

ACTION PLAN

Building a Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness



Developed by the Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness Ad Hoc Committee

April 2021

Ad Hoc Committee

This Ad Hoc Committee was created by the Pierce County Council per [County Council Resolution 2021-30](#). The committee included the following individuals, identified by their organizations as specified in the council resolution:

- Heather Moss, Director, Pierce County Human Services
- John Barbee, Community Services Manager, Pierce County Human Services
- Jeff Rodgers, Homeless Programs Supervisor, Pierce County Human Services
- James Pogue, Continuum of Care Committee representative
- Dr. Lamont Green, Continuum of Care Committee representative
- Gerrit Nyland, Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness representative
- Courtney Chandler, Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness representative
- Klarissa Monteros, Senior Policy Analyst, City of Tacoma
- Tiffany Speir, Long Range Strategic Planning Manager, City of Lakewood
- Kirstin Hoffman, Emergency Manager, City of Puyallup

This plan was created by Pierce County Council Resolution 2021-30. The intent of the resolution is three-fold:

1. Establish an Ad Hoc Committee to write an Action Plan (due to the Council by April 24, 2021).
2. Direct Pierce County Human Services to use the Action Plan as a guide for writing a Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness (due to the Council by September 24, 2021).
3. Develop and implement an aligned plan to provide adequate shelter for all unhoused individuals (target completion date of November 1, 2021).

The Ad Hoc Committee met four times in the month of April 2021 to develop this action plan.

History of Past/Current Plans and Other Regional Efforts to End Homelessness

Since 1996 the Tacoma/Lakewood/Pierce County Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) has received federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to implement new housing programs for homeless. In 2002, the first ever comprehensive plan to address homelessness was developed. This was the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. The goal was to end homelessness by 2013. The plan was robust and identified the resources needed to be successful. Organizations were prepared to expand and develop new housing and supportive services. Insufficient resources were available to increase housing and services needed to succeed. During this time the CoC increased the amount of federal funding and housing services but not to the level needed to end homelessness.

In 2012, a new plan was developed, the Plan to End Homelessness. This plan had a goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2015, reducing all homelessness by 50% by 2016, and reducing family homelessness by 50% by 2021. The State of Washington Department of Commerce increased funding, but the increased resources were still not sufficient to support the increasing need.

In 2017, a plan was developed to realign the CoC Committee and focus on 8 Key Results to address homelessness. By this time resources had significantly increased and access to housing and services had been realigned to ensure that households are prioritized for housing and services based on vulnerabilities and housing barriers. The CoC Committee was focused on ensuring that the implementation of this new plan was the top priority.

In 2018, the State Legislature amended the Homeless Housing and Assistance Act requiring new state and local homeless housing strategic plan requirements. The guidance issued by the Department of Commerce required local jurisdictions to develop a 5-Year Plan to address the identified objectives. Pierce County contracted with a consultant to assist the CoC Committee (local homeless housing task force) with the development of a new plan. The CoC Committee 5-Year Plan to Address Homelessness identifies five strategic priorities that includes the State required objectives. The State guidance also required that the plan be adopted by County Council. In May 2020 the County Council adopted a strategic plan that included only the five State objectives.

Other targeted plans, focusing on populations, have been developed over the years. A Youth Plan was developed in 2014 with a focus on preventing and ending youth homelessness. The plan addressed housing and services as well as education and employment initiatives. The plan targeted homeless youth, ages 12-24. In 2015 the Cognitive Impairments and/or Developmental Disabilities Plan was developed. This plan focused on increased housing and access to existing housing as well as improved health and stability. In 2019 the County commissioned an Ending Veteran Homelessness Task Force that worked on policy updates, resource accessibility for veterans and continuous improvements.

Overarching Goals, Definitions and Guiding Principles

The Ad Hoc Committee held four meetings during the month of April to develop this Action Plan, which will guide development of a Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness in Pierce County. This section includes guidance on the Plan's overarching goals, suggestions for key word definitions, and proposed principles to lead the planning efforts.

Goals

The Ad Hoc Committee identified the following goals for the Comprehensive Plan to achieve:

1. Prioritize capital and operating funds so that as additional resources are acquired the next project for that funding is clear.
2. Identify what additional resources our community needs and where to advocate and lobby for them.
3. Make sure our goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely (SMART).
4. Focus on long-term, high-level policy goals that regional elected officials and staff can support, and that local plans can feed into and/or support.
5. Focus not just on what has historically been possible, but develop a plan that meets actual need; be innovative, yet practical.
6. Use the Built for Zero methodology to achieve "functional zero:" acceptable shelter and an appropriate permanent housing intervention immediately available.
7. Develop more than just a plan; focus on specific steps for action and implementation.

