




## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council

**FROM:** Sara L. Hensley, CPRP, Interim Assistant City Manager 

**DATE:** November 28, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Reducing the Harm, a Compassionate Response to Homelessness, Update #1

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### **Background:**

For many years government, non-profits, and business leaders have worked to address issues specific to funding and infrastructure for housing and support services to address homelessness. While these collaborative efforts have positive impacts, the overall number of persons experiencing homelessness has remained relatively unchanged. A key component of the City strategy is to assess the City's role in providing, facilitating and encouraging social support as part of its work with stakeholders on issues related to housing and support services. In addition to the provision of housing, shelter, delivery of case management and other important services needed to stabilize persons experiencing homelessness, the need exists to provide support as individuals begin recovery and prepare for integration into housing.

### **Current Climate:**

In the past, multiple City departments worked independently to understand and address the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. However, over the last few months, a dozen (12) City departments have collaborated and worked closely to establish a common understanding and develop an integrated mitigation strategy. This process has been enlightening and at times overwhelming as we study the complexity of the issues and the necessary remedy. It has also been hopeful as we discuss various approaches, in concert with community stakeholders, focusing on a unified goal to improve the lives of all community members through the development and implementation of a common strategy. In our research, we have discovered there is much to gain by sitting at the table with our faith community. The faith community working to address homelessness, has invaluable insight and lessons learned, as they have close relationships within the community of service providers as well as with individuals experiencing homelessness.

### **City of Austin Strategy:**

There are compassionate efforts underway throughout Austin, with many agencies working to better understand and respond to homelessness in their own unique way. However, City efforts will be more effective, and resources better spent, as we clearly define goals and create a road map establishing the City's role in the larger community effort.

The City's Homelessness Team is mapping current efforts, both within City departments and among external stakeholders. We are identifying funding sources, needs, and critical gaps in services as well as leveraging the findings from the City Auditor's Homelessness Assistance Audit Series. Once we

fully understand the current state, we can begin to develop a three (3) to five (5) year strategy. The overall goal is to assess the City's role and align resources to ensure that the most significant impact supports the City's Strategic Planning efforts.

The City Team will work with stakeholders to develop and implement comprehensive and coordinated approaches to reduce the number of persons experiencing homelessness in Austin. Approaches will include the prevention of homelessness, support for recovery from homelessness, and delivery of services in coordination with external agencies, including a near-term solution to alleviate health & safety issues in the downtown area. The City will leverage and improve on the use of data, technology, and human-centered design while encouraging improvement and innovation across sectors. In addition, we will highlight recommended objectives that tie to the Strategic Plan.

**Tasks:**

The following is a draft list of near-term tasks the City Team will undertake as part of the strategy implementation. This is in addition to the ten (10) homelessness related resolutions that are under review and action plans being developed.

- Task 1: Define and map current services across the City of Austin, (COA) including those provided by city and county agencies, non-profit stakeholders, and the faith community;
- Task 2: Leverage mapping and engagement per Task 1 to define COA role in prevention, recovery, and delivery of services;
- Task 3: Define scope and performance criteria for contracts supported by the City to address homelessness. Performance criteria will align with the indicators and metrics developed as part of the Strategic Planning effort;
- Task 4: Assess costs and benefits associated with concentrated service delivery (downtown core) compared to a dispersed service delivery model through community providers;
- Task 5: Work with stakeholders to develop and expand on common database/data set, and technologies for accessing information, (including option for mobile technology).

This is a significant undertaking that involves a closer look at the overall common good for our community. It requires all of us to keep an open mind and look for any and all opportunities to eliminate duplication and gaps in services. Our first step in building the plan is to make sure that everyone is at the table.

As we move forward, I will periodically provide a report outlining discoveries, opportunities, challenges, and progress with each individual tasks.

Thank you for your support and should you have questions, please feel free to contact me.

Cc: Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager  
CMO Executive Team  
Homelessness Team Members