Responding Effectively as a Region to Unsheltered Homelessness in the Twin Cities Metro Area

Progress Report – May 24, 2019

In response to the Design Team's recommendations, public sector leaders from the Twin Cities metro area offered specific commitments that their agencies could make to advance those recommendations. While these efforts remain dynamic, this document summarizes the overall impact of these commitments to date.

Global observations/important points of note include:

- Public sector agencies have been working hard to identify viable ways to increase capacity across the region, even if some of these efforts at the moment are in an early stage of development.
- These partners have identified a willingness and specific opportunities to advance the recommendations with new resources (mainly funding, but in some cases also additional staff capacity), but may not be able to seize these opportunities given current resources.
- There are divergent levels of public will, attention, and leadership support on this issue across the region, owing in part to the relative visibility of unsheltered homelessness in each community.
- For most public systems, new investments can only occur through a defined process that occurs on a set schedule, which can impede the ability for public systems to be quick or nimble.
- There may be opportunities to partner with private sector funders to assist with speed or nimbleness and the Design Team is presenting the recommendations to a group of private sector leaders on May 28.
- In order to accelerate progress this summer, the Met Council/Metro Transit and others have been working with Cathy and some design team partners to identify opportunities for urgent action to increase outreach, shelter and housing for people this summer. Some of those ideas are embedded in this document in the progress section comments.

The following table summarizes the activities (not the commitments for potential action) that have occurred on each of the Design Team's high-priority recommendations, including a rough rating on a 0 – 10 scale of how much progress this activity represents from no activity (0) to fully satisfying the recommendation (10). While this is rough, we hope it gives us a template to consider for monitoring progress as we go forward.

Foundational components

Recommendation	Progress	Progress rating
Commit to the goal of ending unsheltered homelessness as quickly as possible, and set an assertive timetable for doing so.	The Public Sector Leadership Team has been consistently engaged and has expressed strong commitment. We have not landed on an agreed upon timetable.	2

Task a small group representing the public sector to determine a viable path for managing efforts to end unsheltered homelessness regionally on an ongoing basis.	Several meetings of working group and additional county discussions underway, focused on developing a viable approach for cost-sharing among public sector entities.	5
Develop and use clear, shared messages that promote public awareness of unsheltered homelessness and its solutions in ways that include a nuanced social, historical, and racial narrative.	No known progress.	0

System Components

Sufficient and coordinated outreach

Recommendation	Progress	Progress rating
Convene funders and providers of outreach to determine how services can be better coordinated, to identify options for making flexible funding available to outreach teams, to develop common understanding of the benefits of improved coordination, to analyze where outreach is needed, and to determine / assign responsibility for outreach coordination.	Separate discussions underway in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.

While there has not been one large convening, there are conversations underway about how to provide additional outreach capacity and coordination yet for this summer (potential "outreach hub"). | 3 |
Create consistent availability of mobile assessments for coordinated entry throughout the region.	No known progress.	0
Develop an approach for providing expedited (e.g., presumptive eligibility for) access to county-administered benefits (GA, SSI, EA, etc.).	No known progress.	0
Develop a funding model for and begin to implement 24/7 outreach with immediate access to flexible funds and other resources across the region.	Discussions in progress to create additional outreach capacity in several communities. No known progress on 24/7 funding model.	3

Sufficient shelter and crisis response with few or no barriers

Recommendation	Progress	Progress rating
Convene shelter funders and providers to establish shared values and standards of care across all shelter operations, anticipating growth.	Preliminary discussions in several counties and at the state level about models of shelter needed to respond to need. Development of recommendations from They Help Each Other project.	5

Recommendation	Progress	Progress rating
Commit to and develop cost estimates, budgets, and plans for creating a net increase of 300 – 600 person capacity in housing-focused crisis, navigation, medical respite, and housing stabilization beds in small, welcoming and inclusive settings across the region specifically focused on engaging unsheltered people, improving geographic distribution of and financial responsibility for shelter, and providing options for culturally-specific and culturally-responsive shelter. Implementation of this recommendation should attend to the anticipated loss of "winter" shelter beds, which would result in reduced capacity and a larger required expansion of capacity.	Identification of potential options for additional shelter capacity, largely contingent on identifying ongoing sources of operating funds and, in Ramsey County, they would like to transition to year-round shelter but need a new location. Discussions are underway about expanded use of Housing Support and the Legislature just approved a one-time new increase in the Emergency Services Program funding for shelter of $3 million. Conversations underway to utilize these resources as quickly as possible. For this summer there are also discussions and budgeting underway to add some additional shelter capacity (Higher Ground is one possibility) and increase flow out of existing shelters to open additional beds.	4
Establish incentives for higher credentials, training, experience, wages and lower caseloads in competitive processes to award shelter funding, to prepare for shelter expansion, mitigate staff turnover, facilitate recruitment, and support more qualified shelter staff.	No known progress.	0
Expand bed capacity by the amount committed.		0

Direct access to permanent, affordable housing

Recommendation	Progress	Progress rating
Deepen engagement and collaboration with and create incentives for property owners to provide housing options for those coming out of homelessness.	Identification of resources to expand landlord risk mitigation funds.	3
Identify start-up funding for providers needed to leverage the DHS Housing Supports program to create additional supportive housing capacity.	Identification of funding to create additional Housing Support funded case management positions.	7

Recommendation	Progress	Progress rating
Set aside or prioritize a portion of rental assistance allocated by PHAs to unsheltered populations.	St. Paul PHA implementation of Housing Choice Voucher preference for homeless households.	5
Identify and implement options to secure access to more units including improving how vacancies are targeted, lowering barriers created by tenant selection and screening processes, and conveying clearer expectations about lowering barriers to access to housing through contract renewals, new funding opportunities, and program compliance expectations.	Conversations underway with funders of PSH to ensure lower barriers. New significant funding pool being developed to incent the purchasing of existing properties to stand up more low-barrier, permanent supportive housing quickly.	4

Consistent practices and protocols

Recommendation	Progress	Progress rating
Immediately, commit to and work expeditiously toward decriminalizing homelessness in the region, meaning that ordinances that criminalize requirements of living in public spaces (e.g., sleeping) would be repealed and no longer enforced.	Conversations may be underway in both Minneapolis and St. Paul, but we do not know the status.	0
Through a collaborative partnership between law enforcement agencies and social service providers, expand the skill sets and capacities of both entities so they are able to utilize a cohesive and collaborative approach when serving those experiencing unsheltered homelessness…	Law enforcement entities are partnering with others in both Minneapolis and St. Paul, but we do not know the status of this exact recommendation.	0
Develop an approach for protecting people's personal property during encampment clean-up.	St. Paul announced at an Outside/In meeting that they were putting procedures in place to ensure that people would not lose their property whenever possible.	3
Get agreement of authorities responsible for public property (e.g., MnDOT, cities, park services) to use a best-practices template and coordinated approach for responding to encampments.	County-specific efforts in Hennepin and Ramsey counties to agree on an assessment approach for evaluating and responding to encampments.	3
Create court systems that work with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness throughout the region.	No known progress.	0