

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 in this report represent what the Homelessness Task Force agrees is in the best interest of the community, its residents, and those struggling with homelessness, and has been created with the intent to guide a long-term plan. Because homelessness is not unique to Westminster, partnership with surrounding cities and/or the County of Orange is recommended to access funding opportunities, share resources, and provide solutions on a regional level.

It is understood that these recommendations may result in questions and concerns; best practice models from established service providers have been taken into consideration during the development of these recommendations. Additional refinements are expected to be made as the plan unfolds and is implemented.

GOAL

The ultimate goal is to end homelessness. Therefore, it is the Task Force's ambition that all appropriate resources and efforts, as identified in this report, be utilized to achieve this goal, including navigation, shelter and long term housing options, and community engagement.

BACKGROUND

The root causes of homelessness include job loss, financial catastrophes – often related to health crises and medical bills, domestic abuse, trauma, addiction, and mental health struggles. In areas like Orange County, the high cost of housing exacerbates homelessness rates, as many jobs do not pay at living-wage rates.

Housing solutions fall along what is called the “Housing Continuum”, as succinctly described in the graphic below, courtesy of United Way.



The best housing solution for someone experiencing, or close to experiencing, homelessness will vary based on their particular circumstance. Therefore, social services and support are often as critical as housing itself to help identify an achievable path towards stable housing based on those unique circumstances.

The Task Force recommends the following activities and solutions be supported by the City: 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 Program
- Families Forward
- SPIN

Affordable Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing - Cost effective way to help individuals and families live a stable and productive life. Both types of housing are typically developed with income-restricted covenants that limit the amount of rent that can be charged, keeping the units affordable. Permanent supportive housing takes the additional step of pairing the unit with social services, community support services, and case management. These units are reserved for those that need long-term support to remain housed, often people that have experienced chronic homelessness.

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.

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.

Emergency Shelter

The City should fund a temporary emergency shelter to increase street exits and provide an immediate solution to homelessness for those willing to accept assistance. A shelter is also necessary in order to comply with the recent *Boise* court ruling and the direction set by Federal Judge David Carter. The navigation center may operate as an independent operation, or in conjunction with the emergency shelter. Some key characteristics of the shelter are as follows.

- The shelter should utilize modern best practices, including provision of wrap-around social services, controlled entry and exits (no walk ups), and 24-hour operations, not just overnight stays.
- The shelter should be low-barrier, accommodating the conditions of many chronically homeless, including allowing pets. However, rules of conduct should be set and abided by.
- A shelter operator should be contracted with to provide all services.
- To the extent possible, the shelter should be located in a place that minimizes impacts on neighboring land uses. Community support built through outreach is necessary, and should be augmented by the selected operator.
- With annual operating costs estimated at \$1.8 million, the Task Force strongly recommends partnership with neighboring communities and the County of Orange.

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

Immediate community outreach should take place to educate residents and business owners about the homeless crisis and the need to support services to reduce and ultimately eliminate homelessness.

Initially, the City should lead community workshops, similar to those the Police Department has conducted on other topics. Social media, mailers, and other outreach tactics should be used to advertise the workshops. More online information and resources should be developed as well, for those who cannot attend.

The focus of early efforts should be on education, to empower the community to do more to combat homelessness. The workshops and outreach may also be used to identify individuals that wish to contribute time and resources as a part of a community team. A faith-based group has already made progress towards shared resources and information, and should be encouraged to continue moving forward in partnership with the City.

Some community members may choose to pursue becoming a "citizen access point" to direct people to the resources of the Navigation Center. Others may volunteer be a part of a citizens' advisory group for the emergency shelter's contracted provider. Above all, continued advocacy for homeless support services is necessary for the community to address and reduce homelessness within Westminster.

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