

Austin City Council Discussion Transcript: Addressing Homelessness in Austin Forum – 09/03/2019

Title: City of Austin

Channel: 6 - COAUS

Recorded On: 9/3/2019 6:00:00 AM

Original Air Date: 9/3/2019

Transcript Generated by SnapStream

=====

[9:32:02 PM]

>> Good evening, everyone. We'd like to welcome you to the hilltop at St. Edwards university. I'm Dr. Andrew Prall, provost at St. Edwards and it's my privilege to invite you here for this important conversation. Homelessness is an issue that affects each one of us in Austin. St. Edwards this evening is pleased to collaborate with merit, city council, leaders of partner non-profits and those in the audience to continue this important conversation on this humanitarian and social justice issue. Thank you for joining us this evening. At St. Edwards we encourage our students to confront society's most pressing issues so they can make a difference in our world. Our admissions specifically calls us to inform students in critical and informative thinking as well as moral reasoning, to analyze problems, propose solutions and make responsible August decisions. We hope tonight will be an opportunity for all engaged in addressing this complex issue of homelessness to utilize these approaches so that we can engage in civil

[9:33:02 PM]

and constructive dialogue for the greater good of all of Austin. We are very grateful this evening to have a distinguished faculty member with us to guide our conversation. I'd like to introduce Dr. Jack Musselman, assistant professor of philosophy and the director of ethics for leadership. The St. Edwards center for ethics and leadership, convenes dialogues about important issues throughout the academic year here at St. Edwards. I'm very privileged for him to moderate this discussion this evening. Without further adieu I will turn it over to jack. [Applause]. >> Thank you, everybody. And welcome to coming. Thank you for that introduction. As he said my name is Dr. Musselman. All of our students here have to do ethics. I also do ethics consults. That's as much as I'm going to say about my job.

[9:34:03 PM]

I do want to say as a catholic college committed to the view that all of us have been created in the image of god, which means every single solitary person regardless of creed, ethnicity, gender, race, identity, gender, orientation, marital status, disability status, everyone. The reason I emphasize that so much is it will give me a segue into the ground rules. I have a little bit to say about the ground rules with the dialogue with the panel and the public. There should be index cards circulating around if you want to write down a question. And where is Dr. Laguna. If you can turn and see there, if you have an index card question, submit it to her through the course of the evening as we have the discussion. She will write down your questions and feed them to me. We may not get to everybody's questions. There may be a lot of people here for 90 minutes. I'll get to as many as we can. Before I ask the panel to introduce themselves by title and name, mayor Adler and council person tovo are

[9:35:05 PM]

not here yet. My understanding is they're late and trying their best to get here. If you want to hear from them, hold on. We really do hope they're coming. When we get to the panel answering questions, I am going to allow them a couple of minutes based on a natural fit between question, questioner and respondent. If there's more -- if there's too much monologuing or speechifying, nobody gets to dominate the floor. I will politely cut them off, draw them back to topic, but cut them off. So people know the ground rules. That's out of respect for everybody here as well. Everyone wants a chance to see as many questions answered. It doesn't mean you can't be critical or trenchant and ask an edgy question, but it does mean we have some time constraints on how it will work. I said something about the ground rules, your asking questions. Chris having the index cards: Let's get a chance to have each member of the panel introduce themselves by name and title and then I

[9:36:05 PM]

have a leadoff question to give you a chance to ask questions on cards and we'll get start. So thank you. >> My name is Joe Katherine Quinn and I'm the CEO at caritas of Austin. >> Good evening, everyone, my name is Darlene buyler and I'm the director of behavioral systems at adult integral care. >> I am Pio Renteria representing draft 3. >> >> I am dahlia garrya who represents the district from stassney to slaughter and then the railroad tracks does this weird thing. That's where interestingly enough I kind of border these two on the map. I don't know if they sat us this way on purpose. >> Kitchen: >> Hi, I'm councilmember Ann kitchen and I represent district 5, which is south central Austin. I would also like to say

[9:37:06 PM]

that councilmember tovo asked me to be sure and let you know that she will get her, she's going to be late. She had a family obligation and then the mayor had an obligation that came up at the last minute related to a funeral. Both of them it's very important for them to be here and they're doing their best to be here. >> Thank you. For those of you who registered on event bright, there was an opportunity to add questions, which is actually what I have here, some of those in my hand. I will start with one of those. And Chris is wandering around to pick up index cards and sort by type. If five people ask the same question we'll 59 combine and ask those. I don't know which of you may think this is a best fit for your wheelhouse, but one of the questions I have from event bright says homelessness is haringbly the top issue the Austin community is addressing today. Between new ordinances on camping, solicitation, and where people can sit or lay, and a new center off Ben white, as well as approaches to addressing mental health and substance abuse.

[9:38:06 PM]

There's a whole lot to sort through. In about a minute -- that's in the question. In about a minute I can give you two, describe the issue of homelessness in Austin as you see it, what are we talking about when we say homelessness in Austin is an issue? That could be for everybody. >> To me homelessness, I'm a lifelong resident here in Austin, especially growing up in east Austin. And what I see people out there and I see my friends, I even had a young -- my youngest brother, he was homeless and he passed away out in the street, but people that have a demon on their back and just can't get rid of T people really suffering out there. Our school system was horrible when I was growing up and I see these people struggling out there in the street. And I see my neighbors, you

[9:39:07 PM]

know, that their family, grew up in a family, got married, their parents passed away. Someone in the family got hold of the house and sold it and left them there on the street. These are the kind of people that we see out in the street that we're trying to help back in the 1980s when we had an opportunity to pass some home bonds that we could have helped these people put in affordable housing and build these kind of housing that we could put them in there, the citizens of Austin turned their back and said no, we don't need to be spending any money on housing. And it comes back to bite us. I started a program, a campaign here in Austin. Homer the homeless goose and we marched down there because we knew that because of the laws that the ordinance that we passed here penalizing homeless was not going to be successful.

[9:40:08 PM]

And we're paying the price right now. And the whole country is facing the same issue that we're facing here where we have a lot of homeless people out there that need help. When we took all the mental illness people off from institutions and just put them out in the streets in the '90s, you know, we saw what was going to happen and the support that the state said that they were going to give to the cities and the community didn't come through. They helped a little bit at the beginning, but the funding didn't happen. So we're facing that crisis now. And that's what I feel that we need to address. >> Thank you. >> Kitchen: Thank you, councilmember Renteria. I want to just add to that, it might be helpful for me the question you asked or question that someone asked is what is the issue of

[9:41:09 PM]

homelessness and what perspective do we see it from? And so I would just quickly say two things. From my perspective I believe that it is -- I believe that people should not have to live on the streets. It is not a good place. It's not healthy, it's not a good place for people to live, it's not good for community at all. So I see this as fundamentally the root of it is a question of housing and the affordability to afford housing and the kind of housing that meets people's needs. I think I would also like to say that it helps to understand the scope of the issue in Austin because for me the scope of the issue helps me understand that this is a problem that we can get our arms and around and we can address this Austin. In your packet there was information about the scope of the issue. I'll cite quickly for those of you who may not have had a chance to see it is the

[9:42:09 PM]

point this time count in January, which is basically the annual census, counted a little over a thousand people living on the streets at that time, unsheltered folks. Now, we know that's one snapshot, that's a point in time literally and so we're probably dealing with more than that in terms of people living on the streets. But still the scope of that is still very doable for us and as a city I believe we can address it. >> Thank you. Any other panelists? Two minutes. The question was -- and people were told that you may be late. What are we talking about when we say homelessness in Austin is an issue? And people are taking two minutes to sort of key that up. >> I would like to just thank everyone for being here. It doesn't matter where you stand, fact that you are here is an indication that we are standing together to address issues of

