MAYOR'S HOUSING THE HOMELESS TASK FORCE

REPORT

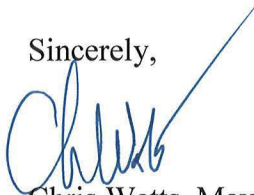DECEMBER 15, 2015

October 20, 2015

Dear Denton Community,

Recognizing that homelessness is a significant issue in our community, I organized a task force in 2014 to explore improving and expanding housing solutions for the homeless in Denton and appointed Alice Masciarelli, RN, DNP, CEO of Denton Community Health Clinic, to chair the group. I am grateful for her leadership, as she shares my deep commitment to improve the quality of life for all who live in the city.

The goal of the task force was to produce a plan for coordinated community–wide efforts to address homelessness. Simply put, the group developed a plan of support to help our homeless citizens find—and keep—homes. The process has made clear that solutions to prevent and reduce homelessness in Denton will require adequate funding, accessible, affordable housing; and collaborative commitments by many organizations.

The Denton City Council has taken three steps to support the recommendations of the task force. First, the City is working with a local organization that will lease a vacant City facility in which it will operate and maintain a shelter for the homeless. Second, federal funds have been allocated to promote the development of transitional housing. Third, the City has approved funding for a coordinator who will assist in implementing the plan in conjunction with participating nonprofit organizations.

I extend my sincere thanks to everyone involved in the task force and to all others in the community who are working to prevent and reduce homelessness in Denton.

Sincerely,

Chris Watts, Mayor
City of Denton

At the request of citizens, and in collaboration with the Denton County Homeless Coalition, City of Denton Mayor Chris Watts formed a task force charged to explore different housing options for the homelessness and, if possible, develop a plan for ending homelessness in Denton. The results of the task force efforts would be delivered to the City of Denton City Council. Informally the task force was referred to as the *Mayor's Housing the Homeless Task Force*.

PARTICIPANTS

Mayor Watts appointed Alice Masciarelli of Denton Community Health Clinic to chair the Task Force. Danielle Shaw, human services coordinator for the City of Denton was assigned to provide staff support. Invitations to participate were extended by email to executive directors of local organizations who were identified as either currently providing some type of housing intervention to assist the homeless or are working to prevent homelessness through assistance programs. Each was encouraged to send leadership staff and board members. In addition, some previously identified homeless were invited to participate. Others were added to meeting notices and updates by request.

List of participants can be found in *EXHIBIT 1* (*p.11).*

MEETINGS

The strategy was ambitious with an initial goal to meet in just 4 weekly 1-hour meetings. Week one set out to explore the interest of the different parties in ending homelessness. Discussion examined existing plans by any agency or group and how those plans were currently being implemented. Week two focused discussion around the perceived causes of homelessness and the perceived needs of the homeless. Week three discussions expanded on the strategies and interventions needed to help people exit out of homelessness and considered other strategies that could be implemented. Week four considered plans to eliminate homelessness by identifying resources that already exist and those resources that are still needed.

After the fourth week, the information collected from the previous meetings was sorted and a tool was drafted. The tool initially used identifiers based on the type of housing intervention, amount of time housed, goals, resources needed, and supportive services provided. A fifth week was then scheduled to introduce this tool to the task force and to allow task force participants time to provide additional guidance.

Over the 5 earlier meetings, the task force generated many innovative and supportive ideas for program and housing interventions for the homeless. It also recognized gaps and concerns in the current system where resources currently exist but are scarce, often fragmented, and siloed. It was discussed frequently in the meetings that communication about what resources are currently available is limited and is a frequent barrier to getting people in need to the right services at the right time. The scarcity of resources - human, fiscal, and knowledge - creates a system that is limited in its ability to create lasting change. As a result the task force's overall consensus supports stronger community collaboration around a coordinated system-wide approach to ending homelessness.

This was the framework for another meeting to be called to finalize priorities to be presented to City Council. The July 20, 2015 meeting discussion reflected on how best to implement the strategies produced by the task force that would meet the short-term and long-term needs of the homeless.

