

Project PATH

Practical Assistance through
Transitional Housing

5-Year Strategic Plan

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Introduction

In the summer of 2018 then Governor Kate Brown and Housing Policy Advisor James LaBar released a Housing Policy Agenda for Oregon addressing Housing Stability for Children, Veterans, and the Chronically Homeless. The Policy Agenda provides background information on families experiencing homelessness, the concern for growing homelessness in the Veterans community, the number of chronically homeless individuals, and a realization that homelessness is not just a problem in Oregon's big cities. It is here in rural eastern Oregon as well.

The Policy Agenda says the following about Rural Communities in Oregon:

Urban Oregonians are not the only people facing housing challenges. An analysis done by Oregon's Office of Economic Analysis (OEA) shows that rural housing affordability is a significant issue in Oregon. OEA found that the median household income in rural Oregon at \$41,098 is very similar to the median household income in the rural United States at \$42,174. However, while median household incomes are similar, the housing prices in rural Oregon are much higher than in the rural U.S. The median home value in rural Oregon is 30 percent higher than in the rural U.S. at \$151,500 compared to \$95,700, and median rents are 16 percent higher in rural Oregon than in the rural U.S. at \$580 compared to \$500.

Other themes heard throughout OHCS's outreach efforts for the Statewide Housing Plan were that the challenges related to housing stability and housing quality are present all across the state, not just in metropolitan areas, and that rural areas often face unique barriers to accessing resources due to limited capacity and infrastructure. The lack of building in rural communities has many causes, including but not limited to: lack of capacity of local governments to plan for and facilitate housing development; identifying buildable lands; local policies that disincentivize residential development; limited capacity or presence of local developers willing to work in rural communities; lack of construction labor/capacity to deliver the housing; and financial dynamics that make it difficult for rural housing developments to be viable.

Emerging law and case law (*Martin v City of Boise*) prompted the Oregon Legislature in 2021 to pass [House Bill 3115](#) which provides that local law regulating sitting, lying, sleeping, or keeping warm and dry outdoors on public property that is open to the public must be objectively reasonable as to time, place, and manner with regards to persons experiencing homelessness. In western Umatilla County a partnership has emerged bringing the cities of Hermiston, Umatilla, Echo, and Stanfield (HUES) together with Umatilla County to address these issues through Project PATH, a program designed to provide Practical Assistance through Transitional Housing (PATH). The intent is to bring together services to assist individuals and families facing homelessness with the objective to move them into and through transitional housing to permanent housing.

Vision, Mission, and Values

Thanks to the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative for the inspiration.

Vision:

Project PATH envisions a region with equal opportunities and support, where everyone who needs stable housing can find and afford it – especially communities who have faced disproportionate barriers to housing – so everyone can achieve the best quality of life possible.

Mission:

Through collaboration and advocacy, we work to reduce homelessness in western Umatilla County by expanding housing capacity and ensuring supportive services are provided in culturally affirming ways that uphold human dignity.

Values:

Compassion and humanity are at the core of our work. As a collaborative, we recognize the hardships that homeless community members experience and the common humanity we all share, regardless of our housing status.

We value *collaboration and partnership*; working together helps us provide greater support to homeless and unstably housed community members.

Advocacy allows us to do more to support the vulnerable populations we serve when we champion strategic investments, projects, and policy changes.

We elevate *lived experience*. We cannot do this work without acknowledging the disproportionate barriers the housing crisis has created for communities of color and other traditionally marginalized populations. We cannot effectively advocate for solutions without lifting the voices of those who are or have been homeless.

We value *tenacity and perseverance*. Homelessness is a complex issue that cannot be solved overnight; we acknowledge that this work requires visionary leadership and resilience.

Project Description

Project PATH brings together Umatilla County and the communities of Hermiston, Umatilla, Echo, and Stanfield (HUES) to address the issue of homelessness in west Umatilla County. It is envisioned to be a model program implemented to serve multiple communities that will, along with its contractor, provide a PATH from homelessness to transitional housing to permanent housing and along the way begin to address the myriad reasons that an individual or family may be experiencing homelessness that could include lack of work, mental health issues, or substance abuse issues. The Project PATH Advisory Committee members must also work to assure that various types of housing are available within their communities to not only support Project PATH but also provide a continuum of housing options to meet the requirements found in Oregon's statewide planning program under Goal 10 Housing.