Definitions

In its discussions regarding definitions, the Ad Hoc Committee focused on the following:

- Define a process for how we come to shared key definitions that all entities and jurisdictions can adopt and use.
- Clarify how to balance ideal versus realistic plan (what do we have actual capacity to do, and how far should we stretch?).
- Define these terms/phrases:
 - What does "warm/safe" shelter include (and not include)?
 - How does individual autonomy and choice factor in?
 - How does Targeted Universalism define our approach?
 - What is the common definition of being "homeless" we should collectively use?

County staff proposed to the Ad Hoc committee the “comprehensive” part of the plan be defined to include responses/services along the following continuum:

- Prevention/Diversion (including Education)
- Crisis Response
- Shelter
- Supportive Housing
- Affordable Housing
- Homeownership

Principles

The Ad Hoc Committee identified these principles to guide development of the Comprehensive Plan:

1. Focus on diversity, racial equity, and inclusion.
2. Build plans based on the concept of “targeted universalism” and the 5 steps framework; develop a common goal to address all homeless, with programs designed to meet the unique needs for specific populations (eg., Veterans, families, youth, DV, etc.).
3. Include experts who’ve lived unsheltered and other marginalized populations in the planning/design process.
4. Start with a value statement about overall intent of plan (such as “Ensure a place where all people belong”).
5. Shelter plan should ensure immediate access to shelter for all populations, and should include a wide variety of shelter types so that shelter is accessible to all.
6. Create a regional approach that locates shelters and programs near prior permanent residences and support structures; downtown Tacoma cannot continue to be the only answer.
7. Utilize best practices, published research, and local research and analysis such as past reports and surveys.
8. Ensure the racial composition of the Steering Committee reflects the diversity of the population served.

Scope

The Ad Hoc Committee discussed the ideal scope of the Comprehensive Plan and determined the following considerations be made:

- Determine how broad we want the comprehensive plan to be; it should include prevention, for example.
- Encourage collaboration across private, for-profit, non-profit, and governmental systems and institutions.
- Recognize we have a unique chance here – don't make this too narrow (Council requested "comprehensive" plan!).
- Systems do not work in isolation – we need to recognize and plan for how so many systems are interconnected.
- Be comprehensive – many plans target specific jurisdictions, populations, and specific funding sources; they should all feed into this larger comprehensive plan.
- Consider primary focus on building the homeless system, with connections to other systems that intersect with the homeless system.
- To correctly size the homeless system, use data from the Coordinated Entry System, the Homeless Management Information System, the Point in Time County, and other information systems to research and document the flow into homelessness, the backlog of current people experiencing homelessness, and the outflow to permanent housing.
- Utilize all possible exit strategies and interventions to end homelessness and create connections to other systems as needed.
- Consider cash assistance as a viable response/solution.
- Understand and improve connections between shelters and coordinated entry.

Groups to Include

Representatives from the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness offer the following list of individuals, groups, and stakeholders to be included in the Comprehensive Plan development process:

- Experts who have lived homeless, including youth, adults, families, veterans, victims of sex trafficking, substance use disorders, formerly incarcerated individuals, and mental health
NOTE: Use trauma-informed practices – be careful to not re-traumatize, ensure safety
- Legal support for persons experiencing homelessness
- Fair Housing
- Faith Community (including mental health chaplains)
- Public Health
- City and County Council members
- Local jurisdiction staff
- Puyallup Tribe
- Domestic violence and sexual assault
- Private and small housing providers
- Immigrant communities and non-English speakers in the homeless system
- Disability community
- Business community/private sector
- Builders, developers, and real estate professionals
- single room occupancy (SRO) providers
- Landlords – both large and small - and property management
- Youth
- LGBTQ+ advocates and organizations
- BIPOC
- **Hospitals and Medical professionals**
- Educational professionals
- Community groups
- Behavioral health system (both substance abuse and mental health treatment)
- Providers to assist with identification recovery
- Providers who offer soft skill development programs
- Home ownership assistance
- Shelter providers
- employment and workforce training services
- Tacoma Housing Authority and the Pierce County Housing Authority