[9:43:09 PM]

homelessness and to solve this. As part of the work we do at integral care we provide mental health services and substance use treatment to the entire county. Last year alone we served 4,000 individuals experiencing homelessness. We want our community to be healthy, we want our community to have

mental health, however, we cannot have a healthy community, we cannot have mental health without a home. So when we talk about individuals experiencing homelessness that are on its streets we talked about the 2200 individuals. When you think about it it's not that many individuals. We last year as a community housed close to 1600. And I think people forget about the accomplishments we have been able to achieve together across the community. Last month we housed 169 individuals through our

[9:44:10 PM]

partnerships in our community. 60% of individuals on the street are suffering from mental health and substance use conditions. And one of the questions was around how do you address that? You cannot address mental health or substance use conditions when you are on the streets. You need to have a roof over your head as the basic foundation for someone to be able to thrive and achieve recovery. >> Thank you. And I think we have some questions on index cards that they kind of sorted or should -- >> No, we've got quite a few questions here, so trying to sort through them and group them a little bit. >> I can go to the event bright list. >> I'm good to go here. I'll try to group them and we'll try to get to as many as we can. So the first one is actually a pretty general question about housing. So maybe more directed to our councilmembers on the panel. What are you doing to address the affordability issue in Austin? The affordable housing is key to solving this issue?

[9:45:13 PM]

>> Anyone that thinks that fits in their wheelhouse. >> Garza: I'll take that one because this is a topic that we've talked about at every town hall that we ever go to. And one thing I always like to say is these big challenges, they're not new and they're on the only Austin problems. They're happening nationwide and for those who don't know my background I used to be an Austin firefighter. My nation was Ben white and south first. I became a firefighter in 2001 and I was a firefighter for six years. And the bulk of our medical calls in that area are probably what they are now is medical calls on our homeless population. My first intersection with -- was during the hurricane. I can't remember which one now. It was when we were having people come to our convention center and hearing stories of people who had nowhere to go. They had nowhere to go and

[9:46:13 PM]

it was very eye opening to know that there are people -- and those were outside of our community coming in with just really nowhere to go. I feel like local government is often -- we're charged with solving problems that we didn't create many times. So one of the first slides that I show at my town halls is how wages have stayed stagnant and housing prices have continued to increase. That's not an Austin problem, that's a nationwide problem. That's why there's a continual fight for a living wage. A lot of quiz

questions I get asked from my constituents is why can't you stop somebody from raising my rent? And I say it's against the law. Our state leaders won't let us do rent control. When a developer does something why can't you make them do this? Texas is a big property rights state. We cannot make people do

[9:47:14 PM]

things with their private property. So the way the council has tried to address it is pushing for affordable housing bonds. Significantly increasing funding. In this budget we see \$62 million allocated to address homelessness. Pushing to reform our land development code. We are a growing city. We are the 11th largest city. Often when I give that statistic people are surprised that we are the 11th largest city in our country. So we are tasked with fixing huge challenges and only being able to solve kind of around the edges. And so that's my response. >> Thank you. We have -- anyone else on the panel want to address it or go to the next question? The night is early. >> Kitchen: I would just echo what the councilmember said, just quickly. The people of this community passed a 250-million-dollar housing bond last November.

[9:48:14 PM]

That is going to go a long way to helping us. The land development code that we will be taking up we're talking about affordable housing being a key that's important to us. We're looking at how we can handle our policies to improve affordable housing and then we've got the funding adjusting homelessness housing. >> Renteria: I would like to just mention what I'm doing in my district too. We're building right now where we will have 600 senior housing, Rebecca Bain right now. Chalmers court will have 400 brand new units to house the people that are making 30% and under. The habitat building a 72-foot tall building, condo that they're going to sell to the working class citizens of Austin between

[9:49:14 PM]

48,000 and \$68,000 apiece and these are also family type condos. So we're also going to have over 200 units over there in plaza saltillo for family housing and low income people to be able to stay. That's just the beginning of what we're doing right now. We've also got a lot of tax credits that are coming up and we just approved about seven of them coming on board here in the next two years. So these are the must not that y'all helped us so that we can work with the private and leverage our money so it can go for a very long distance. So it takes about two years to do a development here in Austin, to get it from beginning to have it occupied. So that's what I'm working on so I'm also an affordable

[9:50:15 PM]

housing advocate. >> Mayor and then we'll do one more response and then Chris, you have some more questions. Yes, please. >> Mayor Adler: First I want to say thank you to St. Edwards to putting this on and everyone being here. I apologize for being tardy walking in. Sheik Omar, I don't know how many of you knew him, died unexpectedly last night. In my 40 years in Austin he's probably one of a handful of really great people and his funeral was tonight. So I was there on my way here. I think the question about affordability and homelessness, I didn't really get to answer the first question or truly related issues. There's nothing that corresponds to homelessness more than accelerating housing prices in this city. In fact, in some cities they've actually been able to figure out how many more people will appear experiencing homelessness on their street based for every

[9:51:17 PM]

thousand dollar increase in the median priced home in that area. Our homeless population went up by about four percent last year to. To Ann's point the national everything was five percent. Dallas went up nine percent. Just to give you perspective of where we are with respect to the rest of the country. Seattle that has 200,000 fewer people than we have has six times the number of people experiencing homelessness as we do. A city like language lapping has nearly -- like Los Angeles has nearly 40,000 people who are experiencing homelessness. Almost 60,000 in LA county. Their homeless count went up by 16% last year. One of the reasons you see that is because the median home price in San Francisco is 1 million five. In Seattle and Boston, by the way, about \$800,000. It's important to note that the median home price in Seattle six years ago was on

[9:52:18 PM]

top of the median home price in Austin today. We don't have the challenge that we have in Seattle or Portland or LA. But if we don't do something substantially different and different than what they did, then that's the path that I fear we might be on. So most of the people that are homeless, experiencing homelessness in our community, are not experiencing homelessness because they're addicts. Most of them don't end up in that place because they have mental health challenges. Most people that end up homeless is because they're dealing with just the perfect storm. They've lost their spouse, their husband or their wife at the same time they lost their children. At the same time that they lost their job and they probably had some really big creditor or hospital trying to get them to pay for a bill that they can't afford

[9:53:18 PM]

to pay and then they lose their apartment and they find themselves homeless. That is what most of the people are experiencing homelessness in our community. So the housing issue and the affordability issue is direct corollary to the challenge we have, which is why housing and housing where people can get supportive services is key to resolving the challenge. >> Thank you. Maybe we can go to another question from the audience. >> So there are a number of questions about the shelter, the new housing focused shelter that's currently planned for district 5. A lot of questions about why there, why not another location? And what's the plan for the next homeless shelter, where will that be put up? I'm kind of lumping a few together, but what assurances or timelines can you provide regarding other shelters in other districts? So I think a lot of the the questions that are coming from the audience have to do with why it was selected to

[9:54:19 PM]

why -- in the in the location that it is and what are the plans going forward? >> Kitchen: Okay. I'll speak to that first and others might want to add. Let me start first by saying a couple of things about the shelter. I think a lot of folks here probably are pretty familiar with the scope of what we've been talking about but I'm quickly going to say a few things. So those who can understand what we're talking about. What we're talking about is a housing focused shelter and what that means is a place that people go through and not to. So the bottom line there is the housing focused shelter is a place where people can be and have access to services so that they can get to a permanent housing situation. So what does that mean? That means that it's a place that -- it's not a drop-in. There are -- that means that the services are provided for the folks that live

