



Sonoma County Community Development Commission
Sonoma County Housing Authority
1440 Guerneville Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95403-4107

*Members of the
Commission*

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MEMORANDUM

Date: July 7, 2020
To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
From: Barbie Robinson, Executive Director of Department of Health Services and
Interim Executive Director of the Sonoma County Community Development
Commission
Subject: Short and Medium-Term Strategies to Address Homelessness

Barbie Robinson
MPP, JD, CHC
Interim Executive
Director

Introduction

According to the Housing and Urban Development 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), Sonoma County has the 3rd highest number of homeless individuals in the country for large suburban areas. Your Board, Leadership Council, homeless providers, and community partners have made great progress in addressing homelessness. This progress is reflected in the preliminary results of the 2020 Homeless County report that shows the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness is 2,745 down by 206 (7%) from 2,951. The current count reflects the lowest number of homeless in over a decade. This reduction can be directly attributed to the investments made by the Board of Supervisors and the Leadership Council.

Even with the significant investments made by your Board and the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council, much work remains. The COVID-19 Pandemic has magnified the importance of a bold, robust, and timely response to addressing homelessness especially for those unsheltered individuals who are most vulnerable and at risk for COVID-19. In all geographic regions of our County, homeless individuals with underlying health conditions and those who are 65 years or older are at greatest risk.

To achieve quick results, short- and medium-term strategies are required that focus on the most vulnerable and those experiencing chronic homelessness. The COVID-19 Pandemic provides an opportunity for the County to focus resources on these strategies to advance our goals of achieving functional zero homelessness. While expanding housing and sheltering solutions are tantamount to our efforts, we also must strengthen the overall safety net system of care to ensure that those services and programs that are critical determinants of successful sheltering and housing are in place.

Below are proposed short- and medium-term homeless strategies that focus on the full continuum of sheltering and housing, safety net services, supports, and administrative and operational changes needed to achieve zero functional homelessness. The strategies below focus on:



Telephone (707) 565-7500
FAX (707) 565-7583 • TDD (707) 565-7555



1. **Administrative and Operational Improvements:** Strengthen the administrative infrastructure to improve our ability to support the delivery of homeless programs and services to achieve successful outcomes. Specifically, restructuring advisory bodies and other operational structures within the Community Development Commission to improve administrative operations.
2. **Expanding Sheltering Services:** Establishing indoor-outdoor shelters designed to meet those experiencing homelessness where they are and providing necessary services to successfully maintain the sheltering in order to move them to bridge housing. With Board direction, develop plans for additional county-owned or county-sponsored sheltering options in each supervisorial districts.
3. **Bridge Housing:** Increase lease-to-own or outright purchases of shared homes/duplex housing to serve as the transition point from the streets, to sheltering, into permanent supportive housing or affordable housing.
4. **Permanent Supportive Housing:** advance additional solutions to contribute to the creation of 1,000 units of permanent supportive housing. These units would house our most vulnerable community members experiencing chronic homelessness of at least one year or more with disabilities who are most in need of safety net services to support successful housing and recovery.
5. **Homeless Prevention Assistance:** Rental Assistance and Rapid Rehousing Support to prevent individuals at-risk of losing their housing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic that has tremendous financial impacts on low-income individuals and families.
6. **ACCESS Integrated Care Management:** Fully operationalize the ACCESS Initiative care coordination teams to coordinate care for key health and social services (e.g., mental health substance use, Medi-Cal, Social Security, primary health, and general assistance enrollments, etc.) which are critical determinants of successful entering and maintaining sheltering and housing placements.

Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC) Background

The Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC) serves as the Entitlement Jurisdiction for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding for the unincorporated areas of the county and Sonoma County's seven smaller cities and towns with populations of less than 50,000. Santa Rosa and Petaluma serve as their own entitlement jurisdictions and receive funding directly from HUD.

The CDC serves as the Lead Agency for the Continuum of Care (CoC) for homeless services. The CoC is responsible for making homeless policy and funding decisions in order to receive annual HUD CoC competitive funding of \$3.9 Million as well as state funding such as Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) and Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP). In addition, the CDC also receives a direct allocation of state funding as the administrative entity for the Continuum of Care and as the County administrative entity to respond to homelessness. For example, the CDC received a direct allocation of HEAP funding in the amount of \$12.1 million. The current homeless budget for the CoC is approximately \$14 million.