To implement a significant part of Project PATH's Vision the Advisory Committee, through the City of Umatilla as the lead agency, will contract to provide a suite of services that will be available to participants within the HUES area. A major component of Project PATH is a facility on property owned by Umatilla County within the City of Umatilla to create a safe space for overnight or longer stays with support services available by referral or onsite. The Stepping Stones Alliance is the designated entity responsible for planning and delivering services for transitional housing and related support services to move an individual or family from homelessness to permanent housing. They are responsible for management of the Project PATH facility that includes a general building with offices, indoor common area(s), showers, and meal facilities; individual shelter units that can accommodate one to two people; and outdoor common areas securely fenced.

A continuum of services to support entry into transitional housing will be used to assist residents utilize various onsite and community services to move towards and into permanent housing. These types of services shall include the following:

- Provide 24 hour, 7-day a week, onsite staffing to support the project buildings that includes offices, residents' showers, a food pantry, and a community kitchen. This includes managing the individual shelter units that will sleep one to two members.
- Educational Services including, but not limited to, coordination with members to receive their high school diploma or GED, counseling services to connect members with local or other traditional educational service providers (BMCC, EOU, and others), and connecting members with employer education services (such as CDL training, unemployment counselors, or workforce partnerships).
- Access to basic level medical, dental, and vision services.
- Access to transportation services to facilitate travel to work, educational programs, or other support services associated with Project PATH or deemed necessary for the member's transition.
- Provision of, or connection to, services for persons with behavioral health conditions and/or substance use disorders.
- Care coordination and/or case management to support access to other needed services

that may include education, training, and onsite or offsite work.

Project PATH, through its contractor, will also provide Emergency Overnight Shelter for identified homeless individuals. A primary purpose of this program offering is to replace the Hermiston Warming Station through use of a dedicated area for these temporary facility users. They will have physically separate sleeping quarters but may have access to selected common and community areas (food pantry and showers as possible examples). Users of these services will need to comply with the entire facilities operational rules but will also have a subset of rules especially for them. This will also be the section of the facility used by law enforcement and emergency responders to house individuals who may be illegally camping in right-of-way, along designated trails, or in parks or have been treated at a local hospital or urgent care.

Project PATH Advisory Committee, Primary Contractor, and Partners

A representative from Umatilla County along with the cities of Hermiston, Umatilla, Echo, and Stanfield comprise the Project PATH Advisory Committee. Working with the primary contractor, the Stepping Stones Alliance, the success of Project PATH will be achieved through partnerships and collaborative situations with other service providers to achieve multiple outcomes in moving clients through the program offerings with success achieved when the client finds permanent housing.

Advisory Committee Members:

Umatilla County	Dan Dorran, Commissioner
City of Hermiston	Byron Smith, Manager
City of Umatilla	Dave Stockdale, Manager
City of Echo	David Slaght, Administrator
City of Stanfield	Benjamin Burgener, Manager

Primary Contractor: Stepping Stones Alliance

Jesalyn Cole, Executive Director

Board Members

Cathy Lloyd, Board Chair and President

Michael Atkinson, Board Treasurer

Chuck Barnes, Board Vice Chair

Sandy Francis

Brandy Medrano, Board Secretary

Phil Spicerkuhn

Roger Condie

Project PATH Partners:

Provided Service	Service Provider
Education	Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) Hermiston High School (HHS)
Basic Medical, Dental, and Vision	
Transportation	Kayak (Service of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) Umatilla Cab Umatilla County Public Transit
Behavioral Health/Substance Abuse Disorders	Community Counseling Solutions (CCS)
Care Coordination/Case Management	Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) WorkSource

	Community Outreach Prevention Engagement Services (COPEs) Community Action Program of East Central Oregon (CAPECO)
Value Added Services	Service Providers
Services to Veteran's	Veteran's Service Office (VSO) Umatilla and Morrow Counties Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) within Blue Mountain Action Council (BMAC)
Transitional Housing for Parents	Martha's House
Fair Housing information and Enforcement	Fair Housing Council of Oregon
Transitional Housing Support Resources	Community Action Program of East Central Oregon (CAPECO)
Outreach and Referrals	Desert Rose Ministries
Domestic Violence Services	Domestic Violence Services (Hermiston)
Subsidized Permanent Housing	Umatilla Housing Authority
Community Partner Services	Service Providers
Law Enforcement support and response	Umatilla Police Department Hermiston Police Department Umatilla County Sheriff's Office
Faith Based Support	Hermiston Faith-Based Advisory Committee Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints New Hope Faith Presbyterian Church
Hispanic Community Support	Hermiston Hispanic Advisory Committee
Civic Outreach	Rotary Kiwanis Altrusa Lions
Community and Business Sponsorship	Amazon Web Services Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation

FUNDING

Project PATH will be initially funded primarily through the Oregon Department of Administrative Services with funds from [House Bill 4123](#) (2022). Future funding is anticipated to come from a variety of sources including funding from the Contractor, funds obtained through various granting opportunities, general fund sources of the partner agencies, and other funding sources identified to support the variety of services that will be offered. Once this initial funding is expended the Project Path Advisory Committee will need to identify ongoing funding sources and mechanisms to assure Project PATH's success. This could include actions outside of this Strategic Plan within each HUES community and Umatilla County to assure a variety of housing opportunities as envisioned under the statewide planning programs Goal 10. Working with the Umatilla County Housing Authority and local housing developers new housing projects should have available housing for individuals and families working through transitional housing to permanent housing solutions.

The Stepping Stones Alliance brought to the project funds secured through the American Recovery Plan, Amazon Web Services, Good Shepherd Community Foundation Grant, a Fair Housing Grant, a donation from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and individual donations. Ongoing funding will need to be planned for and obtained through grants, fundraisers, and work projects that can be developed. Projects throughout the country provide examples of funding opportunities through the creation of stores, service companies, and similar opportunities.

The Project PATH HUES communities, Umatilla County, and the Stepping Stones Alliance are all required to adopt annual budgets which will include funding for necessary annual activities or address how services of the Stepping Stones Alliance will be accomplished.

Words and Phrases to Know

Thanks to the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative for the inspiration.

Affordable and Accessible Housing: Housing that includes features that make it usable for people with disabilities or limited mobility and allows residents to spend no more than 30% of their income to live there.

Area Median Income (AMI): The household income for the “middle” household in a geographic region. Half of the families in a region earn more than the AMI, and half earn less. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development calculates and defines the AMI for specific geographic areas across the county every year. Housing providers then use this number as a reference point when setting local income and affordability requirements for available housing units.

Acquisition and Rehabilitation/Rehab: The process of gaining ownership and management rights over a real estate property and renovating existing units rather than developing new units. Acquisition and rehab are valuable tools used by proponents of affordable housing and preservation.

BIPOC: An acronym that stands for “Black, Indigenous, and people of color.” This is a term used to describe communities of color, while centering the experience of Black and Indigenous people, who experience disproportionately high institutional barriers.

Chronically Homeless: Experiencing homelessness for at least a year, or repeatedly over time, while struggling with a disabling condition like a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability.

Coordinated Entry: A process developed to ensure that all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access to resources and are quickly assessed for, referred, and connected to housing and other assistance based on their vulnerabilities and strengths.

Culturally Responsive/Culturally Specific Services: Being able to understand and consider the different cultural backgrounds of clients, and respecting clients’ customs, experiences, perspectives, and language when assisting them to access resources.

Equity/Equitable: While an Equal approach means giving everyone the same resources, an equitable approach acknowledges that each person has different circumstances, needs, and institutional barriers they have faced. Equity means allocating resources and opportunities in a way that creates equal outcomes.

Equal Opportunity: While equity creates equal outcomes equal opportunity requires treating people without discrimination particularly based on race, sex, age, or disability. It provides an equal playing field.

Goal 10 Housing: As one of 14 statewide planning goals, Goal 10 directs cities to allow a variety of housing locations, types, and densities. In the context of this Strategic Plan Goal 10 is defined as one mechanism that can be used to assure a supply of housing to meet a variety of needs, including housing in support of Project PATH and its stated objectives and priorities.

Guest: An individual who stays at the Emergency Overnight Shelter.

Homeless/Homelessness: Lacking a place to live.

Houselessness: An alternative to homelessness is houselessness because many people who are or have been unhoused prefer it. This is because “home” is more than a building where a person lives; it represents community, social connections, memories, friends, family, or more. People who lack a physical house often still identify strongly with a place they call home.