[9:55:21 PM]

there, not -- that are there at that point in time, that are staying there. The services are not offered to people coming in off the street. There is a coordinated assessment process by service providers throughout the city that determines who is referred to stay there. There's also no -- basically that's it. And there's no day services. There's no drop-in, no day services, and everyone is referred there. So that's to give you the scope of it. So now to key in to a couple of questions that Chris mentioned, there's been questions about how we got there and why that location was chosen. And let me just explain that our staff went through a vetting process. There is a pretty detailed

[9:56:21 PM]

description of what that vetting process was that's posted on our website that we considered back in June when we moved forward. But the bottom line really is the questions that I hear when people ask why there and why not somewhere else? Is concerns about how the shelter will operate. And these are

all legitimate, important concerns that people have and that is what is this shelter going to do to my neighborhood? What should I be concerned about? Is there anything that I need to be concerned about about how this shelter would operate? So the council heard from a lot of people in June when we had that conversation about moving forward. So we've done a couple of things to address that. The first thing I want to speak to is the council passed a direction to our staff that requires a legally enforceable document -- legally

[9:57:24 PM]

enforceable restrictive covenant or local instrument that attaches to the property that says -- that is designed to say that this property is going to operate under best practices. What that means is will not exceed a certain size, which is 100 beds. That drop-ins will be prohibited, day services only as I said for those already living at the center, prohibition on camping around the facility that's enforceable. Additional measures that secure the property and any other measures that are needed for best practice operations. That document, that legally enforceable instrument will come back to the council for approval. We're expecting it now probably in October but that has to happen before the shelter begins operations.

[9:58:25 PM]

So that is one tangible, enforceable thing on how the shelter will be operated. Basically it will operate as a good neighbor and we need clear ways to do that so people can see that. >> That was three and a half minutes and I told people too. Maybe wrap it up and we can come back to that. >> Kitchen: There's one other thing that I need to say and I'll say it quickly. And that is because it's an opportunity for people to have feedback. The other thing we have to talk about is the scope of services and the service providers. Those are two additional opportunities for public input. The scope of services, our staff let me know today that they will put out a draft scope of services that people will be able to comment on. They will also create a list of people interested in getting regular updates on the shelter and they will reach out to everyone who came here to ask you if you

[9:59:26 PM]

want to be on that list to get updates on the shelter. Okay, I'll stop there. I wanted people to know those last two things. >> No, that's trivial. I have a couple of questions about arch. I have a couple of people on event deep Brite who have signed up and asked, and I'll lump them to you, how do we move them closer to community first. I understand they're privately owned. Would they consider moving? I don't know who can answer that? >> Tovo: I'm councilmember Kathie tovo. I'm dividing my time between my daughter's back to school and here. I apologize for being late, but it was important for me to be as there

well. I represent district 9. It includes Bouldin creek and a piece of Riverside and Oltorf that's south of the river and a former resident of south Austin. I lived 10 years in Bouldin.

[10:00:27 PM]

My district includes downtown, most of downtown. So I am proud to have the emergency shelters for the Salvation Army and Arch. I regard the individuals who seek services there as important constituents. My district also has the highest percentage of individuals who are experiencing homelessness and the largest number of unsheltered individuals. It has been a large part of my office and policy work to work within our wonderful social service providers and non-profits to work to end homelessness in this city. I do not support moving the Arch. I believe it needs to be there. It is a city-owned facility. And we contract the provision of services to right now front steps. We are in the midst of a real transformation at the Arch.

[10:01:28 PM]

When I hear concerns about the Arch it is those concerns about what is happening outside the Arch. If we have time I'm happy to address those. I think we would all agree that that change needs to be made out there and I know that our council and our city manager are committed to doing that and seeing that change. Inside the Arch we have some very committed, passionate individuals who are working to really change how we deliver services there. As councilmember Kitchen described, we've had the benefit of having the national alliance to end homelessness come in and talk to us about the Arch, but also how we deliver services in this community in ways that really reflect those best practices. The transformation is already in progress. 100% of the individuals who seek services at the Arch will be case managed. Right now that number is closer to 20%. It is becoming a housing focused shelter and it too will not have drop-in services.

[10:02:28 PM]

The bests who stay there will be case managed. They will have assistance helping them find permanent housing so that the Arch too is an emergency shelter to people go through into permanent housing. It is going to -- from the day they will focus on their housing plan. They can stay during the -- where they need to leave by a certain period of time, a certain hour in the morning, and it is in fact no longer a lottery system. The highest and those who are most in need of housing will be provided with emergency shelter at the Arch. So again, I don't support moving it. I do support addressing the situation and have been very focused, including with Jo Katherine and Dare Lean and others and we launched what I regard as a successful pilot a number of summers ago. My staff and I were there every week talking with the social service providers and helping to provide support

[10:03:28 PM]

for a pilot program that I think helps point the direction to where we need to go to a community. >> Thank you. >> [Inaudible - no mic]. If if >> [Inaudible - no mic]. >> Sir, I will ask to ask you to -- >> (Yelling).

[10:04:33 PM]

>> [Inaudible - no mic]. >> I'm a young minority who pays a lot of money to live in this city. I don't feel safe in my own community. [Cheers and applause] >> [Indiscernible]. >> I have a follow-up question. >> [Inaudible - no mic]. >> So let me do a follow-up question here so we can get going. >> [Inaudible - no mic]. >> I know there are a lot of questions and a lot of comments people want to make, and I know we have limited time, so I think to extent that we can send our questions over that will really afford the best possibility for everybody to participate. >> Councilmember tovo, I have a follow-up for you based on the shelter stuff.

[10:05:36 PM]

[Indiscernible yelling]. >> I'm yelling. >> We talked about the housing focused shelters. And the question is to please describe the plan for transitioning shelter residents to more permanent locations following their stay in a shelter, include projected sources and types of follow-up housing that match the projected shelter volume. So when we talk about the housing focus and you talk about case management and the housing plan, what are the resources to get people out of the shelter and into permanent housing. >> [Inaudible - no mic]. >> We'll get to those. >> [Inaudible].

[10:06:37 PM]

>> [Off mic]. [Applause]. >> Guys, we've got a lot of questions that we want to get to this evening. I want to let councilmember tovo follow up on that. Mayor Adler let me begin by answering some of the safety issue questions. It is against the law in our city for someone to urinate or defecate or masturbate. It is against the law in our city for someone to assault someone else. It is against the law in our city for people to create a public safety risk in our city. It's against the law in our city for people to create a public health hazard. It's against lawsuit in our city for people to block or

[10:07:39 PM]

impede. It's against the law in our city to aggressively approach somebody on our streets. Nothing that the council did takes away from the police the ability and the obligation to arrest or ticket people that are breaking the law. If anybody is hearing anything otherwise than that, then the police chief has asked to be informed and I would ask to be informed as well. I would appreciate badge numbers. Because in this city we've done nothing but reemphasize the ability and the right and the obligation for our law enforcement folks to do that. But I will say this -- I will repeat again that I hear people tell me anecdotally that police officers are suggesting otherwise and I will tell you that based on the representation of Brian Manley police chief I don't believe it. But if there is a police

[10:08:40 PM]

officer out there that is saying that, I would appreciate you getting his badge number and giving it to me or giving it to the chief because that is not acceptable conduct on behalf of our law enforcement people. I don't believe it's really happening. I will say this: That the incidence of people being concerned about their safety, the incidence of people that are seeing camps that are under overpasses or in green spaces near where they live is something that has become of my day-to-day life over the last two or three years than it was over five years ago and four years ago. In the last two or three years I've started going to neighborhood association meetings all over this city where I used to go in and people would want to talk to me about flooding or they would want to talk to me about land use issues, but instead over the last couple of years I'm now

[10:09:40 PM]

increasingly going into neighborhoods where they say to me there are encampments of people that are experiencing homelessness in this place or this place around my home. Many times it's accompanied by people saying that they believe that that's responsible for the vandalism in our neighborhood, the law enforcement people I've always been with in those situations tell community that that's not true, but I understand the perception but I also know those communities have said to me over the last two years "Fix it. Do something to fix it." So in this community that we've been in, what we know is that what we have been doing does not work because the increasing number of places we go to that raised this challenge well before June requires us to do something differently. So I'm with the people in onion creek and they're complaining about the overpass at slaughter lane and I-35.

