

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Homelessness Outreach Program Update

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City Manager's Office

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

INFORMATION ONLY Staff will provide an informational update for discussion. No action is sought from Council.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS**Executive Summary**

In an effort to respond to the need for an enhanced, coordinated approach to addressing homelessness, the City of Bellevue's Homelessness Outreach program was initiated in September 2019. The program was developed to provide a one-city approach in addressing and responding to the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Bellevue.

Homelessness Outreach Coordination

A dedicated Homelessness Outreach Coordinator leads this program by being the City's single point of contact to (1) provide outreach and direct service to those experiencing homelessness, (2) coordinate interdepartmentally to address homelessness-related issues, (3) coordinate with external community-based service providers to connect individuals to services that enhance housing stability, (4) partner with community providers and/or City staff to develop innovative approaches that prevent and address homelessness, and (5) collaborate with regional partners to align resources and identify approaches that enhance a coordinated homelessness response.

The Homelessness Outreach Program accomplishes Council Priorities in providing a caring, safe, and clean environment for both those unhoused and housed (Achieving Human Potential, High Performance Government); and positions Bellevue as a catalyst for change with our Regional Partners (Regional Leadership). The program directly impacts 2021-2023 Council priorities 13, 16, 17, and 18.

Homelessness in Bellevue

The City of Bellevue is not alone in addressing the diverse challenges it faces to identify innovative approaches that address and prevent homelessness. Factors such as affordable housing, low paying jobs, domestic violence, chronic health conditions, youth aging out of the foster care system, substance use disorder and mental health issues are root causes of those experiencing homelessness. The root causes of homelessness are regional and national challenges that necessitate coordination, partnership, and strategic approaches to appropriately address homelessness-related issues throughout the City.

In effort to understand the scale of the issue, the Point-in-Time Count is conducted annually across King County to count the number of persons experiencing homelessness in a single night. Due to COVID-19, the 2021 Point-in-Time count was not conducted. Therefore, our most recent data comes from early 2020, when it was determined that there were 11, 751 individuals experiencing homelessness with 53 percent sheltered (i.e., shelters, transitional housing) and 57 percent unsheltered (i.e., living outside, in a tent or car, and/or in a place not meant for human habitation). This is a 5 percent increase in people experiencing homelessness from the 2019 Point-in-Time count.

Additionally, homelessness disproportionately impacts people of color. As found in the 2020 Point-in-Time Count, Black/African Americans are 7 percent of the Seattle/King County population, but make-up 25 percent of the population experiencing homelessness in Seattle/King County; American Indian/Alaska Natives are 1 percent of the Seattle/King County population, but make-up 15 percent of the population experiencing homelessness; Hispanics are 10 percent of the Seattle/King County population, but are 15 percent of the population experiencing homelessness; and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander are 1 percent of Seattle/King County population, but are 4 percent of the population experiencing homelessness.

Bellevue Point-in-Time data is reported in the East County region and consists of: Beaux Arts Village, Bellevue, Clyde Hill, Hunts Point, Issaquah, Kirkland, Medina, Mercer Island, Newcastle, Redmond Sammamish, Yarrow Point. On the Eastside, there were 1,032 individuals experiencing homelessness with 57 percent sheltered and 43 percent unsheltered. Additionally, the Bellevue School District (BSD) reported that for 2019-2020, there were 375 BSD youth experiencing homelessness.

It is important to note that homelessness counts often underestimate the number of those experiencing homelessness, as homeless definitions vary across agencies and there are difficulties in capturing the actual number of individuals living outside when the count is conducted.

City-Wide Efforts

Homelessness is a regional, national issue that has a no “one-size-fits-all” solution. With this recognition, the City of Bellevue has invested in several internal programs, staff, and services that support the City’s efforts to address and respond to: (1) the needs of those experiencing housing instability and homelessness, and (2) homelessness-related issues that improve the quality of life for all Bellevue residents.

The programs and departments that the Homelessness Outreach Coordinator frequently collaborates and coordinates with to address homelessness include, but not limited to: Bellevue Fire CARES, Bellevue Police, Parks, Transportation, Utilities, Human Services, Community Development, and Bellevue Police. Through this City-wide collaboration and coordination, the Homelessness Coordinator can successfully enhance service delivery to those unhoused and housed in Bellevue. To prevent and address homelessness, respective City staff and departments work collaboratively to:

- Provide direct service and support to those unsheltered and in mental/behavioral health crises
- Adopt and implement an affordable housing strategy
- Fund subsidized housing
- Fund organizations that serve individuals experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability

- Respond and collaborate with direct service staff to address public health and safety issues related to homelessness

Homelessness Outreach Program

The Homelessness Outreach program provides a balanced approach that coordinates efforts to: (1) support those unsheltered in transitioning to safe, permanent homes, (2) create opportunities to address homelessness long-term, and (3) ensure the City addresses homelessness-related issues that improve the quality of life for all Bellevue residents.

This dedicated Homelessness Outreach Coordinator is the City’s single point of contact to provide:

- **City Coordination:** coordinate cross-departmentally to address homelessness-related issues
- **External Coordination:** coordinate and connect individuals experiencing housing instability to external community-based providers that enhance housing stability (i.e., Veteran’s Affairs, Department of Social Health Services, shelter providers, landlords, affordable housing providers, domestic violence agencies, etc.)
- **Direct Service and Outreach:** provide direct service and outreach to those experiencing housing instability in order to help individuals address their housing barriers and move into housing
- **Innovation:** lead and provide technical input to projects and opportunities that respond to the needs of those experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability
- **Regional Coordination:** collaborate with regional partners to enhance a comprehensive Eastside solution
- **Data:** track baseline metrics to identify how many unsheltered are accessing the Homelessness Outreach program’s services and transitioning to safe, permanent and/or transitional housing opportunities that enhance overall well-being and stability
- **Community Engagement:** enhance community engagement and communications regarding the City’s efforts to address homelessness, including responding to community inquiries regarding homelessness concerns

Preliminary, baseline metrics have been collected to highlight the number of individuals connected to the Homelessness Outreach program and the number of individuals transitioning to permanent and/or temporary housing. See table below for 2020 and 2021 data (2021 data updated as of 6/30/2021). See Attachment A for demographics pertaining to gender, age group, and race/ethnicity.

2020		2021 (updated as of 06/30/21)	
Unduplicated Participants	101	Unduplicated Participants	62
Permanently Housed	14	Permanently Housed	7
Temporarily Housed	15	Temporarily Housed	7
Total Permanently/ Temporarily Housed	29	Total Permanently/ Temporarily Housed	14

Challenges

As with our regional partners, the City continues to face challenges related to homelessness. Below are specific gaps in Bellevue that the City is continuing to address through various approaches, opportunities, and projects:

- Insufficient number of places for individuals and families living in their vehicles to find safety and stability until they access permanent housing
- Lack of permanent supportive housing that supports extremely-low and low-income families that need supportive services to maintain housing stability
- Enhanced proactive response to homelessness that prevents homelessness and housing instability for our most vulnerable residents

Upcoming Projects

There are several projects and opportunities the City is developing to address the aforementioned (and other) challenges the City faces:

- Enhanced communication regarding the City's efforts to address and respond to homelessness-related issues across the City
- Continued HB 1590 program adoption and implementation
- Exploring safe parking programs for immediate, temporary stability and safety
- Continued regional coordination with King County's Regional Homelessness Authority to enhance regional partnership, collaboration, and solutions to address homelessness

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

N/A

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

A. 2020 and 2021 Homelessness Outreach Program Data Demographics

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A