

May 2018 UPDATE

Homelessness-related issues have been some of the most difficult issues to face our community. We wish there was one easy solution, but homelessness is a complex issue, caused by many different factors and affecting many individuals with disparate needs. For this reason, the City supports the Pikes Peak Continuum of Care, a consortium of community leaders with expertise in specific areas of homelessness, to provide services and to advise the City on the issue.

Please be aware that this issue is not unique to Colorado Springs, but is an issue that affects all large cities. Our homeless numbers per capita are actually average in comparison to other similarly populated areas across the country. That said, we recognize the valid concerns raised by our residents, and assure you we are working hard to address the issue on multiple levels.

As you can imagine, we are hearing from advocates for the homeless who believe the City should be doing more to assist this population, and who display sympathy for those affected by homelessness. They are concerned that some in our community have no place to live, can't find housing or jobs, don't have a place to go the bathroom, take a shower, dump their garbage, or get mental health or substance abuse help. They are concerned that some in our community work or have housing vouchers but still can't find a place to live. We appreciate this sympathetic approach and recognize its merits.

We are also hearing from those who are upset about mounds of trash, safety of our parks, sanitation, visible camping, illegal fires, and crime in their neighborhoods. Many of these individuals feel that the City, the County, the Faith Community and the Homeless agencies do too much enabling and that many people abuse the system. These are also valid concerns. Finding the balance in providing services to those experiencing homelessness while respecting the needs and concerns of all residents remains the City's priority.

Perhaps the most frequent complaint we hear has to do with the number of panhandlers on our streets corners and rights of way. While we can limit activity on medians where occupation presents a safety risk to pedestrians or drivers, panhandling itself is protected under the First Amendment. Further, heeding the direction of a Department of Justice brief written in 2015, our police force will not relocate individuals camping on non-park public land unless there is a shelter space available. While our community is committed to addressing the concerns of its residents, it can and will only do so within the confines of the law.

Below is an outline of the scope of our problem, what we have accomplished, what we have planned for the near future, and what we are looking into long-term. Yes, we can do better. But we also need to celebrate what we have accomplished. Most importantly, we need to all work together to address this issue so we can make more substantial progress in the future.

THE PROBLEM

In January 2017, the annual Point in Time count showed the total number of people experiencing homelessness in our community to be 1,415. This number includes those living outside, in emergency shelters, or in transitional housing. 457 of the 1,415 were living outside at that time. This number is considered to be a conservative estimate as counting those experiencing homelessness is difficult to do accurately. We also know from the 2017 “Point in Time” count that 70% of the homeless individuals we contacted through our survey last year listed their last permanent address as being within El Paso County, indicating that most of those experiencing homelessness here were last housed locally.

The Department of Education, under the direction of the McKinney-Vento Act, also counts students in our public schools that report experiencing homelessness. In District 11 alone, approximately 1,000 students stated that they were homeless in 2017. This is a separate count and there are most like duplications between the Department of Education count and the Point in Time count.

The 2018 Point in Time count was recently conducted in our community, but the data will not be available until sometime in May 2018. With our deficit in transitional, affordable, permanent supportive, workforce, and senior housing, there are many in our community who find themselves homeless or about to become homeless. Although our community is lucky to have many dedicated service providers offering assistance to those experiencing homelessness, we are currently unable to keep up with the demand.

The number of beds we currently have for people experiencing homelessness on any given night (including the 150 bed emergency warming shelter that’s open until April 30th, 2018) is about 570. 320 of those beds are low-barrier (meaning admittance is not contingent on sobriety, among other things). Some of the higher-barrier shelter beds are empty on any given night in order for shelters to keep women and children staying there safe. There is also a problem with getting the homeless to shelters, as many prefer to camp to protect their belongings; maintain independence, use substances, and some cannot mentally adapt to the shelters.

SUCCESSSES

1. Two permanent supportive housing projects have been approved for construction. **Freedom Springs** will have 50 units for chronically homeless Veterans. **Greenway Flats** will provide 65 units for chronically homeless people in our community. They have already broken ground on **Greenway Flats** with an expected opening date of February 1st, 2019. Permanent supportive housing includes wrap around services and is considered a successful evidence-based practice for ending chronic homelessness.