[10:10:41 PM]

Now, it would be possible for the city to just fence off the area underneath the area at I-35 and slaughter, except those people don't disappear which means they're going to go somewhere else. And they're going to go somewhere else and then that neighborhood is going to call up and say, there's now an encampment near me. And I have the same thing as I walk through the encampment at packsaddle at Ben white and the communities say do something about this. And do you know what we've been doing in this community? We've satisfied ourselves with moving people around. So we send in our law enforcement folks and they say you can't be here. And if you stay here we'll ticket you or arrest you. Do you know how many tickets we wrote in this city between 2014 and 2016? 18,000 tickets. 18,000 tickets K you imagine how many of those tickets, how many of those people showed up in court the

[10:11:42 PM]

following Thursday? Very few. Which means the people who didn't show up in court now have a warrant for their arrest, which means at some point in the future which they actually try to get a job or try to get an apartment, it will be more important for them to do. And they don't show up and it have accomplished nothing. So we got smarter than that and in 2016 we basically stopped writing tickets, but we would go up to someone and say you can't be here. You can't be here. And if you stay then you will get ticketed or arrested. So what happens is that person then gathers up her stuff. She says officer, please don't arrest me, please don't put me in jail I'm complying. Don't give me a ticket. I'm gathering up my stuff, she says. And as she's gathering up her stuff she looks at the police officer and she says, where do you want me to go? Where should I go? And the police officer looks at her and says ma'am, I don't know the answer to that question. I just know you can't be

[10:12:44 PM]

here. We are spending -- I am tired of spending millions and millions of taxpayer dollars just moving people around our city from place to place. We know what works in this city. We were able to achieve zero veteran homelessness in our city. >> Mr. Mayor, 30 seconds,. >> Every veteran with we can get into a home and get wrap around services. We took half of the children in our streets, half of the children in the streets off the streets last year. We know what works. We just need to scale it in our city because I am tired of doing what we have done for years which has not gotten us to the place where we can effectively end homelessness, and that's what this community has to dedicate itself to do. >> We still

[10:13:46 PM]

[applause] >> Thank you. We still have to -- we still have 45 minutes. We still have 45 minutes, and I'm really pleased to hear the civil give and take. It models an excellent way of having a democratic dialogue where we can deliberate important issues. I know there's a councilmember that wanted to say

something as well. If there are any questions, again, Chris has the index card. >> Lots of questions still to get through. >> Kitchen: I want to speak to two quick things, and thank you, mayor. I think you expressed how I feel and many feel, so thank you. Let me just say this, two quick things. One, we do recognize and we've said that, you know, we've got to work on housing as quickly as possible. But we also recognize that something needs to be done in the meantime. And you all have seen the various memos that have come out, but I think our council has committed to take some

[10:14:48 PM]

action on September 19, some action that relates to where is it not safe for people to be camping? So one of the handouts that was sent to all of you was a document for discussion purposes that listed some areas to think about where it's not safe for people to camp. So I mention this only to let you know that there is specific action that the council intends to take on September 19th to address that question. The other thing I would like to just say is that I understand the concerns that people have. We're not gonna get any long-term solution until we deal with housing but we have to do something in the meantime. The second quick thing I want to say to the person on the front is that we don't want women to feel and to --

[10:15:49 PM]

to feel unsafe, and that's put -- if you'll let me finish. And -- >> [Off mic] >> Ma'am, hold on. I gave you a card. >> [Off mic] >> You can speak on the card. >> Kitchen: I want to tell a story, if you will please let me tell a story that's really important here. And it's important for everyone. And that story is this: We hear from people in district 5 all the time, and we help them with these circumstances. There was a incident posted on next door for the zilker area just the other day, with pictures, about someone who was -- a woman who was concerned about someone who was hanging around her apartment complex. We followed up on that A.P.D. We learned the circumstance, and we learned something that there's a potential to address. What we learned is that the A.P.D. Officer told her exactly what the case was, which was -- which has to do

[10:16:50 PM]

with the criminal trespass laws and what had to be posted in order for that A.P.D. To act. So there's a next step that can help in those particular circumstances for that particular complex, where they can post things in a way that that police officer has the authority to immediately address that woman's situation. We wouldn't have known that, wouldn't have been able to help A.P.D. Work that out if that person hadn't said "Look, this is what happened to me," and we said -- we all said, including A.P.D., that that's not the circumstance that we want to happen so let's fix it. So I'm telling you this story just to say,

please let us know if there are circumstances. As the mayor said, that's not -- there are things that are happening that are not legal. We need to understand why. We need to understand what tools A.P.D. Needs to address them. So tell us when something is happening, and don't assume that we're not doing anything to try to address

[10:17:51 PM]

it. >> There was a way to tell them right now. You have index cards. Lots and lots of index cards. If you need a pen we can get you a pen. I want to get all these questions presented, as many as we can to get good answers and get you critical responses but we really, really need to do it in a way that everyone gets a chance that we can, and that they can get a chance to respond, right? I'm going to have to insist on that sort of civil playing level dialogue. Any other set of questions? >> I'm going to shift gears and go into a couple questions. How long the children in schools be protected from adults living on the grounds of school or near the school where the children walk home and relatedly the children of Austin must be protected from anyone, homeless or not, living and or camping on school property, football fields and the like. Our colleges should also be protected. I think the question is when will the ordinances change or give protection to the children of Austin? >> Anyone want to handle that? Councilmember. >> Tovo: I just want to

[10:18:51 PM]

underscore something that councilmember Casar alluded to in her conversation just a minute ago. You know, private property -- >> Please, please, [off mic] >> Tovo: Private property is private report and there are mechanisms for addressing it if something is on -- is camping on priority property. The same is true for our schools. It's my understanding that camping is already prohibited on school property and I know that one of the conversation -- and the same is true of universities. So that's, I think, the answer to that question. >> Thank you. >> [Off mic] >> Ma'am, ma'am, we have cards. >> [Off mic] >> We have a lot of people here. We're doing our very level-headed best. If you have a question you can ask on the card. Doing our best, ma'am. Appreciate it. >> [Off mic] We cannot normally shanty town.