Meeting notes can be found in *EXHIBIT 2* (*p.13).*

REPORTS

The reports below were created from task force member discussion and the meeting activities.

- 📄 Housing Levels Tool [*EXHIBIT 3 p.35*]
- 📄 Housing Inventory Survey [*EXHIBIT 4 p.41*]
- 📄 Housing System Map [*EXHIBIT 5 p.53*]

It is recommended that these be shared with the Denton County Homeless Coalition and community stakeholders as a guide to encourage a system-wide view of coordinated housing interventions and to further reinforce the vital need for shared data collection to help maintain an accurate view of current resources and gaps in service.

Housing Levels Tool
The Housing Levels Tool identified these levels of coordinated housing interventions:

- Level 0: Entry Level
- Level 1: Short-Term Housing
- Level 2: Transitional Housing
- Level 3: Long-Term or Permanent Supportive Housing

Each level includes the same categories consistently applied: population housed; needs of the population; goals for housing and services; services to be provided; resources needed to achieve the goals; and resources that already exist in the community that could be leveraged.

As available community resources are constantly changing, the *Housing Levels Tool* will initially provide a flexible format for real-time strategic modeling. It should be used as a device that can be updated as data and other community needs assessments reflect on existing needs and gaps in the community. The *Housing Levels Tool* is found in *EXHIBIT 3 (p.35)*.

Housing Inventory Survey

The task force also identified some information that would be essential to informing their efforts. One of these was the need for a simple housing inventory. A brief survey questionnaire was distributed to help identify existing housing and supportive housing options that serve the homeless. The *Housing Inventory Survey* is found in *EXHIBIT 4 (p.41)*.

Housing System Map

To generate the system map for the community, the *Housing Inventory Survey* was combined with the *Housing Levels Tool* and with the notes from the task force meetings. The *Housing System Map* found in *EXHIBIT 5 (p.53)* is an infographic that has three main parts. It reflects all of the priorities as identified by the task force. It maps the housing and supportive services interventions by the levels including the snapshot of the housing inventory at each level. Finally it provides the supportive services wheel, a visual representation of the most common identified supportive services needs of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

It is recommended that the draft map and its concepts be applied over the next year to any current community strategies. It could help determine where any adjustments need to be made in the system. It is anticipated that this system map will also provide the first steps in initiating a community wide, coordinated system driven approach to ending homelessness. It can help any independent organization determine how it fits into a coordinated system approach. An organization should be able to identify where its services are meeting a community level need, where it fits in the overall system of care, and where it can collaborate to help ensure a client's progression through the continuum of care.
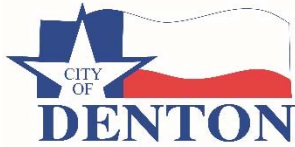
1. Funding – Increase in Available Resources
2. Housing – Coordinated, Accessible, and Affordable
3. System Design – to establish a network of Community Collaboration

Funding

As previously stated, having the resources to provide the necessary services and implement innovative solutions are necessary. Funding is a vital resource. Currently there is neither sufficient funding to meet the needs and frequently the funding source rules and regulations are barriers to being able to help all those in need. Increasing the overall availability of financial resources, specifically unrestricted funding, will be an important step in achieving the goal of ending homelessness. Another aspect of funding is the efficient use of available resources. When entities work in silos often there are often unintended consequences like duplication of services or with clients falling through the cracks.

Accessible/Affordable Housing Options

There is an urgent need for more accessible and affordable housing to prevent low-income families from becoming homeless and to help house more of those currently homelessness. These are people who are typically unemployed or underemployed at the time of housing need. Accessible and affordable housing options provide housing that ensure renters are not cost burdened and that reduces the barriers found in trying to access traditional market rate housing. Income and unemployment, poor credit rating, record of previous eviction, criminal backgrounds, etc… are all barriers to get people who are homeless off the street.