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2. The **Springs Rescue Mission** expanded its low-barrier shelter bed capacity to 300 and opened a resource center to connect the homeless to needed services. It also provides showers, a day center, and storage for visitors' belongings. Once their expansion is complete, the Springs Rescue Mission will soon be offering more meals for the chronically homeless (taking pressure off the **Marian House Soup Kitchen** and reducing the foot traffic through Downtown).
3. **The Continuum of Care (CoC)** is fully active. The CoC brings all of the service providers to the table, coordinating homeless services and are in the process of implementing their strategic plan. The CoC has also rolled out a "coordinated entry" system that helps ensure that people experiencing homelessness in our community are identified and connected to appropriate housing. Coordinated Entry is also considered to be another successful evidence based best practice.
4. **Urban Peak**, which focusses on serving youth experiencing homelessness, received a grant to track youth homelessness and to expand services and beds.
5. **TESSA** received a grant to house more victims of domestic violence.
6. **Rocky Mountain Human Services' Homes for All Veterans** program has connected with 1087 Veterans experiencing homelessness in our community and moved 75% of them into permanent housing. Another 645 Veterans have been provided resources to prevent them from becoming homeless. The success of the **Homes for All Veterans** is a model for Colorado.
7. **Catholic Charities** opened a brand-new Family Connections office at 917 E. Moreno Avenue in the Helen Hunt Campus, which provides a full continuum of family-focused services, including those targeted to families on the verge of, or experiencing homelessness, with help to transition them from housing crisis to housing stability.
8. **The Marian House Soup Kitchen** is serving up to 1000 meals a day, seven days a week. It now has a day center and childcare for families, two nurses and a doctor on staff five days a week, and is offering job coaching and help with resumes to help individuals experiencing homelessness to find work in the community. It has succeeded in securing 200 plus jobs for the homeless.
9. **Ecumenical Social Ministries** opened its WISH House that "provides emergency shelter operations on-site at ESM's facility" to "help women move from crisis to stability."
10. **The City's Neighborhood Services (formerly called Code Enforcement)** is working diligently to facilitate large garbage collection at homeless camps and will be increasing their cleanups this year. (The City also works with Keep Colorado Springs Beautiful to do cleanups around our community.)
11. Our Nationally recognized **Colorado Springs Police Department Homeless Outreach Team (HOT Team)** is out on the streets every day, helping connect homeless individuals with service providers, policing for illegal activities (including camping on public property), and addressing the myriad of problems that are on the ground.

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12. **Westside Cares** is providing food, toiletries, health care, provider connections, and bridge funding to keep people in their homes, focused mostly on the Westside.
13. **The Salvation Army** is focusing more on women and families at its **RJ Montgomery Shelter** and has opened and is managing the 150 bed low barrier warming shelter on Weber Street to keep homeless individuals safe from hypothermia and frostbite on cold winter nights.
14. The **Memorial Health System, Penrose/St. Francis, Peak Vista, Aspen Point, Silver Key, The Independence Center, Greccio Housing, Partners in Housing, Keep Colorado Springs Beautiful, Coalition for Compassion in Action, Black Bird Outreach, Care and Share Food Bank and dozens of faith groups and nonprofits** are filling the gap with health and other homeless services unlike any time in our community's history.

WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW or COULD DO SOON

"The Better Way to Give" Campaign

The City is preparing to launch the "Better Way to Give" campaign aimed at educating residents about how they can effectively help by giving directly to service providers, while discouraging giving to panhandlers. The campaign will include strategically placing signs at key panhandling spots in the City, setting up a text-to-give functionality and informative website. We will also be offering signage to downtown businesses.

GARBAGE

City Neighborhood Services continues to work with CSPD HOT on identifying and cleaning up camps. We have seen an increase in camp clean ups in 2018. As of 04/16/18 141 camps have been posted by HOT, 111 camps have been cleaned up, with 284 truckloads of trash removed. Roll off dumpsters are being placed at strategic sites with the hope that this will aid in the ongoing cleanups happening daily in our community as well as to encourage those experiencing homelessness to clean up.

PAY INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS TO CLEAN UP

Private money may soon be raised to pay those experiencing homelessness to do day labor to help clean up camps and prepare them for job applications through a local non-profit called "Uplift!". Springs Rescue Mission currently employs approximately 50 people experiencing homelessness to clean-up, catering and to work at their mission.

BATHROOMS

There is a hope to organize placement of portable bathrooms in key locations that will provide a sanitary place for those experiencing homelessness to use.