[10:19:52 PM]

That doesn't help anybody. Doesn't help the homeless. [Applause] >> I know you want to answer. If -- if -- >> [Off mic] >> Thank you, ma'am. >> But allowing people to camp is [indiscernible] [Yelling] [Overlapping speakers] >> Excuse me. Excuse me. Excuse me. If I could get everybody's attention here for a minute. Sir, ma'am. >> [Off mic] >> It is. We can address it if we're civil about it. It's very difficult with the shouting. I can't even track. We have a safety concern about schools and it was addressed and

there are other questions. There are cards, repetition being the best part of education. You can write your question on the card. We'll do our best to get to

[10:20:52 PM]

your card. I'm going to insist if people continue to yell and scream maybe we'll have a three strikes and I'm going to have to ask you to leave rule. It's not fair to everybody else not yelling and screaming, who have written on cards which now I have to use time they would use to answer the cards to say what the ground rules are again. So please, if you have a question, there's a card. Ask the question. We'll get to as many as we can. And then we'll ask the councilmembers to answer as many as we can. Chris, do you have questions on the cards? >> I do. >> Which don't yell. For our councilmembers. >> Yes. It looks like this might be a question for our providers on the panel. How are you cooperating with those on the front lines? Law enforcement, ems, outreach, that have the most contact with the homeless population and can you give best -- give the best insight into the situation? Who can give the best insight? How do we cooperate with those? >> So we have -- we have a variety of initiatives throughout the city,

[10:21:55 PM]

bringing the providers and ems and other stakeholders and the police department. One of those initiatives was decoration of host and it was supported by council and supported by the city. This is an initiative that has been in effect to provide services around downtown, and around the UT area. It has been extremely successful. Last year, we were able to connect with over 1,000 individuals and connect those individuals to services. And get -- and also were able to get those individuals connected to housing resources. That is only one of many initiatives. There is another initiative where we have outreach and engagement staff who are located throughout the county, not only in the downtown area, but they are out in the camps. And we have the ability, as providers, to help and engaging individuals in

[10:22:56 PM]

providing services wherever they're at. One of our teams have been working with constables to ensure that individuals are connected. We're assessing their mental health, assessing their substance use conditions, making sure they have access to respite and, therefore, moving them into housing opportunities. I can go on and on in terms of the relationship we have with A.P.D. And ems. It has been a very important partnership because we realize that we cannot do this by ourselves. >> Thank you. Another question. >> So this is also since you brought up A.P.D., this question has to do with the relationship with the police departments. So it seems like less is being done by the police when complaints are made. How can we at A.P.D. Work better together to address these issues?

[10:23:58 PM]

>> Mayor Adler: When that question is asked chief Manley and I've been now on a couple panels with him over the last couple weeks, he answers that question by saying that -- that the police officers in this city are supposed to be enforcing our laws, and if someone is creating a public safety risk they're supposed to act. If someone is creating a public health hazard they're supposed to act. If someone is impeding or blocking they're supposed to act. If somebody is defecating or urinating or masturbate, the kinds of things I see in social media, the police are supposed to be act. What etches -- what he has said, he wants people to call the police department, he's accumulating data on calls. When police go out to situations as to what was the public safety risk or the public health hazard that was in fact occurring. They're keeping that data. They're also keeping track of when they're brought out to see somebody who is not creating a risk, is not creating a hazard, is not doing anything that's

[10:24:59 PM]

violative of our laws but is just there and somebody who is experiencing homelessness, so they're keeping track of that, of that data as well. What he has said, is that if we have police officers that for whatever reason are not doing their duty, are not doing what they're supposed to do, that he'd like to know that as well. As would I. As would, I'm sure, my colleagues on the dais. Because that is their job. If we had people that are sleeping on school property and nothing is happening, then we have an enforcement issue that we need to figure out why it is that we have that enforcement issue in our city. But ultimately the answer for someone who is on the corner, is not doing anything that is violative of laws other than being there, the answer is not to move that person to a different corner because we can chase them from corner to corner to corner,

[10:26:00 PM]

spending millions of dollars and a lot of resources doing that, or we can help that person get off the street, help that person get into an environment that increases the chances that they can stabilize their lives. We have 2255 people in our city of a million people, 2255 people. We have -- this is, as Ann said earlier, this is a scale of a challenge that we ought to be able to do something about. Because if I want to take the person -- I don't want the person on the corner. I need to give him a better place to be. And I ought to be able to do that in this city. [Applause] >> I have a question from [indiscernible] Which we hadn't got to yet. It says Austin has distinct neighborhoods and zip codes. How long solution to homelessness different from south Austin, different from east Austin, different from

[10:27:00 PM]

north Austin. >> Kitchen: So the question is, is the solution different in different parts of town? >> I believe that's what the question. >> Kitchen: Okay. I would just say this, I think the solution is not -- the solution is not different, but there are different challenges depending on where people are living. So -- or where people are staying. So the bottom line solutions we've all been saying is housing. So we have to recognize, though, that in different parts of town there are different challenges in terms of the safety issues about where people are staying. And that goes back to -- I'm just going to repeat what I said before. We -- there's a document that you all have received that was put out a while back that says immediate actions to address homelessness. It proposes for people to discuss appropriate places that are not safe for people to be camping. So I would like your feedback on that.

[10:28:01 PM]

You can email us. But to be constructive, we need to understand what you're thinking about the things that are listed here so that we can take action on September 19. So going back to the specific question, I know that in our part of town, in the south Austin part of town that I represent, one of the areas that people are staying is under the bridge at Manchaca and Ben White. That is not a safe place for people to camp. We've got folks who are camping on the median for example, and it wouldn't take much for them to roll into traffic or in front of a bus, next to the transit center. So -- >> Please, please. >> Kitchen: That is one of the places that for myself -- that is one of the places that I feel in south Austin is not a good place for a person to camp. So I'm just giving you one example, and I'm not going to take up all the time to

[10:29:01 PM]

talk about all the places that I think are of concern from a safety standpoint. But I do think that the shelter in south Austin, operating as a good neighbor that is secure and safe for the area around -- area around it, is a positive, constructive solution moving forward on housing. At the same time, I'm committed to working with folks on what are the places that are not safe for people to camp. >> I have two clusters of questions I'm going to ask both of them and then people can perhaps choose whether to answer. One is about the budget. This particular question. But there are a couple budget questions. Says how does council plan to allocate funds to address homelessness in 19-20 and will there all be enough funds required to address the needs. There are a couple questions about sanitation and health in the urban core, how is the city addressing sanitation health concerns downtown? So -- >> Before we go to the budget question, because I can tell that safety is a

[10:30:04 PM]

really big issue for a lot of people in the room. And I just -- I want to use facts to guide us, and I feel compelled to respond because there's nobody on the panel tonight who has actually experienced homelessness to my knowledge. I've never experienced homelessness, and so no one who has actually experienced that can speak tonight for themselves. >> I can speak to it. >> Please, please. >> Okay. So perhaps somebody can. And so I would just like to say, I've worked at caritas of Austin for almost 15 years, and I've walked to and from my office numerous times. Our office is located at seventh and naches. I walk through crowds and crowds of people experiencing homelessness numerous times a day for 15

[10:31:05 PM]

years. I have only two times had a slight scare of someone walking to -- at me that was aggressive and actually in that instance another person experiencing homelessness came between the two of us and redirected the guy that was about to cause me harm. And so I want to say the facts are that when you're experiencing homelessness, you're much more likely to be the victim of crime than to perpetrate crime. [Applause] And at the same time, I understand why people are fearful. Because before I got to know people who experienced homelessness, I had the same fear that you're experiencing tonight. But I would say, additionally, that homelessness is one of the

