

Legislation Text

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Subject:
Draft Tri-Cities Homeless Action Plan

Prepared By: Samma Fox, Assistant to the City Manager

PURPOSE:

To present the Draft Tri-Cities Homeless Action Plan to council.

PRESENTATIONS:

Staff Presenter(s): Mark Relph, City Manager
Samma Fox, Assistant to the City Manager

Additional Presenter(s): Alisa Osunfunke Orduna, MPIA, MA, PhD, Florence Aliese Advancement Network

SUMMARY:

The Draft Tri-Cities Homeless Action Plan is the culmination of nearly three years of work by the Tri-Cities Homeless Policy Group (TCHPG) comprised of the cities of Littleton, Englewood, and Sheridan, as well as many partner organizations. The TCHPG engaged Florence Aliese Advancement Network (FAAN) to develop an action plan incorporating the analysis and studies already completed (such as the PESTEL Analysis and University of Denver studies on chronic and family homelessness), to identify stakeholders and include partnership and funding opportunities, and most importantly, to be actionable.

PRIOR ACTIONS OR DISCUSSIONS:

6/8/2021 - Discussed during the council goal setting study session on Goal 8: Housing & Livability

Three years ago, the Cities of Englewood, Littleton and Sheridan launched the Tri-Cities Homelessness Policy Committee ("the Committee") to identify challenges and discuss solutions for homelessness in the region.

In the summer and fall of 2020, the cities conducted an analysis of challenges and opportunities related to homelessness, while contracting with the University of Denver (DU) to develop studies to identify the root causes and challenges of homelessness in the region.

In the winter of 2020 and into 2021, the cities then contracted with a consultant to develop a plan of action to identify strategies and needed resources to lessen the impact of homelessness in the region.

On January 28, 2021, the three City Councils met in a joint study session to review the findings of the PESTEL and DU studies and to provide guidance on the development of an action plan. The Tri-Cities Homelessness Plan of Action includes a series of goals, and is now before the City Councils of Englewood, Littleton, and Sheridan for discussion and approval.

ANALYSIS:
Staff Analysis

Background on the Tri-Cities Homelessness Policy Committee

The Committee meets monthly and includes Mayors, City Managers, City Attorneys, Police Chiefs and representatives from the State of Colorado, Arapahoe County, and nonprofit service providers. In addition to the partnership between the three cities, the cities also partnered with Change the Trend, a coalition of over 30 nonprofit service providers who provide housing vouchers, food, resource navigation, and other services to those experiencing homelessness. Finally, the cities formed partnerships with Arapahoe County ("the County"), the State of Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), and the Metro Denver Homelessness Initiative (MDHI). These partnerships recognize that homelessness is a regional issue as well as one that requires partnerships between different levels of government, nonprofit service providers, and the larger community.

Understanding the Causes and Challenges of Homelessness

In July 2020, the cities launched a PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal) analysis to evaluate outside factors that are impacting homelessness in the region. Key findings included:

- A strong commitment by local leaders to address homelessness;
- Dedicated homeless service organizations;
- Regional public and private investments in homelessness; and
- Consistency in local ordinances regarding occupancy of public spaces

Opportunities identified by the PESTEL included:

- Increasing affordable permanent housing options for persons experiencing homelessness;
- Permanent supportive housing;
- Allocating housing authority vouchers;
- Increased participation in the local data collection platforms; and
- Additional safe alternatives to unsheltered dwelling

In October, 2020, the cities contracted with DU to better understand the root causes of homelessness in the region. DU produced two reports, one for chronic homelessness and one for family homelessness. These reports identified common causes of homelessness, as well as barriers for homeless individuals and families to becoming housed.