Housing Stabilization: The process of connecting to a wide range of individualized services – not just those that are directly related to housing – that help facilitate a person’s ability to find and/or stay in housing.

HUES: This refers to the municipalities of Hermiston, Umatilla, Echo, and Stanfield.

Impact Fees: Fees charged to property developers by local governments for the new infrastructure that must be built to accommodate new development.

Individual Shelter Units (ISU): A small one- to two-person unit designed to provide a secured sheltered area for sleeping and limited personal items.

Jail Diversion: Community-based services that are designed to keep individuals, especially those with behavioral health issues, from becoming incarcerated by connecting them to other community-based resources like mental health support, substance abuse services, employment services, and housing. Jail diversion aims to minimize the contact individuals have with law enforcement and help them avoid or reduce jail time.

LGBTQ+: An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and more. These terms are used to describe a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

Lived Experience (with homelessness): Personal knowledge about homelessness that has been gained because of going through homelessness first-hand rather than through representations constructed by others.

Medical Respite: Medical respite care is short-term residential care for people experiencing homelessness who are too ill or frail to recover from an illness or injury on the streets, but not ill enough to be in a hospital. Medical respite care helps people rest and recover in a safe environment while accessing medical care and other supportive services.

Member: An individual who is participating in services provided through Project PATH and the Stepping Stones Alliance. They may also have an agreement to use an Individual Shelter Unit.

Point in Time Count: Also known as the PIT Count, this is the annual count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness across the United States during the last ten days of January.

Preservation: The process of retaining existing affordable housing, whether at subsidized or fair market costs, and protecting its affordability for current and future tenants.

Rapid Re-Housing: A type of housing assistance that quickly helps people experiencing homelessness to get into housing with the help of application fees, security deposit funding, time-limited rent assistance, incentives to encourage landlords to place clients in their units, and case management services.

Reintegration After Incarceration: The process a person goes through to re-enter society and become a productive member of the community after serving time in jail or prison.

Services/Supportive Services: Aid that makes it easier for someone to get into and stay in housing long-term by enhancing their overall way of living. Examples include help directly related to housing – such as rent assistance – or other resources, such as reliable transportation, affordable childcare, food assistance, training in budgeting and money management, health care, job training, mental health services, or substance abuse treatment.

Supportive Housing: The combination of ongoing affordable housing assistance, such as rent subsidies, with flexible and supportive services for people experiencing homelessness. The goal of supportive housing is to help people stay housed and live a more productive life in the community. There are multiple models of supportive housing: it could include the construction or renovation of new housing, setting aside units in privately-owned buildings, or leasing individual apartments throughout a specific geographic area where clients can receive services from supportive case managers.

Traditional Health Workers: Frontline public health workers who work in a health care clinic or community to assist individuals to achieve positive, health-related outcomes. Examples of traditional health workers include community health workers, personal health navigators, peer support specialists, and peer wellness specialists. Traditional health workers may have a particular specialty area or background, such as being a peer support specialist who uses their personal experience recovering from addiction to help a client struggling with a substance use disorder. Or they may promote health on a more holistic level by helping clients navigate multiple supportive services, including those that are not related to health care but contribute to overall well-being and stability.

Strategic Plan

Thanks to the Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative for the inspiration.

To meet the Mission, Vision, and Values identified in this planning document the Project PATH Advisory Board has identified the following Goals and strategies.

Goal Area 1: Shelter

Objective: Assure that shelter is available in west Umatilla County serving the HUES communities. Support the Stepping Stones Alliance in providing shelter services.

Strategic Priorities:

1. The Project PATH Advisory Committee will work to improve coordination with service providers.
2. Identify and prioritize funding for shelter, rehousing, and staff. This includes funding for the Stepping Stones Alliance and their work as a contractor to Project PATH.

Goal Area 2: Services

Objective: Ensure the supportive services delivered in west Umatilla County meet client needs.