[10:32:05 PM]

most dehumanizing and most socially isolating experiences someone can have. When you're homeless, you begin to feel invisible. And so I would just ask for people to try to suspend their stereotypes and their personal biases and to learn and to get to know someone who is experiencing homelessness. And you will find that they are human just like you. [Cheers and applause] >> Since we had a cluster of questions on that issue, maybe we should continue with it. >> Garza: Specifically to the budget, I think it was a budget question. >> It was. >> Garza: And I've heard a couple times that we haven't provided solutions, but each one of us has said several times a solution is to house

[10:33:05 PM]

them, and housing is incredibly expensive, but we are trying. And so of the 62.7 million that is in this budget, 18.9 million is onetime funds, and I could go into a whole long conversation about revenue caps and how that's affected our ability to address these biggest challenges, but a lot of the money that we will be spending this budget will be money we will not have next year because of revenue caps. Imposed by the state. The 43.8 million is ongoing spending to keep the programs like the following following,

permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, increasing capacity and emergency shelters, rental assistance and other programs to prevent homelessness, case management through our housing and through our downtown court, crisis intervention, pay for success, which is a program that councilmember tovo can speak to, mentally services, substance use treatment services, our host team,

[10:34:06 PM]

expanded emcot team at the price tag of 1.1 million, services at the arch, portable toilets, workforce first programs and also a million dollars for encampment cleanup. >> Does anyone else on the panel want to address either the budget or health and sanitation issues. >> Tovo: Sure. I'll address the budget. As mayor pro tem Garza detailed, you know, we have made -- we have made increasing investments over the last probably at least the last five years. Every year trying to identify more funds to end homelessness in this community and to provide more services, and I think we are -- have some very successful innovative strategies. The host team is one. Pay for successful is another, where we are partnering with private investors to fund permanent supportive housing, which takes some of our most vulnerable individuals who are experiencing homelessness and provide services and housing as a permanent solution.

[10:35:07 PM]

And then those investors have certain -- we have certain metrics and only if those metrics are met does the city and our other partners pay those investors back, so it's a very innovative program, it's a way of leveraging our funds, it's a way of bringing in new partners to help provide resources, financial resources for ending homelessness. I think the second part of the question talked about will that be enough? And let me say, absolutely not. You know, the city of Austin, revenue caps aside, will never have the financial resources it needs to end homelessness in this community. It has to be a partnership that involves our nonprofits. It involves private businesses. It involves our corporate sector. It involves individuals. Let me just give you one example. You know, we have some terrific organizations working here in the city of Austin, caritas is definitely one of them. I mentioned front steps, who runs our arch downtown. The Salvation Army has been another tremendous partner and emergency shelter. They have the downtown

[10:36:07 PM]

shelter, also have a brand-new -- they run the city shelter out on town hill lane and have a brand-new family center. They raised lots of capital, did a major capital campaign and raised the funds to build the family center. They don't yet have the operating expenses to run it at full capacity, so, you know, we're all gathered here tonight to talk about how to end homelessness and talk about shelter and address some of your concerns. We have a brand-new family center ready to go that can house families with

children who are experiencing homelessness. As soon as that can operate at 100% capacity we can move the families that are currently downtown half a block from the arch to that new center and use those beds downtown. I think it's about 50 beds, to house additional individuals, men and women who are experiencing homelessness. That's just one of the examples of the ways in which we need to be great partners in this community and need to work together. The city of Austin has committed a million dollars to help with that operating gap out at the salvation

[10:37:09 PM]

Army. It's not enough. I think soon we're going to hear about some private individuals who are stepping up to help meet that gap, too, but that is, again, just an example of the ways in which we really need to work together on this issue. And it needs to be a partnership between the private sector and austinians and the city and the other partners that are working on -- >> Mayor Adler: I -- let me mention quickly one budget number, it's important to put this in perspective. The folks that are most chronically experiencing homelessness in our community, the ones that have been on the street for the longest period of time, also happen to be the folks that the mayor pro tem was talking about in her time with the fire department, the number of calls that her fire department makes to approach and try to bring support or help to that community. But it's not just the fire department. It's also EMS are making an

[10:38:10 PM]

inordinate number of runs with this community. It's not just them. It's the emergency room admissions all over our city. It's not just that. It's the number of folks that are in our courtroom and in our jails spending time. The cost of the 250 most chronically people experiencing homelessness in our community is \$225,000 a year when you take into account all of those services. \$225,000 a year for each of the 250 people. I would suggest to you that while it is a big bill to house people, to get them the services they need, the cost of not doing that is what's happening in our city right now. Again, for the same reasons I would say, we have to do something differently than we have been doing in the past. >> Thank you. >> My contrast, caritas of

[10:39:12 PM]

Austin, provides supportive housing for the population that the mayor is talking about, and our annual cost for providing that housing is about \$17,000. As opposed to \$225,000 per person. >> Chris, do we have anymore questions? [Applause] >> Yes. So there were a few questions about different models. One specifically mentions -- I think there were a few questions, actually, about Haven for Hope. Some folks I think are aware of that, have actually seen it and they're curious about whether or not we will bring something like that to Austin as a possible solution. In addition, why can't we provide protected

legal camp sites so we can better serve individuals, and then we can return to our no camping laws outside of those camps? Got a couple different models. >> I don't know who can handle that best. Does anyone -- councilmember tovo. >> Tovo: So I've toured haven for hope. I've also toured the Chapman center in Miami, both of the Chapman centers, they have a

[10:40:13 PM]

downtown center as well as one outside the city by about 30 minutes. The haven for hope I thought was an interesting model. That is largely funded by private dollars, and so that is one very distinctive difference. One of the things that I thought was an interesting idea at the haven for hope that we've certainly been thinking about in Austin is that they do provide an outreach space where individuals can be in their courtyard and that is a conversation that we've had in this community and I think is a very important new direction to go in to provide some kind of outdoor space where individuals can be during the day who don't necessarily want to come inside one of the buildings. Your second question was about designated camp sites. Our manager, we did have in a in the resolution that was passed on June 20th to ask our manager to come back and suggest -- make recommendations about a designated site for camping in each district, each council district. The manager did come back and say that those resources

[10:41:13 PM]

in their opinion were better put into permanent housing solutions, and so they have not made recommendations to move in that direction. I know that's something I'm still -- I personally am still thinking about, whether having some camping -- some areas where individuals who are experiencing homelessness could be that has easy access to laundry facilities, good lighting, restrooms might not be something -- and option to -- an option to consider but at this point that's where we are in that situation. >> Do we have another question? >> If homelessness is truly a crisis why not treat it in a similar matter such as a natural disaster such as a hurricane? [Applause] >> I'm not sure what that's asking. [Laughter] I'm sorry. I do analogies in my classroom. I'm not sure what the analogy is. >> Kitchen: I would say this, just -- I'd like to

[10:42:13 PM]

talk with that individual to understand what they're thinking, that they're not seeing. To me, to handle an emergency, we put the resources that are needed in the most effective way. So one thing that we haven't said that I'll just talk about right now, in addition to what you've heard in terms of the additional funding, we do know that it is necessary to have an actual implementation plan. We do have an action plan, but that's at a higher level. An implementation plan means to me the task, who's responsible, the date it will be accomplished by, where the funds are coming from. So our homeless strategy officer,

when she starts, that will be one of our activities, is to actually create that implementation plan. That will help us make sure that we are -- that we can see the steps along the way to get to the numbers that we need to get to in terms of housing to address

[10:43:14 PM]

homelessness in Austin. So I mention that because I think it's important to understand that we are doing a lot. We know that we're doing the kinds of things that need to be done, so we just need to wrap it up so that people can see and we can understand how we measure that we're gonna get there and where it is that we're gonna get in terms of the numbers that we need for housing for folks. >> Garza: I guess I kind of don't understand the analogy either, but I would say if we're using a hurricane as an analogy, that is a crisis you not only get federal funds, you get state funds when you have those kinds of crises. Here we have a crisis, we're not getting state funds to address this. We're not getting federal funds to address this. So that is the difference in those two kinds of situations, is we're dealing with a crisis and being tasked to do it with limited, local dollars.