ENFORCE NO CAMPING, NO CAMPFIRES and NO TRESPASSING LAWS

Since the opening of The Salvation Army Warming Shelter and the expansion of year round shelter beds at The Springs Rescue Mission, low- barrier shelter beds are often

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available. The CSPD HOT Team will continue to enforce the camping ban and trespassing laws with 24-hour notice instead of 48, until no beds are available. Campfires will continue to be extinguished as a vast majority do not meet fire code.

SETBACK FOR CAMPING BY WATERWAYS AND VEGETATION REMOVAL

City Council will soon hear a proposed ordinance that would impose a set-back requirement for camping next to waterways. There is a high e-coli count in our downtown core that may be related to individuals camping near our waterways.

ADDITIONAL HOT TEAM HIRES

With only four Homeless Outreach Team officers covering 200 square miles, CSPD is looking into ways to increase staffing in this important area. That being said, they are doing an exemplary job with only four officers. The Council budget committee, the Chief of Staff, the Mayor, and the rest of Council are working to find emergency money for two additional HOT Team officers and to put that funding in place permanently.

MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS ASSIGNED TO HOT TEAM

Through the State Office of Behavior Health, a non-profit is trying to secure a grant to pay for a mental health professional to be assigned to each HOT TEAM member.

ASSESS CURRENT CITY FUNDING FOR HOMELESS

As we complete our current Point in Time survey, we will be assessing direct and indirect costs to City and taxpayers via the evaluation of CSPD and CSFD calls to service, Neighborhood Services, Homeless Outreach Team, garbage contract with haulers, Keep Colorado Springs Beautiful, as well as other City costs associated with homelessness.

A “NEW” SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM HOMELESS STRATEGIC PLAN

The City’s Homelessness Prevention and Response Coordinator, in cooperation with the Pikes Peak Continuum of Care will be convening a new long-term shelter plan taskforce and new short-term “on the ground” strategic plan with deliverables.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

We will be discussing the idea of approaching local hospitals to reduce their emergency room visits and encourage them to ask for their help to fund mobile “Homeless Health Services”, an expanded Detox and Sobering Center, and funding for Permanent Supportive Housing for the chronically homeless.

FIGHT “RIGHT TO REST” LEGISLATION

The City testified against HB 18-1067 “Right to Rest” legislation at the State House and it did not pass.

BRIDGE FUNDING TO KEEP PEOPLE IN THEIR APARTMENTS AND HOMES

President Skorman, The City office of Housing and Urban Development, Greccio, Partners in Housing, Silver Key, Catholic Community Services, The Apartment Association, Westside Cares and the Urban Renewal Authority are looking at ways of harnessing existing community services to address bridge funding for rental assistance, eviction prevention services, help with moving, and legal assistance and credit assistance to keep local residents from becoming homeless.

MITIGATION/INCENTIVE FUND FOR VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

The City’s Homelessness Prevention and Response Coordinator has convened an exploratory committee to look at implementing a mitigation/incentive fund for Veterans experiencing homelessness. This type of fund has shown to be successful in other communities. They saw housing placement rates go up quickly. We are close to reaching “functional zero” with Veteran homelessness in our community and this fund could get us there.

LANDLORDS

City Planning is preparing to present an ordinance to City Council that would address violations for “slum” landlords by holding building owners responsible for violations by building, not for each occurrence as is currently done. This is designed to discourage repeat offenders and encourage more voluntary compliance with City Code. There is also a need for more Neighborhood Services personnel (Code Enforcement) to deal with landlords who don’t do basic repairs and then evict tenants who complain.

FUTURE PROPOSALS TO INVESTIGATE

1. Research the ways in which public-private partnerships can work to build more permanent supportive housing units for those who are chronically homeless.
2. Research the possibility of bringing a “Homeless Court” to our community.
3. Research creative ways to address the deficit of low-barrier shelter needs.
4. Research ways to expand mental health and substance abuse services to those experiencing homelessness in our community.
5. Research ways to implement a common health management information system software used by all agencies that serve those experiencing homelessness.

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6. Research ways that our faith communities could act as emergency overflow shelters during the cold winter months.

We understand that homelessness issues are difficult and complex. Please get in touch with local service providers to volunteer or donate. If you would like to be updated on our progress, please let us know. We will try to update you at least monthly on progress.

Richard Skorman, President of Council

Andy Phelps, Homelessness Prevention and Response Coordinator