This emphasizes a priority need to identify areas of coordination among housing service programs and housing providers. For example, identifying how to provide support to landlords in helping reduce barriers and helping them to recognize early signs for risk for eviction to help prevent homelessness. It also seeks to possibly incentivize landlords to house some homeless.

System Design

System Design view is taking a look at new and existing programs to find areas for coordination of services for broader community impact. This effort serves a number of important needs. A coordinated approach means more efficient use of existing resources. It is leveraging funding across the service providers and providing opportunities for scaling up successful programs for

greater impact. It is sharing resources and knowledge. It is community data that informs decision-making. It is identification of best practices to improve programs and reducing programs no longer relevant. It is the development of innovative system-wide programmatic interventions like coordinated access or centralized intake, as it is commonly known. This is an example of a task force priority to find a way to give citizens in need one easily accessible entry point to find the right service to help them prevent or exit homelessness.

The homeless population and those at risk of homelessness remain fragile for many years and at risk of returning to homelessness when faced with a crisis. Another integral component of system design is the ability to provide on-going case management from the point of intake through independent living. Having a sufficient number of well training and adequately funded case managers supports the system design recommendations for a strong foundation for successful implementation of community strategies.
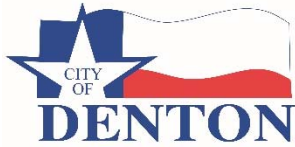
RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediately following the July 20th meeting the task force chair, Alice Mascerelli sent a report by email to Mayor Watts with recommendations from the task force. The email was also shared with City Council members the same day. This email can be found in *EXHIBIT 6 (p.57)*.

The recommendations were formed from the task force's priorities specifically to develop a more community focused view of ending homelessness. Nested in the ideas for program and housing interventions for the homeless was stronger community collaboration around shared community goals to end homelessness; better data collection and sharing; involvement of a wider audience of stakeholders; and more intentional effort to help educate and inform the community about solutions to homelessness and community impact efforts. Ultimately, the priorities that the task force recommended to City Council for their support and consideration were to seek funding to seed new collaborative projects.

The first of the recommendations sought to increase the number of supportive housing beds for homeless in the community. Specifically asking for dedicated funding for the renovation or expansion of an existing building or one that would create a new supportive housing facility. The first suggestion took into consideration interested donors, the City's current support of an inclement weather shelter, and the existing plans for the development of a new transitional housing facility.

The second recommendation sought support for a coordinator position to oversee the development and implementation of a community-wide coordinated system to address homelessness and housing services. The goals, based on task force priorities, would be to increase and improve effectiveness of community funding, ensure multi-faceted affordable housing options are available, provide a framework (structure, process and on-going evaluation) for delivery, supporting the implementation of innovative programs.

An integral part of the position would be the effort to collect systematic data on access to and the use of current resources as well as the impact the resources make in the current service environment. This would provide the community with a robust picture of the impact of current resources, the gaps in availability of resources, existing barriers to access housing and the need for more housing resources that would support the ending of homelessness in Denton.

The second recommendation took into consideration existing examples of public private partnerships where the City is collaborating with other organizations to provide funding to programs like Mentor Denton, the Park Foundation, and Keep Denton Beautiful.

CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS

With the presentation of priorities to City Council, the task force has concluded its work. At the time of publication of this report, the City Council, in support of efforts to end homelessness, has implemented the following:

- Directed staff to make available through a long-term lease agreement with the Monsignor King Outreach Center the use of a city owned property for the purpose of offering shelter and services to the homeless.
- With 2015-16 Action Plan approval by City Council, the Community Development Advisory Committees recommendation is approved to allocate $100,000 of the City's federal HOME Partnership Investment Grant funds to Denton Affordable Housing Corporation for the development of a property on Hinkle that will offer transitional housing.
- Approved in the final budget, is a council priority item of $40,000 to encourage a collaborative public-private partnership to support a community homeless coordinator position. United Way of Denton County is partnering with the City to fund and supervise this positon using the United Way's Community Impact model.