

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Update on the King County Regional Homelessness Authority

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DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**INFORMATION
ONLY**

The King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) was established in 2019 to coordinate policy, funding, and services for people experiencing homelessness in King County. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Marc Dones (they/them) and Subregional Planning Manager Alexis Mercedes Rinck (she/her) will provide an update on the KCRHA's activities.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS**Background**

In 2002, eight organizations, coalitions, and local governments came together to form the Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEH), an effort to develop and implement a plan to end homelessness in King County. In 2003, planning to end homelessness became a national initiative of the federal government and has since become a requirement for grant funding assistance to jurisdictions from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The CEH began work in 2005 with a 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in King County. When the plan came to an end in 2015, the CEH was re-formed and a new regional vision and strategic plan to guide the work of stakeholders for 2015-2019 period was created. This effort included creation of All Home. This agency met the federal funding requirement to establish a "continuum of care" (COC) process to coordinate homeless services. Federal rules require the local COC to determine a priority order for projects to receive funding. The 16-member All Home Board included representatives from King County, Seattle, suburban cities, non-profit service providers and the Seattle Housing Authority.

The vision for the CEH Strategic Plan for 2015-2019 was that homelessness in King County was rare, brief and one-time and that racial disparities are eliminated. While some successful outcomes have been achieved in helping people avoid homelessness, assisting people who are homeless and the addition of affordable housing units over the past several years, homelessness remains a crisis in King County.

In 2007, Bellevue set up a temporary winter shelter following the death of a homeless man during extreme cold weather. In 2014, the City worked with Redmond and Kirkland on shelter locations.

Redmond committed to providing a youth shelter, Kirkland committed to providing a shelter for women and families and Bellevue agreed to establish a permanent men's winter shelter.

In 2015, Council adopted principles that supported collaborative regional efforts to prevent individuals from becoming homeless and to ensure that when people experience homelessness, the experience is a rare, brief and one-time occurrence. Nearly all of the principles below are applicable to today's efforts to provide shelter for people experiencing homelessness. Those principles are as follows:

- **Continue to Support a Broad Continuum of Services.** A regional safety net of programs addressing the full spectrum of community needs must be maintained and enhanced. Homelessness is effectively prevented through continued investment in areas such as domestic violence advocacy, mental health and substance abuse treatment, early intervention with at-risk youth, employment counseling, and emergency financial assistance.
- **Focus on Prevention.** Making homelessness rare will require addressing the causes of homelessness and predictive factors such as the housing market, safety net, economy, demographics, and transience. Homeless prevention strategies should be supported that assist households to resolve or stabilize a housing crisis that would otherwise lead them to homelessness.
- **Align Existing Funding Resources.** Funds and programs within the current system should be aligned to support the strengths and address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. This includes addressing the crisis, finding housing as quickly as possible, and realigning housing and support to meet the needs. If necessary, additional or new funding sources may then be sought to support practices that prove effective in further preventing homelessness or supporting those experiencing it.
- **Enhance Locally Available Services.** Individuals and families at risk of homelessness or who become homeless should be able to access either prevention support or permanent housing with support services that address the root causes of their housing crisis within the community in which they live. Funding originating from federal, state and county sources should be distributed equitably across all county sub-regions to support local responses to homelessness from public, private and non-profit organizations, including faith communities.
- **Recognize Homelessness as a Regional Issue.** All sub-regions should actively partner to improve the regional response to addressing those factors leading to homelessness that have county-wide impacts, e.g. need for more crisis response resources and affordable housing, access to appropriate health and mental health services, employment assistance, etc.
- **Acknowledge Differences in Sub-Regional Needs.** Each sub-region of the county should lead efforts to identify factors leading to homelessness that are particularly prevalent in that sub-region, e.g. cost of housing, insufficient shelter capacity to address demand, etc.
- **Acknowledge Differences in Sub-Regional Strategies to Address Homelessness.** As sub-regional needs differ, so will strategies to address those needs. County-wide initiatives and funding resources should accommodate sub-regional variation in the programmatic response to preventing and ending homelessness. For example, East King County has identified the need for permanent location(s) for winter shelters for homeless, along with day centers to provide access to hygiene and other services to provide a pathway to housing.