Strategic Priorities:

1. Increase accessibility of services with a focus on needs identified by clients.
2. Address gaps in services for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.
3. Strengthen communication between service providers.
4. Invest in transportation networks to allow those seeking services to get to appointments, work, or other aspects of life's needs.
 - a. Coordinate transportation services to include various Kayak routes and revisions to routes, services provided by local cab or other similar operators, and invest in vehicles as appropriate and available.
 - b. Assure that future updates to the Umatilla County and HUES communities Transportation System Plans include transit and related components with reference to transportation needs related to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.
 - c. Invest in the required transportation connections imposed by the land use decision for the Project PATH facility in the City of Umatilla which includes a connect to the proposed Umatilla River Trail system connecting the HUES communities.

Goal Area 3: Housing

Objective: Preserve and expand affordable, accessible housing.

Strategic Priorities:

1. Increase the supply of housing units that low-income households can afford.
2. Use preservation, acquisition, and rehabilitation to protect the region's existing supply of affordable, accessible housing.
3. Prioritize access to affordable, accessible housing units for communities of color and other traditionally underserved populations.
4. Education elected officials, community leaders, and the public about why our region needs more affordable and accessible housing.
5. Assure that the participating communities have Comprehensive Plans with policies supportive of needed housing at a variety of price ranges and rent levels.

Goal Area 4: Advocacy

Objective: Advocate, engage the community, and build support for the region's efforts to address homelessness.

Strategic Priorities:

1. Communicate to build awareness and support.
2. Use accurate data to inform people of the realities of homelessness and to address opposition to the Advisory Committee's priorities.
3. Advocate for funding and policies that support the Advisory Committee's strategic investments both in our individual communities and the HUES area collaboratively.

The Stepping Stones Alliance has identified that their work will focus on Connecting, Developing, and Supporting. These actions support the Goals, Objectives, and Strategic Priorities identified by the Project PATH Advisory Committee.

Implementation

To meet the guidelines of the HB 4123 funding the following implementation requirements are to be included in this Strategic Plan. They are as follows:

1. Identify funding to support the ongoing operations.
This is addressed earlier in the Strategic Plan under the heading Funding. Ongoing work will be required to assure the longevity of both Project PATH and the Stepping Stones Alliance.
2. Increasing or streamlining resources and services to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness within the participating cities and counties.
Project PATH has identified several Goals, Objectives, and Strategic Priorities that work to assure resources and services are available to those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. While many services have been available within the HUES communities historically this is the first-time coordination of services is being done with the involvement of local cities and the county.

The Stepping Stones Alliance, the Project PATH selected contractor to implement and coordinate delivery of the services, has three components to the program that includes a sleep center, navigation center, and housing center. Individuals generally and most often would enter the program through the emergency overnight shelter which provides night to night shelter. Once established in the program, engagement would occur in the navigation center where needed services and access to resources are available to active members and delivered during all operational hours by staff, community partners, and volunteers. The housing center will initially offer 20 individual shelter units for participants engaged with navigation center resources.

3. Incorporating national best practices for ending homelessness.
Homelessness continues to increase across the HUES Communities, the State of Oregon, and nationally. There are a number of programs and service providers that are doing exemplary work and seeing success in moving participants from homelessness into transitional housing and eventually into permanent housing. But providing that initial shelter is not enough. It requires a continuum of services to address a wide range of concerns and problems that the homeless may be facing that includes access to mental health services, transportation services, job training, and shelter. It also requires working to establish affordable and accessible housing for individuals and families seeking to make the transition. Or in some cases providing that bridge from the edge of the abyss to the promise of a home.
4. Eliminating racial disparities within homeless services within the service area.
The Project PATH Advisory Committee members need to assure that services and materials offered by them, and any partners, are available in English and Spanish. Regionally work with potential partner agencies to assure that offered services are available without limitations based on racial or other potentially discriminating factors.

Several key Stepping Stone Alliance staff are multilingual. Publications and social media are being provided in English and Spanish. Operation of the Project PATH facility will be done as a low barrier shelter lowering or eliminating barriers to shelter and services.

5. Creating pathways to permanent and supportive housing that is affordable to local populations experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Project PATH Advisory Committee communities will continue to work on housing opportunities as outlined in Oregon's statewide planning program Goal 10 and the multitude of measures that are being created through legislation and policy work by the State of Oregon. Implementation of the Goals identified earlier in this Strategic Plan will also work to build a larger and more stable supply of affordable and accessible housing options.

Stepping Stones Alliance is partnering with CAPECO and the Umatilla County Housing Authority to create opportunities for permanent housing. Plans include development of larger transitional housing moving to permanent housing over time.