

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness has reached crisis levels both locally and nationally. The community of Westminster recognizes this crisis and the needed efforts for improvement. In response, the Westminster City Council has created The Homelessness Task Force to provide input and recommendations to address homelessness.

The recommendations expressed represent what the Homelessness Task Force agrees is in the best interest of the community and its residents with the intent to provide a guide to a long-term plan. Furthermore, partnership with surrounding cities and/or the County of Orange is recommended to access funding opportunities, share resources, and provide coverage to the region.

It is understood that this recommendation may result in questions and concerns; best practice models from established service providers have and will be taken into consideration during the development of this recommendation and as the plan unfolds and is implemented.

PURPOSE

While the ultimate goal is to end homelessness, it is the Task Force's ambition for all appropriate resources and efforts to be identified and utilized towards this goal, to include navigation, shelter and long term housing options, and community engagement.

BACKGROUND

The Housing Continuum is defined as all housing opportunities to include: outreach, prevention and diversion, emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing:

Outreach - Make connections with individuals and families seeking assistance and provide them with the support services of their choice. Preferably, the individual or family would be able to connect with the best services to fit their specific needs. Some examples would be to provide the clients with mental or behavioral health care, transportation, access to benefits, and or a shelter bed(s).

Existing Examples Include:

- City Net services
- Orange County Outreach and Engagement
- Orange County Mental Health
- Westminster Family Resource Center
- Westminster Police Department Homeless Liaison Officer

Prevention and Diversion - Prevention: Targets individuals and families at imminent risk of becoming homeless. Diversion: Attempts to reduce the number of individuals

and families from becoming homeless by providing linkage to resources that prevent entry into the homeless system.

Existing Examples Include:

- Finding Individual and family resources
- Sourcing affordable housing options
- Linking to other available resources

Emergency Shelter - A place for individuals and families to safely reside temporarily. The shelter also reduces the impact of homelessness on the community.

Existing Examples Available to Westminster Clients Include:

- The Courtyard
- Santa Ana Armory

Rapid Rehousing – Funding for short-term rental assistance with support services. Typically, the goal for rapid re-housing is to help recipients obtain housing quickly, remain housed, and increase self-sufficiency. Support services usually end once the rental assistance terminates.

Existing Agencies Examples Include:

- Westminster Housing Authority: Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing
- Families Forward
- SPIN

Permanent Supportive Housing - Cost effective way to help individuals and families live a stable and productive life. This could be coupled with social services, community support services, and case management.

Existing Examples Include:

- Della Rosa on Beach Boulevard, an affordable housing community with a set-aside of supportive housing units.
- Westminster Crossing on Westminster Boulevard (upcoming), an affordable housing community with a set-aside of supportive housing units.
- Potter's Lane on Jackson Street (Westminster-adjacent), an affordable housing community where all units are Veteran's supportive units.

Rental Housing - Is the last step on the housing continuum. Residents are fully self-sufficient and paying rent independently. To support this stage, City governments take an active role in encouraging the construction of more housing within the city by private sector developers, including both market-rate developers and developers

who work with affordable housing funds while meeting its mandated share of regional housing needs

Existing Examples Include:

- Low-Income housing
- Multi-unit housing

RECOMMENDATIONS

Navigation Center

The City of Westminster, either independently or in partnership with another city, should offer a Navigation Center for homeless residents, which will include access to support services and temporary, emergency shelter beds. The Navigation Center will be accessible to Westminster (and its partner city or cities) residents and individuals with a verified community connection.

Support services will be established and coordinated by the designated services provider. Navigation Center staff will have knowledge of on-site and community resources and be prepared to provide appropriate support. Additionally, the provider will work collaboratively with city staff, community organizations, and stakeholders.

Referral Points

Designated City Staff and community organizations will serve as the main support and referral system for homeless individuals and families. The referral process will include an initial screening for an assessment of needs and connection to appropriate support resources, which may include service by the Navigation Center. After the linkage, the HLO will verify community connection and make final determination of eligibility.

Upon arrival and assessment at the Navigation Center, staff will determine an individual or family's entry point on the housing continuum and provide resources accordingly.

Community Engagement

Coordinated outreach and plan to connect with

- Businesses
- Faith based involvement
- Community education – shelter operations “Good Neighbor Policy”, resources available, how to connect to resources, what is your role?, community and resource collaborative (input, advocacy, ongoing education, grievances), collaboration
- Resident involvement – Citizen’s Academy, 1st point of contact

This part can start immediately. Departments, staff will start implementing this plan. Mailer, social media, website,

Enact steps to engage the community to help end homelessness. These could be done through direct contact as well as larger marketing strategies.

Funding

It is recommended that the City seek on-going funding sources with Federal, State, County, neighboring localities, corporations, non-profits, and private entities. All funding opportunities should be evaluated and given consideration by the City of Westminster and the Council Members.

Conclusion

Reasons why – provide care and shelter (compassion and empathy), pathway to self-sufficiency, positive community impact, law enforcement
Empower the community to be involved in the process

~~The Housing Continuum would prioritize the City's identified needs and obligations with an awareness that without access to outside funding resources for capital or operational support, the needs within the City cannot be met. Wherever possible, initiatives would be structured with the goal of leveraging outside resources and avoiding "leaving money on the table" in terms of securing outside resources, including the use of City-controlled land where applicable.~~

~~*[Editor note: may want to expand thoughts on City-controlled land for clarity where it occurs. For example, does this mean parks?]*~~

~~For permanent supportive housing, this means aligning the building design and programming so that the housing is eligible and competitive for capital funding from sources beyond the City. For temporary housing such as a Navigation Center or emergency shelter, this includes partnership with at least one neighboring city as a prerequisite for Orange County funding and efficiencies of scale; the County of Orange has indicated that its policies generally favor temporary housing that is established by multiple cities in partnership. In all instances, the City would seek to reduce capital costs by seeking opportunities to utilize City-owned land resources within the City or the City's sphere of influence.~~

Examples:

- ~~The Orange County Housing Trust Fund (County)~~
- ~~HOME Funds (City)~~
- ~~Project-based Housing Choice Vouchers or Mainstream Vouchers (OC Housing Authority)~~
- ~~Housing for a Healthy California fundings (State HCD)~~

~~Upon the drafting of this task force recommendation, it became apparent to the Task Force members that certain assumptions had been built into this document, and we present those assumptions as guiding principles for this recommendation, as follows:~~

~~(1) The Task Force is of the view that practical guidance and real-life advice is what the City Council should hear from the Task Force, so that our recommendations are immediately useful.~~

~~(2) Our position does not wholly represent the views of all of the task force members, but does come together in good faith to give a clear recommendation that is realistically actionable by the City of Westminster immediately.~~

~~(3) Further, the Task Force assumes that the City will prioritize compliance with federal court guidance concerning the enforcement of anti-loitering laws, which in turn will require the City to provide adequate shelter space, to screen homeless, and to connect them with health services or shelters.~~

~~This report comes during challenging times that cannot be ignored nor fully addressed: rising homelessness, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, an economic downturn, and we now stand witness to a national response to racial inequity.~~