- **Coordinate efforts with other regional human services initiatives.** As homeless housing and support services are considered regional services, activities of the CEH Strategic Plan should be coordinated with other regional funding initiatives, e.g. King County Veterans and Human Services Levy, Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) sales tax, etc. as they relate to the development of long-term stable funding for regional human services.
- **Establish Performance Measures and Uphold Accountability.** Performance measures should be designed to track the region's progress in making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time. These measures should be regularly reported to the community and be used to ensure accountability and positive outcomes within the service system.
- **Continue to Support Existing Conduits for Affordable Housing Production.** Confirm the role of A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) as the primary conduit for the Eastside sub-region's response to issues of affordable housing production that relate to homelessness.

Establishment of KCRHA

Since 2015, several groups worked to try to stem the increasing number of homeless individuals and families. A number of reports identified the fractured nature of the services system as a barrier to addressing homelessness in King County.

In response, King County and the City of Seattle entered into a Memorandum of Understanding in 2018 to increase collaboration on homelessness services. The City of Seattle, King County, and All Home retained National Innovation Service (NIS) to analyze the homeless response system and to make recommendations for improvement. Simultaneously, philanthropic leaders in the region retained the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) to develop a Regional Action Framework.

Between October and December 2018, an "Executive Leadership Group" (ELG), which included King County Executive Dow Constantine, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan, then-Bellevue Mayor John Chelminiak, Auburn Mayor Nancy Backus, and then-Renton City Council President Ed Prince, along with representatives from the business and philanthropic communities, met to discuss regional homelessness governance.

In December 2018, NIS identified actions to improve the region's response to the homelessness crisis, including a recommendation to consolidate the region's investments and efforts to address homelessness into a new agency. Mayor Durkan and Executive Constantine expressed support for moving ahead with consolidation. City representatives on the ELG indicated more information about a new agency, governance structure and funding would be necessary before they could support consolidation.

These comments were echoed at the King County Regional Policy Committee (RPC). Bellevue Councilmember John Stokes serves on the RPC. City representatives expressed support for working together as a region to address homelessness and gave feedback about the need for sub-regional planning to address the different needs of communities throughout the County and supported a robust role for elected policy makers in the governance structure.

In September 2019, on September 4, the County Executive and the Seattle Mayor transmitted legislation to their respective councils that included an Interlocal Agreement (ILA) to oversee and administer regional homelessness programs and services, with the option for cities across King County

to join. The County Executive also transmitted legislation that would create a charter for the King County Regional Homelessness Authority, which would replace All Home as the coordinating entity for homelessness response.

That month, the City Council received a briefing on the draft ILA. While Bellevue supports a regional approach to addressing homelessness, Council opposed joining the ILA. Major themes of the City Council's comments include:

- Local control and policy-making authority. Jurisdictions that participate in the ILA are expected to align their homelessness policies with KCRHA's. The City Council supported retaining local control of these policies. The City Council also noted that ILA participants are not able to withdraw in the first five years even if new policy conflicts arise between KCRHA and members.
- Representation on KCRHA governing bodies. The City of Seattle and King County are both represented on KCRHA's Governing Committee, which is described below. Additional ILA recipients were not offered seats. The Bellevue City Council opposed participating in an agency that is not accountable to Bellevue residents.
- Regional collaboration. Recognizing that homelessness needs differ across the County, the City Council supported participating in KCRHA's sub-regional planning process, which is described below.

King County and the City of Seattle executed the ILA in late 2019. Seattle is contributing approximately \$75 million and King County is contributing \$55 million annually. No additional jurisdictions joined the ILA. Any new KCRHA members would join under a new agreement.

KCRHA Governance and Work Program

CEO Dones will provide an overview of homelessness in King County. KCRHA staff estimates that 20,000 people annually need assistance from the homelessness support system. At the time of writing, 6,000 shelter spaces are available in King County. To support and expand homelessness services, KCRHA will renew Seattle and King County's \$135 million homelessness services contracts for next year, then conduct a new bid process to administer funding for the following year.