Proposed Homeless Strategies

These proposed housing strategy will focus on the continuum of sheltering, housing and care coordination across safety net services and systems. Below is a list of short- and medium-term strategies for your Board's consideration. Based on the direction of your Board, the Community Development Commission and the Department of Health Services will present the final plans and updates to your Board.

Short-Term Strategy (3-6 Months)

1. Administrative:

- **Redesign Leadership Council:** Redesign the Leadership Council to include elected officials from all cities to develop county-wide homeless policies; eliminate the Technical Advisory Committee; and restructure workgroups to help support LC in policy and funding decisions. Position the Community Development Commission to focus on administrative operations.
- **Redesign Community Development Committee:** Focus the advisory body on affordable housing and HUD funded housing authority related activities. This will improve the operations of the Committee while also reducing the burden on CDC staff by removing redundancy in responsibilities between the Community Development Committee and the Leadership Council.
- **Participate in Governor's 100-day Challenge:** Focus on housing COVID-19 vulnerable homeless and Transitional-Age Youth (TAY) ages 18-24 years old.
- **Transition Responsibility for Coordinated Entry to the County:** Refine Coordinated Entry protocols and policies to more expediently move people through the system and expedite placement of individuals, families and youth into housing and shelter. Bring Coordinated Entry into the County system to improve efficiency, oversight, and accountability.

2. Sheltering: Receive Board approval for the creation of indoor-outdoor shelters to serve 80 or more individuals. Execute operating agreement with indoor-outdoor shelter operators. Move some of the 104 COVID-19 vulnerable individuals from the Non-Congregate Shelter (NCS) sites at Sonoma State University, the Astro Hotel, and the Fairgrounds trailers to the indoor-outdoor shelter site.

3. Bridge Housing: Purchase/lease-to-buy up to four shared housing as directed by the Board on December 23, 2019 for bridge housing. Two homes have already been

purchased; four remaining homes will house up to 60 individuals depending on placements.

4. Permanent Supportive Housing: Explore investments in long-term, permanent housing and sheltering solutions. These solutions would focus on adding an additional 1,000 units over the course of the next 24 months.

5. Homeless Prevention Assistance: Provide rental assistance and enhance rapid rehousing efforts. With Board directed investments, we would reduce the risk of more individuals and families falling into homelessness. This proposal would investment \$1.5 Million dollars and serve approximately 300 individuals with short and long-term rental assistance.

6. ACCESS Integrated Care Management Team: The Homeless Encampment and Resource Team (HEART) would continue to enroll COVID-19 vulnerable homeless into the Accessing Coordinated Care & Empowering Self-Sufficiency (ACCESS) Initiative. Prioritize the 104 individuals who have enrolled into the ACCESS Initiative for shared/bridge housing or permanent supportive housing. These individuals come from the Non-Congregate Site (NCS) at the Alternate Care Site (ACS) at Sonoma State University.

Medium-Term Strategy (6-12 Months):

1. Administrative:

- **Leadership Council:** Implement LC strategic plan.

2. Sheltering:

- Explore the establishment of shelters in West and North County.
- **Participate in Governor's 100-day Challenge** focusing on housing COVID-19 vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness and TAY.

3. Bridge Housing: Continued efforts to purchase four of the remaining six homes approved by the Board in December 23, 2019.

4. Permanent Supportive Housing: Expand Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) for populations to move them into additional permanent supportive housing that will be coming online.

5. Homeless Prevention Assistance: Direct investments in rapid rehousing for homeless veterans and families experiencing homelessness. Such investments can support efforts to achieve functional zero homelessness among veterans and families that have seen over a fifty percent reduction since 2011 in Sonoma County.

6. ACCESS Integrated Care Management Team: HEART homeless encampment team to continue to enroll homeless into bridge and permanent housing options as they come online. Interdepartmental Multi-disciplinary Team (IMDT) to implement a strategic plan to work in all non-entitlement jurisdictions throughout the County.