



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: J. Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager
Kristi Samilpa, Executive Assistant and Assisting the Homeless Strategy Office

DATE: August 15, 2019

SUBJECT: Update from the Homeless Strategy Office

On June 20, 2019, Austin City Council voted to approve Resolution No. 20190620-184 (the Resolution). The Resolution covered many topics regarding options for assisting individuals experiencing homelessness who are living unsheltered, including the potential for identifying safe and clean camping and parking areas, storage lockers, bathrooms, showers, and laundry facilities. This update covers the direction to the City Manager to do the following:

- Propose reasonable time and place opportunities and limitations on camping, sitting and lying.
- Provide possible options for at least ten locations, one in each Council district, that would allow for camping.
- Provide possible options for parking areas across the City that would allow for people to sleep in cars and receive wrap around services, perhaps in association with parking lots of volunteer places of worship or larger retail locations.
- Provide possible options for reasonable time and place opportunities and limitations on camping, sitting, and lying including possibly limiting a person camping in a public area underneath a highway overpass that is a median or concrete barrier designed to divide motor vehicle travel in the same or opposite directions or that is sloped towards a roadway.
- Provide possible options for non-criminal remedies or tools related to time and place limitations on camping, sitting, and lying.

Authorized Encampments and Parking Lots are Not “Housing First” Solutions

“Everyone experiencing homelessness shares one thing in common: they do not have a safe or appropriate place to live.” – National Alliance to End Homelessness, March 18, 2019, [“What Housing First Really Means”](#).

People experiencing unsheltered homelessness is a nationwide epidemic, and major cities across the United States are endeavoring to develop solutions for this moral concern which also encompasses a public health and safety concern. At the crux of sustainable solutions is developing “Housing First” pathways that provide permanent housing opportunities which also connect individuals and families to resources to help stabilize them once they are housed.

Housing First is a complicated and costly endeavor; however, it is the model and set of approaches supported by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, and Austin’s Action Plan to End Homelessness.

“As we respond to the crisis of unsheltered homelessness, we must not repeat past mistakes of focusing only on where people will be tonight. We must simultaneously be focused on where people can succeed in the long term—and we know that is permanent housing.” – Executive Director Matthew Doherty, USICH, [Housing First Partners Conference, April 10, 2018](#).

USICH advises significant caution when considering authorized encampments and places to sleep in cars or recreational vehicles. The primary reason for USICH’s caution is that the cost and consequences of this type of response negatively impacts and detracts from systemic efforts to end homelessness. In May 2018, the USICH published a short report, “[Caution is Needed When Considering ‘Sanctioned Encampments’ or ‘Safe Zones’](#)”. The report cited the following reasons why this approach is problematic:

- Creating these environments may make it look and feel like the community is taking action to end homelessness on the surface—but, by themselves, they have little impact on reducing homelessness.
- Creating these environments can be costly in money, staff time, and effort.
- These environments can prove difficult to manage and maintain.
- Although often proposed as “temporary” approaches, these programs prove difficult to close once they open.

Recently, HUD published a report, “[Understanding Encampments of People Experiencing Homelessness and Community Responses](#)”. As a conclusion, HUD found that limited evidence suggests that sanctioned encampments help to reduce homelessness.

For the above reasons, the Homeless Strategy Office will respectfully not bring forth recommendations for authorized encampments nor options for parking areas. Rather, the focus will continue to be on Housing First and the deployment of actions targeted toward rapid re-housing, emergency shelters, low-barrier housing-focused shelter, and permanent supportive housing. Please reference **Attachment A** on the number of shelter beds available and in progress for completion. On August 5th, a memo was provided to Mayor and Council which indicated that the evaluation of new initiatives would be viewed through the lens of “How will this get a person housed?”. Neither authorized encampments nor parking areas provide housing for people experiencing homelessness. Rather, each option detracts from the staff resources assigned to addressing this moral imperative. Other areas of focus continue to be as follows:

- Creating more effective indoor shelter or crisis housing options if needed.
- Analyzing the current state of existing emergency shelter program.
- Planning for how individuals will be able to exit homelessness and access permanent housing options, including permanent supportive housing.
- Providing a high-quality environment within all shelter and housing programs.

Continued Collaboration is Needed for Solutions to Homelessness

USICH also published a more lengthy report in August 2015 entitled, "[Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue](#)." Key perspectives from the report included the following:

- The presence of encampments in our communities is an indicator of the critical need to create more effective and efficient local systems for responding to the crisis of homelessness.
- Providing lasting solutions and ending the homelessness of people living in encampments requires a thoughtful, coordinated, and collaborative plan and process to ensure that people can be linked to appropriate housing options and that the presence of encampments in the community can be resolved.