Governance

KCHRA established two governing bodies, per the ILA:

- The Governing Committee is comprised primarily of elected officials and evaluates and approves all plans for KCRHA. The Sound Cities Association (SCA) has three seats on the Committee. Redmond Mayor Angela Birney, Renton Councilmember Ed Prince, and Auburn Mayor Nancy Backus are the SCA representatives. The Governing Committee's membership is set in the ILA. If additional jurisdictions join the KCRHA, they would not have seats on the Governing Committee.
- The Implementation Board is comprised of subject matter, management, and policy experts who manage KCRHA's staffing and other administrative work. Membership does not include elected officials. Former Bellevue Mayor John Chelminiak is a member of this board, appointed by the King County Council.

In addition, the KCRHA established a COC Advisory Committee, which is responsible for prioritizing projects for HUD funding applications. The COC Advisory Committee is made up of representatives from human services agencies.

Catalytic Portfolio

In addition to the work described above, KCRHA is seeking grant or private funding for its “catalytic portfolio,” three transformative changes to King County’s homelessness response system:

- Providing bridge housing, which is the link between the shelter system and permanent housing. Bridge housing helps to immediately transition vulnerable clients out of homelessness in order to provide a stable experience that can facilitate placement into permanent housing. KCRHA would invest in single family homes for shared living in small supportive communities.
- Implementing a peer navigation workforce to help people access homelessness services. If funded, KCRHA would launch a network of 75 peers with lived experience of homelessness.
- Creating and maintaining a by-name list. A by-name list is a comprehensive list of every person in a community experiencing homelessness, updated in real time. Using information collected and shared with their consent, each person on the list has a file that includes their name, homeless history, health, and housing needs. With this tool, communities are able to track the ever-changing size and composition of their homeless population. They know current and detailed information on every homeless person in each subpopulation.

Regional and Sub-Regional Planning

KCRHA staff is developing a five-year regional homelessness plan as well as sub-regional plans. The Eastside Sub-Regional Plan will include Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond, Issaquah, and Mercer Island. Bellevue staff is participating in the sub-regional planning process by providing data, giving input into data collection and analysis, and facilitating input from people with lived experience of homelessness. To understand sub-regional homelessness needs, KCRHA staff is conducting site visits and will visit Bellevue in late October. KCRHA intends to finalize the sub-regional plans in March.

As part of the planning process, KCRHA is researching safe vehicle parking sites. Vehicle residents are an underserved sub-population of the unhoused community in King County. As part of KCRHA’s mission to “do things differently”, the KCRHA team conducted a “Vehicle Resident Engagement Week ” and visited with vehicle residents around the region both in safe parking programs and with outreach teams. This engagement is helping inform strategies towards addressing vehicle residency.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Specific policy impacts on cities as a result of the homeless system realignment are unknown at this time. Staff will keep Council apprised of KCRHA’s progress and return for direction as appropriate.

City of Bellevue Services and Eastside Collaboration

Eastside cities are providing emergency services and seeking long-term, sustainable solutions to address homelessness. To meet the needs of this population, Bellevue has increased its investments and staffing as well as making improvements to related services to ensure a comprehensive response.

The Eastside cities of Bellevue, Kirkland and Redmond have agreed to coordinate to provide shelters for youth, women and families, and men. Like other Eastside cities, Bellevue funds direct-service

organizations which provide support to individuals experiencing homelessness through human services grants. In 2020, Bellevue's human service contracts with the youth shelter, women's shelter, family shelter, and men's shelter totaled \$353,518 from the General Fund and \$489,623 in Community Development Block Grant and CARES Act funds.

Redmond has opened a youth shelter, and in 2020, Kirkland opened a permanent shelter for women and families. Bellevue leases space at Lincoln Center below market rate, for a 24-hour, 7-days a week men's shelter and day center as a temporary "bridge" location, while a permanent facility is sited and built. In January 2021, Congregations for the Homeless applied for a conditional use permit to build a permanent men's shelter in Eastgate. The King County Council approved surplus property at 13620 SE Eastgate Way for sale in July.

CFH is partnering with Inland Group, Horizon Housing Alliance and Plymouth Housing to develop the nine-acre parcel into an Eastgate Housing campus, featuring a day center and workforce housing as well as a shelter. City Council approved \$3.6 million in supplemental funding for the development of the permanent shelter in July.

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

N/A

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A