[10:44:15 PM]

>> I have will 16:00, 8:20 everyone everyone on the panel to address, call to action questions. Do we have time for one more, people are asking over -- >> So there's obviously a lot of questions that we didn't get to, trying to go through as many as we can. I think this may have been brought up at one point, but the question is, were there efforts made by the various organizations represented to have people currently experiencing homelessness be a part of this conversation? >> I mean, I can speak to it a little bit. >> Please. >> Garza: On the council level, absolutely. In fact there's a lot of I guess misunderstanding of how this came before council. Many times I heard this came out of nowhere, done very fast and there was no input. When the vote happened it was the second time it was on the agenda because people asked for more time. So we had discussions at work session, and in that discussion community members said we're not ready, could you please give us more time to talk about this?

[10:45:16 PM]

And the sponsors agreed and said, sure, let's postpone it. We won't vote this next council meeting. We'll give more time to hear more input. And if that council meeting that we were supposed to vote on it there was a panel and I'd encourage you if you have the time to watch that panel where there was a individual experiencing homelessness on the panel and I actually see him, he's here actually today, too. And there were all of, like, mobile loaves and fishes representatives, caritas, there were -- this was not some decision that was made without any of this input. And in fact the story that really had the most impact on me in making this decision was the fact that when you as the mayor explained, when you give

somebody a ticket, they're homeless. They're probably not gonna show up to court. They're gonna get a warrant. Then you create this barrier for when they are able -- when we're finally at that point to get them that housing and then the -- our

[10:46:16 PM]

service providers explain to us how hard it is to get them into that housing when they're having to clear up that warrant that they've gotten simply because they had nowhere else to sleep that night. They were given a ticket because they had nowhere else, to were laying on a curb somewhere, got a ticket and now it's created all these barriers. So from a council perspective, yes, we heard from individuals experiencing homelessness and from all the service providers who have 15 years plus of helping this type -- this community. >> I have two final questions that I want each person on the panel in two minutes addressing. So I'll ask the two questions. Maybe you can go in sequence and answer them and then before we leave, 8:29, 8:30 I'll have one final closing re-mark. Two final questions, what is one thing you want everyone to keep in mind about the issue? And what action step can each austinite take to address it? Each have two minutes. >> I'll go first. So what do I want all of you to keep in mind? That we can end homelessness

[10:47:17 PM]

if we do it together. We in Austin, the homeless service provider community has been working very, very hard to develop evidence-based practices that we see in our data works. It works every day. We are ending homelessness for people for households and individuals every day. If we make those efforts bigger, we can end homelessness together. But we must all work together as a community. And what was the second question? >> I have to go back. >> Keep in mind -- what can each person do after tonight? >> What you can do is to get involved in one of our organizations that are -- has a mission of preventing and inlanding homelessness. There are lots of us all across the community. Volunteer. Give money. Both of those things help.

[10:48:22 PM]

>> So what to keep in mind, what I have in my mind at this point was a meeting I had with a person with lived experience last week. I went to her apartment after she had been chronically homeless for a very long time, and as I approach to pick her up for this interview, to tell her story with -- and share her story of courage, I was overcome with emotion just realizing that I was actually going to pick her up. And I learned through just my conversation with her that she had been married for a very long time, had children, was battling a lot of anxiety, had serious trauma in her life, was an abusive relationship, and it

[10:49:25 PM]

culminated in her needing to leave because the abusive relationship was such that she sustained a head injury. And she talked about the amazing work that providers did throughout the community to come together to get her where she was. She lost her children in the process. And the trauma continued on the streets for a very long time until she was connected to safe place. From safe place she was connected to Salvation Army. From Salvation Army she was connected to caritas. From there caritas connected her to integral care for psychiatric care. And finally she end up in housing. And the reason I'm sharing that story with you is because it really in one story alone, it demonstrated the impact of the community coming together to change this woman's life. She regained the custody of her children.

[10:50:25 PM]

And was in front of the cameras, sharing her story. She had never thought that she would be homeless. And if you see her, she looks like you and I. And so it takes a community coming together, and when we look at our partnerships, community first is a -- it's a group of individuals coming together. We're working on opening housing first, oak springs, terrace at oak springs, permanent supportive housing. It brought together the state, the city. 21 funders to make that project a reality. And most of them people like you and I. Not a lot of wealthy people, a hundred dollars, a thousand dollars, \$50. That's what's on my mind.

[10:51:26 PM]

What we can do, I echo what Joe Katherine had to say, just get to know people and take them and remove them from the shadows. >> I would say that, you know, fish and loaves has one of the greatest projects right now, housing the homeless people out there, community first. It's in south -- it's in east Austin, off of decker lane. And visit that site. Talk to those people. You'll find out that there are humans, you know? And these are the people that were helped. You know, I've worked in the homeless community there, and for over 30 years and worked. I even had homeless -- [indiscernible] Was a mascot of the homeless and we bought the goose. When we bought that goose, the homeless -- we got one of the meanest looking homeless person who said

[10:52:27 PM]

we're gonna kill this goose, and people just went crazy. They hired an animal patrol officer to go ahead and make sure that this goose landed we bought at Callahan couldn't get hurt. You know, that's how, you know, people react to these things. And the whole thing was that we [indiscernible] More concerned about the birds in west Austin than you care about the homeless population here in Austin. You know, that was the -- an eye opening for me, to see -- I -- over my neighborhood, I got methadone center, got the intake for mhmr, and I see these young healthy looking kids, I call them kids but they're -- and they're addicted to drugs. And in two years I see how badly they deteriorate, you know? Really just really bad out

[10:53:28 PM]

there. And no telling what happens to them because they disappear. Most likely they're -- they passed away, you know, they're -- they lose their teeth because of the drug addiction that they have. You know, and they're out in the street, prostituting. >> Sir. >> Renteria: Those are the kind of things that we need to address and that's what I'm committed to doing, is working with those kind of people. >> Thank you. >> Garza: You know, I remember at work session when we had this discussion and I -- it obviously hadn't gotten to the boiling point that we are now, and I remember saying, you know, I hope we get to a point where we're not talking about "Those people" in Austin. And what I feel like I've heard throughout these conversations is I want to help but I don't want to see them. And that doesn't solve the problem. Not seeing it doesn't solve the problem. [Applause] I've heard -- I've heard -- I understand that housing is

[10:54:28 PM]

a solution, but I don't want it next to me. And can you -- I mean, that is every single neighborhood, and I understand it. And I just want -- I know there's people that are upset here, and I understand it, and I want you to know that we're -- we're not up here making these decisions easily. We are trying really hard to find solutions to address all of the concerns, the safety concerns, the concerns for our most vulnerable in our community, and if it was something easy it would have been solved. And I think that we can do it. I think that Austin can come together, not think about those people, not say send them to Los Angeles, we need to take care of our people at all levels in whatever situation they're in. So I hope you continue to stay engaged and help us continue to find these solutions. >> Thank you. [Applause] >> Kitchen: So what I'd like folks to keep in mind and I

[10:55:31 PM]

try to keep in mind myself is that we can -- that Austin is a place that we put our mind to it, we can make change, we can make a difference. And we need to keep that in mind. We can make a difference, and we can make a change, and we can provide housing. So keep that in mind. But I also want to ask people

to talk to each other, to listen to each other, and when you're doing that, to focus on solutions. And to respect everyone's perspective. It is not wrong to care about your home, to care about your neighborhood, to be concerned about what you see happening in your neighborhood, to be concerned about what that means for your family. That is not wrong. It is also not wrong to care about people who are homeless, and we all do. I think we all care about people who are homeless, and we also care about our families and our homes and our neighborhoods. We all want the same thing.