As cited, by USICH, collaborative efforts can better align available resources and more quickly connect people with housing, health care, and services. Effective action plans for lasting solutions to homelessness involve multiple public and private stakeholders including, but not limited to, local officials, city and county staff, continuum of care agencies, philanthropists, service providers, housing organizations, law enforcement, business leaders, strategic planning bodies, and people who have experienced homelessness. **Attachment B** of this memo references the variety of community service providers and organizations that receive funding from the City of Austin. There are many more service providers and organizations that are focused on various aspects of issues surrounding homelessness, and all should be included in the collaborative approach.

Both Matthew Doherty, Executive Director for USICH, and Robert Pulster, Regional Coordinator of the National Initiatives Team for USICH, have offered to assist as needed to provide a federal perspective on the issues surrounding homelessness.

Time and Place Limitations Criteria on Camping, Sitting, and Lying

The HSO has initiated meetings with stakeholders to solicit feedback on camping, sitting, and lying limitations criteria. To date, meetings have been held with the Downtown Austin Alliance and the Greater Austin Crime Commission. Additional feedback has been secured from the Austin Homeless Advisory Committee, service provider partners, and fellow public safety departments. Additional feedback will be sought from a broad array of organizations including those concerned with the criminalization of homelessness.

Limitations criteria for camping, sitting, and lying will likely focus on geographical areas which have high pedestrian traffic, high automobile traffic, and floodways. By way of example, rainwater tunnels are not physically safe for camping due to the large rain events typical in this region which cause flash flooding of the rainwater tunnels. As another example, high pedestrian areas that are blocked by encampments could unintentionally lead to more accidents in already high pedestrian crash areas as identified in the City's [2018 Pedestrian Safety Action Plan](#). The HSO will work with the Austin Transportation Department Vision Zero team to fully understand the intersection of high pedestrian crash areas as they relate to encampments.

It is not the intent to identify limitations criteria that would result in arrest. Rather, it is the goal of the HSO to provide reasonable criteria to ensure the safety of those experiencing homelessness as well as the sheltered public. In addition to local stakeholder feedback, additional research will be performed regarding national best practices. The following reports by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty offer valuable insight into constructive alternatives to the criminalization of homelessness:

- [“No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities”](#)
- [“Tent City, USA: The Growth of America’s Homeless Encampments and How Communities are Responding”](#)

More information regarding limitations criteria will be forthcoming following the conclusion of stakeholder meetings and best practices research.

In conclusion, the Homeless Strategy Office is committed to solving the issue of providing housing for person experiencing homelessness, and additional updates will be provided as we continue our work.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Copy: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
 CMO Executive Team
 City Directors and Assistant Directors
 Austin Transportation Department Vision Zero Team

AUSTIN AREA SHELTER BEDS¹

Shelter	Beds	Notes
Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH)	130	Individual Men
A New Entry – Substance Abuse Recovery/Transitional Housing	80	42 Beds for Veterans
Austin Shelter for Women and Children - Salvation Army	81	17 rooms – Women with Children 3 rooms – Single Women
Casa Marianella	89	Dedicated to solely immigrants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (65% asylum seekers) • 41 beds – Women and children • 48 Individuals
Foundation for the Homeless- Family Rehousing Shelter	26	Families with children
Integral Care – SafeHaven	15	Veterans
LifeWorks	20	Youth
SAFE Alliance – Domestic Violence shelter beds	106	Individuals & Families with Children
SAFE Alliance – Children's Emergency Shelter	29	16 beds – Youth 13 beds – Teen Parents
Salvation Army – Downtown Social Service Center	242	Individuals & Families with Children
Salvation Army – Rathgeber Center (not yet opened)	212	Individuals & Families with Children
South Austin Housing Center (under development)	100	Individuals
TOTAL BEDS	1,130	

¹ Updated per ECHO 2019 Housing Inventory Count

Landscape of City of Austin Investment in Community Service Providers and Organizations

	Agency	Description of Program / Services
OUTREACH AND NAVIGATION	ECHO - Housing Navigation Program	Assists people who are homeless with Housing Navigation to find permanent housing
	Family Eldercare - The Other Ones Foundation Workforce First Pilot	Family Eldercare subcontracts with The Other Ones Foundation (TOOF) for engaging homeless individuals into daily employment opportunities and connections to case management, banking, public benefits, housing programs and more
	Integral Care - PATH Expansion	Expansion of PATH homeless outreach program, engaging with unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness, assessing their needs, and connecting them to services and programs

	Agency	Description of Program / Services
EMERGENCY SHELTER SERVICES	Casa Marianella - Shelter	Emergency shelter for immigrants and refugees (single adults, women & children)
	Front Steps - Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH)	Operation of housing-focused night shelter, case management and services for men
	The Salvation Army - Women & Children's Shelter	Emergency shelter, basic needs, case management, specialized counseling, and education services for adult women and their dependent children under age 18
	The Salvation Army - Passages Child Care for Families in Shelter	Short-term, quality child care for families experiencing homelessness and residing in emergency shelter through Salvation Army or SAFE
	The Salvation Army - Pathways & Partnerships Emergency Shelter	Emergency shelter services, case management, employment services and housing support for adults
	The SAFE Alliance - SafePlace - Victim Services	Emergency shelter for men, women and children who have experienced sexual and/or domestic violence. Services include shelter, counseling, crisis stabilization, case management, financial assistance for housing supports
	Foundation for the Homeless - Family Rehousing Initiative	Case managed shelter and transitional housing for families with children under age 18, financial assistance for rehousing
	LifeWorks - Housing Programs within Collective Impact Continuum	Emergency Youth Shelter, Transitional Living Program for youth, Street Outreach and Services for youth, Supportive Housing (part of a larger contract that includes education, counseling, and youth development services)
	The SAFE Alliance - Austin Children's Shelter - Emergency Shelter Program	Emergency shelter services, assessment, and case management services for youth in care of the State

