*
A wide variety of people experience homelessness for many different reasons. Solutions should consider diverse homeless individuals and families and their needs.
- *Support to advance self sufficiency and maximize independence*
Individuals and families should have support to achieve the maximum degree of self sufficiency and independence possible.
- *Effective use of resources within a coordinated and collaborative system*
National best practices demonstrate that coordinated, collaborative systems yield better outcomes for people and cost-effective solutions for communities.

Homelessness Strategy Goals

- *Prevent Homelessness*
Provide support to prevent individuals and families from the traumatic and costly slide into homelessness.
- *Provide temporary shelter and supportive services as needed*
Maintain a safety net of emergency shelter, food and other needed services with a pathway to long-term solutions such as permanent housing.
- *Provide long-term housing and support solutions*
Provide housing options and support; including permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals and families and rapid re-housing for people with fewer support needs.

- *Improve systems to support efficient and effective services and outcomes*
Implement best practices in homelessness that result in a system that is coordinated, integrated, easy to navigate and provides performance information that supports analysis of outcomes and opportunities for improvement.
- *Improve public education and communication*
Provide accessible information about homelessness and people experiencing homelessness and how the community can be involved in solutions.

Homeless Action Plan

The Homeless Action Plan (HAP) provides implementation strategies and action items to achieve the goals of the Homelessness Strategy.

Strategy 1 – Strengthen Regional Partnerships

- 1.a. Work with other funders, local and regional partners and service providers to identify barriers and resources needed to implement system improvements
- 1.b. Actively support the proposed goals of the Metro Mayors Caucus, Homeless Committee
- 1.c. Engage Consortium of Cities for countywide dialogues and solutions
- 1.d. Actively engage in regional homelessness reduction efforts

Strategy 2 – Innovative Solutions to Increase Housing Options

- 2.a. Develop community dashboard on goals
- 2.b. Identify any new opportunities in the Consolidated Plan to prioritize homeless housing
- 2.c. Strengthen landlord relationships for housing retention and incentives
- 2.d. Address barriers to maximizing federal housing resources
- 2.e. Support community initiatives to develop housing for the homeless
- 2.f. Address land use barriers to developing and acquiring housing

Strategy 3 – Improve Local Service Integration

- 3.a. Require system improvements (coordinated assessment, intake, case management, data) as condition of city funding
- 3.b. Develop prioritization system, including vulnerability assessment, for services
- 3.c. Conduct a more thorough evaluation of emergency sheltering system and update target goals for sheltering, including feasibility of expanded day services center and summer study of homelessness.
- 3.d. Strengthen Municipal Court Referrals to Bridge House and other services
- 3.e. Support Boulder Police Department EDGE Partnership with Mental Health Partners

Strategy 4 – Improve Community Education

- 4.a. Work with community stakeholders to improve communications and information about homeless populations, initiatives and results achieved.

Strategy 5 – Prevent Homelessness

- 5.a. Continue support and coordination of city and regional programs that help people out of poverty, including affordable housing programs and supportive/temporary assistance programs.