

January 4, 2017

MID-WILLAMETTE HOMELESS INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE CONCEPT

BACKGROUND

The Mid-Willamette Homeless Initiative was created in January 2016 by four jurisdictions: the cities of Keizer and Salem and Marion and Polk counties. The initiative's purpose is "to identify and launch proven strategies that will reduce homelessness in the Marion-Polk County region, encompassing the cities of Keizer and Salem." The initiative convened a 20-person regional task force appointed by the four jurisdictions with leaders representing social services, housing, public safety and business. Through monthly task force presentations and in-depth discussions in eight subcommittees, the task force is in the process of wrapping up its recommendations, anticipating adopting a strategic plan at its final meeting on February 7, 2017.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Homelessness is a complex issue. Effective strategies vary depending on the unique needs of the many populations facing homelessness. What works for addressing the issues of homeless veterans may not work for a runaway or homeless youth, a person experiencing severe mental illness, or a victim of domestic violence fleeing an unsafe situation. The Mid-Willamette Homeless Initiative Task Force recognized the need for a diverse array of recommendations that address the wide scope of homelessness drivers. Recommendations being considered by the task force include:

- Increasing housing capacity through developing affordable multi-family and non-traditional residences
- Examining county and city codes to incentivize low income housing development, such as allowing Accessory Dwelling Units and waiving System Development Charges
- Supporting and adding capacity to transitional housing and shelters
- Coordinating social services through multi-agency data collection, a comprehensive resource network and supporting neighborhood-based community centers and faith-based and nonprofit programs offering assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness
- Expanding the reach of financial literacy programs for adults and youth
- Working with local school districts to address the education and basic needs of homeless families
- Implementing evidence-based harm reduction models, such as Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) to divert people with mental illness and addiction from jails and hospital emergency rooms
- Promoting contributions to local nonprofits rather than supporting individuals who are panhandling
- Encouraging collaboration among local service providers and WorkSource Oregon
- Using rapid identification to locate veterans and connect them with permanent housing

PIVOTING TO IMPLEMENTATION

To assure that the Mid-Willamette Homeless Initiative’s strategic plan is implemented – and doesn’t just collect dust on a shelf – the Task Force is proposing a new collaborative structure that will oversee implementation, promote regional coordination, and hold participating entities accountable.

Parameters for this new structure include:

- **Shared ownership** through a Memorandum of Collaboration by the participating government jurisdictions and key nonprofits, such as Community Action Agency, Union Gospel Mission, and Salem Leadership Foundation
- **Commitments** by each participating organization to the common structure
- **A Mid-Willamette Housing Commission** appointed by the participating jurisdictions to oversee the work
- **A Project Manager** to coordinate the work and support the commission, contracted through the new structure, with funding from the participating jurisdictions
- **Periodic reports** to the county commissions, city councils, and nonprofit boards of the participating organizations
- **Prioritization** of the strategic plan’s strategies, looking first a potential “low hanging fruit” but also putting in place the steps necessary for longer-term efforts
- **Community engagement** in the ongoing work to reduce homelessness in our region’s communities

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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