Top six causes of homelessness	Chronic Homelessness	Family Homelessness
	Loss of job	Unable to pay rent
	Change in employment	Change in employment
	Unable to pay rent	Loss of job
	Unaffordable expenses	Housing cost increase
	Housing cost increase	Domestic violence
	Relationship issues	Relationship issues

Top six barriers to housing

Unable to pay rent	Housing cost increase
Housing cost increase	Low/no credit score
Loss of job	Unable to pay rent
Unaffordable expense	Change in employment
Housing waitlists	Loss of job
Change in employment	

Engagement Process

To develop the plan of action, the consultant conducted 55 semi-structured interviews with a diverse regional stakeholder group. This group included:

- Local and county elected officials;
- Local, county, and state appointment officials;
- Nonprofit service providers; and
- Individuals who experienced homelessness

Stakeholders identified areas of hope such as the humanization of homelessness, equity, personal responsibility and empowerment, stewardship, and fair-share regional approach. They also identified several assets to be leveraged in the final plan, including confidence in the co-responder program, food distribution, inter-jurisdictional coordination, partnership with school districts as well as libraries and recreation centers, and a continued partnership with the nonprofit group Change the Trend. Areas of concern included lack of funding, the region becoming a homeless magnet, underutilization of homelessness services, vulnerable people falling through the cracks, and the complexities and expense of housing the homeless.

Recommendations and Action Steps

Based on stakeholder engagement, the Tri-Cities Homelessness Plan of Action includes several recommendations and next steps. The recommendations are based on national and state best practices, and focus on four thematic areas:

- Building a strong foundation;
- Single adult system;
- Workforce development; and
- Family system

Building a strong foundation

The Committee, partnership with Change the Trend, and partnerships with other government agencies provide a strong foundation from which to continue to build a strong governance structure. While the Tri-Cities region is a part of the Metro Denver Homelessness Initiative (MDHI) Continuum of Care, increased collaboration is important to create additional resources for homelessness housing and services. A strong governance structure will build local capacity, support coordination across government entities and nonprofit partners, and attract additional public and private funding for homelessness programs.

Single adult system

Currently, several programs exist to support single adults experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities region. Designating a lead service provider will ensure enhanced coordination of services. While additional resources should be added to the internet, a dedicated space for walk-ins and client referrals is needed to help transient populations build trust, learn about services, and receive navigation support to apply for benefits and programs.

This work can further be enhanced by additional direct outreach programs and promoting a variety of housing opportunities.

Workforce development

Pathways to workforce opportunities can work for some people experiencing homelessness to achieve financial self-sufficiency. In the winter of 2021, the City of Englewood partnered with Arapahoe Community College to provide job training to individuals in the community financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the winter of 2021, the Tri-Cities conducted a pre-feasibility study with Bridge House Ready to Work, a program that provides temporary housing and job training to people experiencing homelessness.

Family system

In addition to increasing services for single adults, the Plan of Action promotes additional resources for families. Partnering with all three school districts can leverage federal McKinney Vento funding to provide case management services, school support, supplies, and make referrals to shelters. Additional programs, such as a peer-support specialist, can focus on ensuring that housing vulnerable families do not become homeless.

Fiscal Impact

The implementation of the recommendations listed in the Plan of Action matrix are estimated at a total of \$705,000, divided between the three cities. There are significant funding opportunities with state and federal grants which would be analyzed in the near term, plus an assessment of the applicability of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The Tri-Cities will also be exploring opportunities with Arapahoe County on how they will be able to assist in the short-term and long-term service and funding strategies. A more complete funding proposal will be proposed to each city council during their respective budget process and schedule.

Alternatives

Homelessness will continue to exist and delaying a plan of action will result in much higher funding needs in the future.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The attached draft Tri-Cities Homelessness Plan of Action builds on previous studies and analysis of the root causes and challenges associated with homelessness in the Tri-Cities region. The Cities of Sheridan and Englewood held similar study sessions over the last two weeks. Late in July, all three Councils will have agenda items to vote to approve this plan of action by motion. If approved, the Tri-Cities will begin to execute the plan in August, 2021.