[10:56:33 PM]

We all want to make sure that people can have housing. So let's all work together to make sure it happens. Let's focus on solutions. Let's not focus on whether my perspective is different than your perspective or whether my perspective is right or your perspective is right. We are all concerned, and we need to work together, and we can solve these problems with homelessness. People say to me we'll never solve homelessness. I don't believe that. Now, I'm an optimist at heart, but I don't believe that. I believe that we can get to a place where we have effectively ended homelessness in our city and what that means is, we can be at a place where if someone -- we can work on preventing homelessness, if someone becomes homeless they're not homeless for very long, so we can do that. >> Thank you Mr. Mayor. >> Mayor Adler: I think, two

[10:57:36 PM]

quick statistics to keep in mind or make a note of. The life expectancy of someone living on our streets is 26 years less than the life expectancy for those of us that don't. Another statistic important to note in our community 40% of the people experiencing homelessness are African-American. This is not a challenge which is finding all parts of our community in equal numbers. Just to be aware of those numbers. I think it's also really important to keep in mind that no one, no one that I've talked to, certainly no one on the council or anyone I've talked to in the community wants to see people camping in our city. No one wants to see people camping in our city. And I think it's everybody's goal to not have that happening in our city. It didn't start happening in June. It's been happening to an increasing degree in our city, the number of people living chronically in our city that are experiencing

[10:58:36 PM]

homelessness has gone up by 55%. We have people that are living in our community for a longer period of time on our streets. No one wants to see them camping. The question is, how do we achieve that result? And there are people -- what Ann said, because I think it's important, admittedly, we have some people in our community that are only concerned about people. And we have some people in our community that are only concerned about places. But almost everybody in our community is concerned

both about people and places, and maybe they're on different places on that spectrum, but we're all there. The fortunate answer that we have to this challenge is it doesn't make any difference if you're concerned about people or places or both or to whatever degree, because the answer is exactly the same. We have to get these folks into homes, into houses,

[10:59:36 PM]

into apartments, into rooms, so that they can take advantage of the services so they can stabilize their lives. Wherever you are, that's the answer to the challenge that we have, and that's where we're trying to move toward. Because I also believe that we can get to effective zero of homelessness in our community. Again, as rich as our city is, to house 2255 people, to make sure that we can, as we identify people who are homeless, getting them into housing is something we ought to be able to achieve. What I would ask people to do, find somebody who believes differently than you do on these issues. Because I think what's happening in our community right now is we're all spending time with people who think exactly the way that we think. And we're reinforcing whatever it is that we think because those are the people that we talk to. I think our community would

[11:00:38 PM]

really benefit, each of us would really benefit if we made a real point to try to find somebody who believed very differently than we did on this issue. And then listen to them. And try to understand what it is that they're saying. And have them listen to you so that they can really understand what it is that you're trying to say. I think right now in this community, with the debate that's going on, that could be one of the most important things that we could be doing. >> Thank you. [Applause] Councilmember. >> Tovo: Thanks. Well, I agree with all of the the comments that were made before. I just want to touch on one of those numbers that you've heard now multiple times this evening, that number of 2255, which was the snapshot in time that last January of the number of individuals who are experiencing homelessness, and that doesn't count those who might -- who will come and seek services throughout the year. But if you look at just that one number, my high school was larger than that number. This is a doable -- this is

[11:01:39 PM]

a -- Austin is up to the challenge. We can end homelessness. You know, this is -- Austin is a model to other communities for the kinds of best practices that we're doing here. The mayor talked about ending veterans -- effectively ending veterans homelessness. That wasn't done with new units for the most part. That was done with a creative partnership that the mayor and others worked on to get apartment complexes to participate in that and provide housing for veterans who are experiencing homelessness.

And so, you know, we don't have the time to talk about how that worked, but the point is, we have some great models. We have organizations that are working very closely together, but they don't have the resources they need and, again, as part of the action step, I would encourage you, if you're in a position to be able to contribute, even if it's a small amount, there are some great organizations that are putting those dollars to really effective use and one of them I'll just highlight, again, is the salvation

[11:02:41 PM]

Army's family center, because when we invest in -- my family is going to invest as well. When we invest in that family center we're also helping create more beds downtown where we really need them. One other thing I would really suggest, you know, we've -- Joe Katherine Quinn talked about volunteering, learning more about the organizations, getting involved. One thing that was very significant for me was to participate in the annual point in time count. 600 or so volunteers go out on that night in January and, you know, you get up at about 3:00 A.M. And report down there and with your team you get a list of the questions that you need to ask and a little geographic area and go out and wake people up often and interview them to collect that information. And that goes -- that's critical for our community to get a really accurate count of the number of individuals who were experiencing homelessness. That information is what is used to provide federal grant money to our community. So it's important to be able -- to be as thorough as possible but for me it was

[11:03:42 PM]

really important and I would say life changing to talk to the individuals who are experiencing homelessness, who are sleeping in the alleyways, in the door fronts, I mean, in the course of an evening one year I talked to a young man who had been kicked out of his house. He was under 18. Living on the streets outside one of the churches downtown. He in his description he had mental health issues as well as other medical challenges and is, you know, a child out on the streets of our downtown, of our downtown. And, you know, there were many conversations that night. Another one I remember is a man who we woke up, which was -- which is the protocol. He said, you know, I'd be happy to talk to you but just for a couple minutes. I've got to get up and report to my construction jobs in a couple hours and really need the sleep. I would really encourage you to mark that date in January and participate. I think it's a very, very valuable thing to do. I just want to thank you all for coming and participating in this conversation. >> Thank you. >> Tovo: I think it is very valuable. >> Thank you.

[11:04:42 PM]

[Applause] >> This brings us to the close of the program. I want to say two things. Thank you for the panel for coming and hearing the constituents, taxpayers, the citizens' concerns. We're way over time.

I'm sorry. >> I want to speak to the question -- >> I have something to say about that too. We are going to compile them and make sure the panelists get all the questions. If you didn't get your question answered my apologies, but in 90 minutes we can't answer all the questions of the world, much less homelessness. I want to thank everybody who came down tonight, especially as a catholic and philosopher, it's wired in my DNA, I'm a optimist. Nothing for me is more powerful than Jesus' statements if the lease of our brothers and sisters aren't cared for then you don't care for me. If you wrote a question on a card, if you listened, if you donate, if you vote, if you volunteer and listened to people with different perspectives, that's how we're gonna overcome the

[11:05:43 PM]

divide in this country and for a little time tonight maybe the room. Thank you for playing by the rules. Thank you for coming to -- >> Kitchen: I'm sorry. We'll get the questions but we will also answer them. I wanted to let people know that they will get answers to their questions. >> Thank you for coming, everybody. >> Mayor Adler: Thank you. [Applause] [Conclusion]