



DATE: December 16, 2020

TO: Community Services Commission

FROM: Deputy City Manager

SUBJECT: Update on City of Hayward Homelessness Efforts Including Soliciting Input to Inform the Development of the Homelessness Reduction Strategic Plan

RECOMMENDATION

That the Community Services Commission reviews and provides comments on this report and provides input to inform the development of the Homelessness Reduction Strategic Plan.

SUMMARY

Homelessness is a growing regional and state-wide crisis, with homelessness in Hayward increasing 23% from 2017 to 2019. While the City Council has long identified homelessness, housing affordability, and eviction prevention as key concerns in the community and have supported local efforts and projects to address these issues, the global COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues and created a more acute need for increased homelessness response and intervention, particularly for individuals with increased vulnerabilities. As a result, the City is taking additional measures to address this growing need. Additionally, the City has contracted with Homebase, a highly qualified strategic planning consultant, to develop a five-year homelessness reduction strategic plan that will help the City create a path for ending homelessness in Hayward and align the City's efforts with those occurring at the regional and State levels. This report provides an update on the development of that plan, solicits feedback and input from the CSC to inform that plan, and provides other important updates on the City's efforts to address homelessness, particularly in light of the increased risks of COVID-19.

BACKGROUND

Homelessness is a growing regional and state-wide crisis. From 2017 to 2019, homelessness across Alameda County increased by 43%, and in Hayward, the homeless population grew by 23%, from 397 in 2017 to 487 in 2019.¹ Of Hayward's homeless population, 76% are unsheltered. Further, many individuals and families have experienced or will experience sudden income loss due to COVID-19, leaving them vulnerable to eviction and homelessness.

¹ <https://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019-Hayward-Final-Report.pdf>

The Hayward City Council has long identified homelessness, housing affordability, and eviction prevention as key issues in the community and has supported many local efforts to address these issues. Recent efforts to holistically address these issues include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Development of the Hayward Navigation Center to provide shelter and housing navigation services to homeless Hayward adults;
- Passage of the Residential Rent Stabilization and Tenant Protection Ordinance (RRSO) to reduce displacement of many Hayward renters;
- Inclusion of *Preserve, Protect, and Produce Housing for All* in the Hayward Strategic Roadmap;
- Passage of Temporary Eviction Moratorium through September 2020 for non-payment of rent and mortgage payments caused by COVID-19 to prevent evictions;
- Passage of Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance to align with state law and guarantee assistance to renters displaced due to necessary substantial repairs or health and safety concerns;
- Allocation of over \$900,000 for emergency rent relief grants to support low-income renters and \$75,000 for foreclosure prevention counseling and education for homeowners experiencing financial impacts from COVID-19;
- Allocation of over \$600,000 in CDBG emergency funds for food access and shelter services for unhoused and at-risk individuals;
- Annual allocation of local and federal funds to support projects and programs that address homelessness and housing issues in the Hayward community; and
- Approval of an agreement with Homebase, a strategic planning consultant, on September 22, 2020 to prepare a five-year City of Hayward Homelessness Reduction Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan).
- Approval of the Hayward Navigation Center Hotel Annex project to provide highly vulnerable individuals with shelter and housing navigation services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report provides an update on the development of that Strategic Plan, solicits feedback and input from the CSC members to inform that plan, and provides other important updates on the City's efforts to address homelessness, particularly in light of the increased risks of COVID-19.

DISCUSSION

Homelessness Reduction Strategic Plan Update and Discussion

Progress Update

Along with City staff, Homebase started work on the Strategic Plan in October. Currently, Homebase staff is conducting background research for the needs assessment and gaps analysis and is reviewing existing research and documentation to synthesize and bring forward useful data to the community to inform decision-making.

Homebase and City staff have also formed the Strategic Planning Steering Committee. The Committee is composed of representatives from sectors including local governments, service providers, homeless advocates, business communities, law enforcement, those with lived experience of homelessness, and other interested parties, including City Councilmember Lamnin. There is a high level of community interest to participate in this process. The Committee will guide the strategic planning process by providing insights, suggestions, and will start the process of building coalitions to carry out the work once the Strategic Plan is approved. The Committee will meet monthly, starting in November, to review data, provide suggestions on the plan components, and offer additional insights into community driven solutions. For example, the Committee may provide input on the development of the planning process, review planning documents, provide feedback on plan goals and format, identify additional stakeholders for inclusion in a larger community process, and finalize action steps.

