

Worksession Agenda Summary

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Title:

Overview of City Partnerships and Strategies to Address Homelessness

Background:

For many years, individuals who were unsheltered would be able to overnight at a modest 1930 residence with 38 beds located near the Spanish Colony known as the Guadalupe Shelter, operated by Catholic Charities. Over time, and as the need and profile of unsheltered individuals grew, more community services established to offer housing options for those in need ranging from emergency shelters (A Woman's Place, Cold Weather Shelter), families needing transitional housing and support (the Greeley Family House), and the expanded services of Catholic Charities (overnight emergency shelter for families and, from May-Oct for women, and transitional housing support). Most of these programs offer both shelter and 'wrap around' support services.

The City of Greeley has dedicated significant financial support to these efforts over the last decade (Attachment A).

As the needs of unsheltered persons has grown, so has competition for limited funding and services. In response, United Way of Weld County convened a community taskforce to explore development of a unified strategy to coordinate and leverage resources. After over a year of research, discussion and work, the final report was issued in 2016 and proposed a universe of services under the banner of "Weld's Way Home", Addressing and Preventing Homelessness in Weld County". The focus of that plan centers around a coordinated "housing first" strategy which promotes getting individuals into stable shelter as the first step to then address conditions that led to their homelessness, such as drugs, physical/mental health issues, family separation, and financial crisis. United Way continues to evolve the action strategy with its agency and community and partners and will soon release a major update to the plan as "Weld's Way Home.2".

Aligning resources has resulted in a partnership to help stabilize and support the Cold Weather Shelter, establish a Housing Navigation Center to promote prevention and connect resources, and approval of the Northern Colorado Continuum of Care to foster a regional resource approach.

COVID conditions in 2020 brought about a partnership between the City of Greeley and Bonell Good Samaritan Center (22nd St./8th Ave) to stand up a 32-unit residential unit on the Bonell campus planned to house individuals who needed to quarantine.

That housing need proved unnecessary and the facility was able to shelter “COVID vulnerable” individuals. Operated by United Way, it also offered short term shelter for unhoused persons while resources and more secure housing could be pursued. By the end of 2021 United Way had successfully placed 42 persons in more permanent housing.

The Cold Weather Shelter, managed by United Way with an operating contract with the Guadalupe Center is open for overnight stays from Nov. – April. A chronic challenge with sheltering persons experiencing homelessness in cold weather has been securing an acceptable location that is accessible for those in need and of minimal impact to adjacent properties. After years of different temporary locations United Way, with the financial support of the City of Greeley, was able to secure a 40-month lease in Evans, adjacent to the Monfort Family Clinic. That lease has terminated and a new location with a 5-year lease, again underwritten by the City of Greeley, has been secured on S. 8th Avenue in a former car dealership east of the University Square Shopping Center. The remodel of that building will support both the Cold Weather Shelter and the Housing Navigation Center (HNC).

The HNC, staffed by United Way, is a place where multiple agencies hold offices thereby providing a single stop for individuals threatened with homelessness to receive multiple services as opposed to traveling to multiple locations. The HNC provides guidance, support and resource referrals to help divert individuals from homelessness and to offer resources and support to those without shelter. HNC “navigators” are also expanding their work to include street outreach to individuals who experience chronic homelessness for a variety of reasons. United Way has indicated it will have 3 navigator/street outreach in 2022.

In search of a more stable and reliable way to provide a continuum of shelter and services to limit homelessness in the community, City staff visited other community models and recently issued a Request for Proposals under the moniker of “Weld Village” to study local housing service and housing options.

Following its update of its Comprehensive Plan, the City adopted a Strategic Housing Plan to address a full complement of community needs, including homelessness (Attachment B – Plan excerpt – Housing Ladder).

Current Conditions & Initiatives

While work to address homelessness has grown so has the presence and impact of persons who trespass private property and occupy public areas with encampment and attendant waste and troubling behaviors. In fall, the City Manager convened a staff committee meeting bi-weekly to focus attention on ways to address the impacts of homelessness.

The status of work facilitated by this committee and the services noted above follows:

Protecting Private Property Guide: a tip guide on measures property owners can take to limit trespass and protect property from unwanted access was developed. This guide has been shared in a presentation with the Weld County Apartment Association and offered to the Greeley Area Board of Realtors (Attachment C)

Power-washing Downtown Plazas: the City has researched the costs to power-wash the Downtown plazas 2-3x/week and as needed to remove waste in areas problematic for businesses (in addition to the once/month cleaning of target alley areas by the DDA) (Attachment D).

Encampment clean-ups: on a regular schedule the City will monitor areas in which encampments tend to occur (underpasses/bridges, near the railroad, etc.) to determine if a minimum threshold has been reached which requires contracted clean-up to remove waste, debris, biohazards, etc. to limit contamination to the river and adjoining areas. Pre-approved signage and notices will be placed on site along with information about housing resource support (Attachment E).

Cost of Service Schedule: a schedule has been devised to catalogue on-going City labor and materials expenses for services across multiple departments that respond to impacts related to homeless conditions in order to measure the impact in financial terms.

Street outreach workers: a homeless outreach team is envisioned to be a group of trained individuals dedicated to investigating encampments, making contact with Greeley's unhoused population, and providing resources to those experiencing homelessness. The goals of the team would be to build proactive relationships with the homeless community and community homeless service providers and work with regional partners to collect and analyze data to inform recommendations.

Continued agency case-management support: to the degree consistent with its policies and federal limits, continue support of agencies serving those with emergency housing needs to provide case-management to limit the number of persons experiencing homelessness

Weld Village Scoping and Assessment: With the assistance of a third-party consultant, the City has begun a scoping and assessment process evaluating current homeless and housing data, determining market and financial viability and feasibility, and estimating capital and operating costs for possible sheltering and housing alternatives. The scoping and assessment will also include community input sessions throughout the process which will last approximately six months.

The cost in financial and human terms of homelessness is a burden every community experiences at some level. The strategies listed above offer the current initiatives and will evolve and shift as opportunities and resources arise to inform best practices. It is Greeley's advantage that it has a collection of partnerships that are well aligned to continue to face this challenge in an on-going and pro-active manner. Council will continue to receive updates as the response to this community issue evolves.

Strategic Work Program Item or Applicable Council Priority and Goal:

Implementation of the City's Strategic Housing Plan

Decision Options:

This item is for information only

Attachments:

- A: Historic City Funding Supporting Resources to Address Homelessness
- B: City's Strategic Housing Plan - Housing Ladder
- C: Protecting Private Property Guide
- D: Proposed Downtown Power Washing Cost Estimate
- E: Encampment Clean-up Signage
- F: City Cost of Service Log

Powerpoint Presentation