Agency		Description of Program / Services
RAPID REHOUSING / HOUSING PLACEMENT SERVICES	Caritas - Best Single Source Plus Collaborative	Case management and financial assistance for homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing across 12 different partner agencies (AIDS Services of Austin, Any Baby Can, Caritas, Catholic Charities of Central Texas, Family Eldercare, Foundation for the Homeless, Front Steps, Goodwill, Meals on Wheels and More, SAFE, The Salvation Army, LifeWorks)
	Casa Marianella - Open Doors Rapid Rehousing	Rapid Rehousing services including case management, housing location, housing stability services, and financial assistance for homeless families and individuals who are immigrants or refugees
	Downtown Austin Community Court Rapid Rehousing - Front Steps Rapid Rehousing	Rapid Rehousing services including case management, housing location, housing stability services, and financial assistance for homeless adults.
	Family Eldercare - Rapid Rehousing for Older Adults	Rapid Rehousing services including case management, housing location, housing stability services, and financial assistance for older homeless adults
	Integral Care - Rapid Recovery - Shelter to Housing	Housing location, time-limited financial support and tailored housing and behavioral health case management to individuals experiencing homelessness and accessing or camping outside ARCH
	LifeWorks - Youth Rapid Rehousing Collaborative	Rapid Rehousing services including case management, housing location, housing stability services, and financial assistance for homeless adults. Subgrantee is SAFE Alliance

Agency		Description of Program / Services
PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (PSH)/ SUPPORTIVE HOUSING	Caritas - BHS	Behavioral health services for residents of PSH, including substance abuse counseling, mental health counseling, psych nurse services
	VinCare - St Louise House	Long-term supportive housing for homeless women-led families with children under age 18
	Foundation Communities - Arbor Terrace	Housing stability and case management services for residents of PSH
	Front Steps - PSH	Case management, supportive services, and direct client assistance for residents of PSH
	Foundation Communities - Supported Employment	Supported employment assistance program for residents of PSH
	Foundation Communities - HOME (Medicaid 1115 Waiver)	Intensive community-based services for PSH residents with significant health conditions
	Integral Care - City ACT PSH (Medicaid 1115 Waiver)	Intensive community-based services for PSH residents with significant health conditions
	Integral Care - PSH Oak Springs	Intensive, individualized community-based services for chronically homeless/PSH residents

Agency		Description of Program / Services
HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION	Caritas - Best Single Source Plus Collaborative	Case management and financial assistance for homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing across 13 different partner agencies (AIDS Services of Austin, Any Baby Can, ARC of the Capital Area, Caritas, Catholic Charities of Central Texas, Family Eldercare, Foundation for the Homeless, Front Steps, Goodwill, Meals on Wheels and More, SafePlace, The Salvation Army, Wright House Wellness Center)
	Catholic Charities of Central Texas - Financial Stability	Homelessness prevention case management and financial assistance for renters experiencing a crisis in Austin/Travis County through the City Neighborhood Centers and Catholic Charities
	Texas RioGrande Legal Aid - Public Benefits and Housing Rights	Legal and other professional services to low income clients who are threatened with loss of housing and/or public benefits in order to increase their ability to maintain or achieve self-sufficiency; Austin Tenants Council is a subcontractor
	Texas RioGrande Legal Aid - Resident's Advocacy Program	The program provides 4 basic services: a. Educate tenants that reside within the City of Austin on their legal rights. b. Through investigation, outreach and from referrals from the Code Department, identify tenants that reside at substandard rental properties. c. Work with tenants to make sure Landlords make needed repairs as required by law. d. Counsel and represent tenants unlawfully targeted for eviction.
	Austin Tenants Council - Housing Stability Pilot Program	Provides service to referral agencies to reduce rental debt of clients in Rapid Rehousing and Homelessness Prevention program.

Agency		Description of Program / Services
PLANNING & ADMINISTRATION	ECHO	Planning, prioritizing, and implementing strategies to end homelessness in Austin/Travis County; Administering HMIS database; Leading Coordinated Assessment initiative and systems change; Serving as CoC lead, ensuring community partners meet HUD requirements and secure available funding
	NAEH (National Alliance to End Homelessness)	Consulting services of ARCH redesign, emergency shelter system