In early January, Homebase will hold community forums that will allow a wider range of interested community members to provide input and suggestions to be considered in the Strategic Plan. Additionally, Homebase will conduct one-on-one interviews and/or focus groups with key stakeholders, including people with lived experiences of homelessness. A draft of the Strategic Plan is on schedule to be shared with the community in February, and a finalized Strategic Plan is anticipated for completion and recommended approval by May. The Strategic Plan will also help inform the upcoming budget process for fiscal year 2021-2022.

Community Services Commission Input

Homebase would like to explore the following discussion questions with the CSC in order to gain insight from the unique perspectives of the commissioners:

1. What are your priorities and goals in terms of addressing homelessness? How have those priorities evolved in recent years, and what may continue to change as you look ahead to the next five years?
2. What identified gaps or unmet needs are the focus of the Commission/Council? Is there missing information you wish you had about homelessness that could further inform the City's approach?
3. What potential solutions to address homelessness do you think are the most promising for Hayward? Are there specific programs or models (in the City of Hayward, Alameda County, or from other communities) that you would like highlighted or included in the plan?

Homelessness Response Updates

COVID Impact on Homelessness

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, many individuals and families have experienced or will experience sudden income loss, leaving them vulnerable to eviction and homelessness, with some estimates predicting a 40-45% increase in homelessness nationwide due to the economic impacts of COVID-19.² The pandemic has impacted City

² <https://community.solutions/analysis-on-unemployment-projects-40-45-increase-in-homelessness-this-year/>

activities intended to address homelessness as well, including causing an intentional reduction of capacity in the Hayward Navigation Center (HNC).

In response to the pandemic, the County of Alameda, in collaboration with Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless, the Health Care Services Agency, Abode Services, and the State of California, initiated Project Roomkey. Project Roomkey hotels provide temporary housing for unsheltered residents as part of the emergency response for COVID-19. The program will soon be winding down in Alameda County with many of the hotel leases expiring by the end of the year. As of November 1, 2020, referrals are no longer being accepted for Safer Ground and no additional guests will be placed in Safer Ground sites.

During the pandemic, the prevalence of unsheltered homelessness in Downtown Hayward and near City Hall has increased noticeably. As the prevalence in Downtown Hayward and around City Hall increases, the consequences of unsheltered living, such as public defecation, are also increasing. In an effort to address this, staff have placed portable restrooms outside City Hall, and the Watkins garage restroom will re-open to the public by January 2021. Additionally, Maintenance Services will be hiring two temporary laborers specifically dedicated to this area to provide daily clean-up. The two temporary employees will be responsible for daily pressure washing, litter and trash removal, and providing direct support for HPD in clean-ups in the Downtown area. Based on requests from Downtown businesses and property owners who have experienced increased vandalism and theft in recent months, Hayward Police Department (HPD) has also increased their foot patrol around Downtown Hayward and at City Hall to increase their visible presence. HPD also assists in identifying referrals to the HNC. HPD increased personnel Monday through Thursday during day shifts and Friday through Saturday during evening shifts. HPD meets weekly with the Maintenance Services Department (MSD), Fire, Code Enforcement, and Community Services staff to identify homeless individuals and camps to refer into the HNC.

Hayward Navigation Center

Opened on November 18, 2019, the HNC recently celebrated its one-year anniversary. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to decrease the capacity at the HNC from a 45-bed capacity to 25-bed capacity. Because of the reduced capacity, Bay Area Community Services (BACS) had significant contract savings, which will allow for funds previously allocated for their FY 2021 contract to be used for additional homelessness reduction efforts, including a proposed hotel project described in greater detail below.

In October 2020, four RV Trailers were placed on-site to increase the capacity up to 32 beds. Additionally, as part of the 2019 CDBG Annual Action Plan, \$161,200 was allocated for the purchase of an additional residential trailer at the HNC. With a third trailer on-site, the HNC capacity will be increased to 45-beds while allowing for adequate social distancing.

In the first year of implementation, there have been 91 clients at the HNC. Over half (57%) of HNC clients were non-white, with 42% identifying as Black or African American. Approximately one-third (31%) identified as Hispanic or Latinx. Almost half (47%) identified as chronically homeless. Of the 91 HNC clients, 45 exited to permanent housing and 30 are currently still enrolled at the time of this report writing. The majority of clients who moved

out to permanent housing (71%) did so through rapid re-housing, with clients receiving temporary housing subsidies.

In addition to operations of the HNC, staff entered into a contract with California State University, East Bay, to conduct an independent evaluation of the Navigation Center. As a requirement of the Prop 47 grant, the evaluation will have a component that looks at implementation successes and challenges, and an outcome component that examines the extent to which the HNC is meeting its goals, including reducing recidivism among clients with a history of justice involvement. As part of this evaluation, researchers will conduct focus groups and/or interviews with HNC clients to ensure the voices of individuals with lived experiences are heard and centered in the evaluation. Researchers will also interview BACS staff and Hayward Police Department officers who work on the City's homelessness response team to further understand implementation successes and challenges.

Hayward Navigation Center Annex Project

With the decompression of the HNC from 45 to 25 beds and the inability of vulnerable individuals experiencing homeless to safely reside in congregate shelter, staff is working on a proposal to develop a Hayward Navigation Center Hotel Annex Project (HNC Annex). The HNC Annex would provide 30-35 vulnerable homeless individuals with temporary isolation shelter (up to six months) and housing navigation services to exit into permanent housing. The program design would mirror that of the HNC but would be housed out of a local hotel to provide isolation shelter to those with increased vulnerabilities.³

Staff has identified three hotel providers who expressed interest in partnering with the City to house this program and is discussing further the details of a potential contract with them before selecting a preferred hotel operator.

On December 8, 2020, Hayward City Council authorized the City Manager to take emergency actions to implement this project within a pre-determined budget authority, including authorization to enter into a contract with a preferred hotel operator and social services provider. Staff will finalize agreement with a preferred hotel operator, based upon cost efficiency, site accessibility, and other relevant factors. The City will also contract with BACS, the existing operator of the HNC, to provide supportive services to leverage existing staffing structures already in place and cut down on contract expenditures. Services provided at the HNC Annex will include care coordination and housing navigation, residential counseling, flexible funding to support success in permanent housing, and three meals daily. The target population of the HNC Annex will be individuals with increased vulnerabilities and at high-risk of complications if exposed to the coronavirus.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

³ Vulnerability is defined as an individual who is at high-risk of complications (including death) if infected with COVID-19. The City of Hayward is using the definition provided by Alameda County's Safer Ground program. (<https://www.achch.org/safer-ground-hotel-voucher-program.html>)

There is a positive economic impact from reducing homelessness and poverty and moving individuals into permanent housing as part of the City's strategic response to homelessness, including the HNC and HNC Annex.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Homebase agreement was funded through the City's CDBG entitlement allocation, using part of the twenty percent of funds allowed for planning and administrative costs. Therefore, there is no impact to the City's General Fund.

The funding plan for the HNC Annex was presented to Council as part of the 12/8 report. The project will be funded almost entirely with existing funds. On December 3, the City was notified that its application for funding for Permanent Local Housing Allocation funds was accepted, resulting in approximately \$650,000 annually for the next five years. Staff will allocate \$90,000 of the FY21 allocation for use at the HNC Annex Project, and the remainder of funds will be for use at the Navigation Center.

STRATEGIC ROADMAP

This agenda item supports the Strategic Priority of Preserve, Protect & Produce Housing. Specifically, this item relates to the implementation of the following projects:

- 1b. Oversee operations of the Navigation Center
- 2a. Create a Homelessness Reduction Strategic Plan modeled on an empowerment approach and best practices, as well as after Alameda County's EveryOne Home Plan

PUBLIC CONTACT

In February 2020, staff provided a homelessness update and received Council's approval on the EveryOne Home plan, as well as the City's local plan for addressing homelessness. Staff received approval from Council on September 22, 2020, to contract with Homebase to develop a strategic plan for reducing homelessness in Hayward. On December 3, 2020, staff and Homebase presented to the Homelessness-Housing Task Force on the development of that Strategic Plan and to solicit feedback and input from the task-force members to inform that plan, as well as to provide brief updates on other homelessness efforts.

Additionally, staff provided an overview of the HNC Annex project to the CSC on November 18, 2020. Comments from the CSC on the HNC Annex project were integrated into the staff report for the December 8, 2020 City Council meeting.

NEXT STEPS

Over the next several months, staff and Homebase will be working on multiple fronts to prepare a plan that addresses homelessness in Hayward, with a focus both on long term solutions and on emergency response to current needs exacerbated by COVID-19.

Specific to the strategic plan, Homebase will integrate feedback from the CSC with input and findings from providers, community meetings, focus groups and the CSC. Staff will return with a draft plan for Council approval in Spring 2020, which will inform Fiscal Year 2021-2022 budget discussions.

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