Other members of the Ad Hoc Committee offered these additional suggestions of groups to include in the plan development process:

- Cities and towns associations

- School districts and higher education
- Emergency/first responders
- Philanthropy partners
- Justice system
- Foster care system
- City and County Housing Authorities
- State agencies (DSHS, DCYF, Commerce, etc.)
- Veterans Administration and other Veteran service providers
- Continuum of Care Committee
- Land Trusts/Banks
- Funders
- Chambers of Commerce
- Impacted businesses

Public Engagement Goals and Process

The Ad Hoc Committee had a brief conversation about public engagement goals and processes at their third meeting, and members offered the following input:

- Be sure to include as much public engagement as possible within the time constraints; public dialogue and input should encompass the bulk of time in the comprehensive planning process.
- Each of the two main working groups should identify the overarching goal (i.e.. end street homelessness in Pierce County by Nov. 1st and end homelessness in Pierce County) then take those goals out to public for input on how to achieve them for various targeted sub-populations (adopt a targeted universalism approach).
- Go to where the public is, such as requesting attendance and space at already-established meetings, community events, farmer's markets and similar events.
- Consider focus groups, street surveys.
- Go to experts with lived experience – the plan should be developed by those who use, benefit from, and interact with the system. Outreach needs to be trauma informed and connect with a wide variety of people experiencing homelessness, not just those engaging with shelters and outreach teams.
- Hire/assign someone on the team to be specifically focused on communications and engagement.
- Be sure to include system mapping and modeling to assess shortcomings and gaps; where are the problems/bottlenecks?
- Develop a layer of accountability for the comprehensive planning team (both the steering committee and the work groups).
- Build on what works well in our region; elevate and build on best practices.
- Ensure diversity is represented on the various teams/committees involved in this effort.
- Consider how to do effective political outreach: include efforts to connect with the Growth Management Committee, Pierce County Cities and Towns, the Puget Sound Regional Council, and other conveners of elected officials and local leaders.

When discussing who should lead this work and oversee the larger comprehensive planning process, the Ad Hoc Committee recommends a steering committee. Many of the members of the Committee expressed interest in being part of the steering committee, and offered the following additional suggestions:

- Consider a workable size for the steering committee – large enough to be representative, but small enough to encourage meaningful engagement and input.
- Develop a feedback loop for the larger population of interested parties so they can stay apprised with what's happening and to amplify the work.

- Broaden the steering committee to include additional representation from the provider community, and from constituents representing East Pierce and unincorporated Pierce County.
- Be clear about who/what the steering committee members represent – themselves and/or their organizations?
- Include the Continuum of Care Committee (COC) and the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness in a meaningful way.
- Include and compensate experts with lived experience of being homeless.

Based on conversation with the Ad Hoc Committee, Pierce County Human Services proposes to develop a core staff team that will do the bulk of the work outlined by this action plan:

- Facilitator to manage the steering committee meetings; this individual can also help strike the right balance between meaningful community engagement and the short timeline for these projects
- Project manager to oversee work in both the comprehensive plan and the shelter plan
- Communications expertise
- Public engagement support
- Homeless program management experience

Additional information on these resources is in the final sections of this plan.

Meeting Council's Commitment to Providing Adequate Shelter to All by November 2021

The Ad Hoc Committee recommends separating this specific assignment from the larger comprehensive plan to meet the more ambitious deadline of developing and implementing a plan to provide adequate shelter by November 1, 2021. The committee suggests a work group focus solely on this effort, but under the general oversight of the steering committee convened for the comprehensive planning process.

The Ad Hoc Committee is also generally supportive of the Pierce County Human Services (PCHS) staff proposal to organize this work around an interactive program and cost model reviewed in the committee's third meeting. The model contemplates a multi-step process for building a plan to provide adequate shelter before the end of 2021:

1. Determine the approximate number of people who are unsheltered in Pierce County (PCHS current estimate is approximately 1,350 individuals).
2. Identify interventions to divert or exit clients from the streets or shelter to permanent housing.
 - a. Diversion
 - b. Rapid Rehousing (*NOTE: the Ad Hoc Committee suggests this may not be appropriate to keep in the shelter model*)
 - c. Critical Time Intervention
3. Include all types of shelters and other interventions we should consider developing or increasing in order to adequately shelter all:
 - a. Expanded capacity at existing or new congregate shelters, informed by CDC guidance
 - b. New non-congregate shelters (hotel, pallet shelters, tiny homes, etc.)
 - c. Sanctioned encampments
 - d. Safe parking areas
 - e. Transitional housing
 - f. In-patient behavioral health treatment
 - g. Medical respite
 - h. Others (*NOTE: Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) was suggested, but then dismissed because it is not considered emergency shelter*)
4. Identify other expanded services for people who are sheltered and may need additional immediate services beyond a place to sleep, such as out-patient behavioral health treatment, transportation to/from work, and storage for belongings.
5. Determine approximate volume of our unsheltered homeless population who will access each type of intervention listed above and determine targeted per unit costs for each.
6. Build a proposed budget based on analysis, and present to County and municipal elected officials for funding and site locations.

7. Once funding is identified and approved, work with providers on plans to expand services and create the new shelter options listed in the plan.

The Ad Hoc Committee offered the following additional suggestions for this effort during its final meeting:

- It will be important to start with a clear definition of what emergency shelter is, and what it includes, in order to clarify what is in or out of the model suggested above.
- Be clear on how this plan intersects with the larger comprehensive plan to eliminate risk of gaps and how they complement one another.
- Create a shelter plan that accomplishes more than merely setting up expanded shelter for inclement weather (one member suggested becoming a “right to dignified shelter” county).
- It is important to maintain focus on substantial implementation by November 1; it is good to maintain urgency.

PCHS Staff NOTE on legal intervention: “Legal intervention” is one option PCHS staff included in the original model proposed as a place some homeless individuals may go; that is, despite being offered multiple choices for shelter, some individuals may decline all services. At that point, the community needs to determine a response: do we allow individuals to continue to live unsheltered, if that is their wish, or do we create a “zero tolerance” policy within the community and enforce loitering laws, detaining them either through law enforcement or civil commitment interventions? County staff proposed including this as one option in the model, and the Ad Hoc Committee had varied responses: some members supported the idea, while others thought this may be assumed, but should NOT be part of any model or planning (or budgeting) efforts. Still others thought it should not even be an optional response. There was considerable agreement that non-law enforcement individuals could be successful in doing this work.

See the timeline section below for details on how the committee proposes this work occur over the next six months.

Project Timelines

As indicated in the Council Resolution driving this effort, there is a six-month window to achieve a comprehensive plan from start to finish once the Action plan is submitted and approved. It is anticipated this will occur on May 4, 2021, therefore establishing the due date for the comprehensive plan on or around November 4, 2021. The Ad Hoc Committee recognizes the ambitious nature of this deadline but indicated that “this aggressive timeline spurs action!”

This comprehensive plan will inform County budgeting priorities in the upcoming 2022-23 biennial budget, as well as spending priorities for funds received from the American Rescue Plan, among other possible revenue sources.

After initial discussion of general timeline requirements, a member of the committee offered the following timeline for consideration:

Proposed Timeline – Comprehensive Plan

- May 3 - core team of County staff and consultants formed
- May 10 - steering committee begins meeting every two weeks; begins by setting universal goals
- May 31 – core team develops plan outline based on developed universal goals
- June – August - outreach on universal goals and potential targeted strategies to stakeholders, providers, and advocates for input
- August 30 - core team publishes final draft plan
- September – October – plan shared with general public for final feedback
- September - October – Develop funding plan, including requests of local, state and federal government
- October - final steering committee meetings
- November 4 – core team delivers report to County Council

The bulk of the time dedicated to this effort must focus on collecting input and feedback. It is understood that elected officials in partner jurisdictions will need time to review and formally adopt (vote on) both this action plan and the comprehensive plan.

Council staff also provided two additional suggestions regarding timing of the Comprehensive Plan:

1. Build in scheduled **maintenance** for the comprehensive plan to allow for a natural and reasonable extension of the planning process; one component of the plan should be regularly revisiting strategies and recalibrating.
2. Include a first phase of the planning process to **use data to clearly define the issue** (both for the comprehensive plan and the street homelessness plan).

As described earlier in this Action Plan, the Ad Hoc Committee does recommend this effort be clearly divided into two separate efforts: the Comprehensive Plan, due by November 4, and the Street Homelessness Plan, due and implemented by November 1. Accordingly, the committee

generally agreed on the following timeline for consideration for implementing all types of additional shelter, safe parking and safe encampment options:

Timeline – Shelter Plan

- May 3 – homeless work group convened; clarify scope and goals
- May 17 - shelter provider focus groups (include providers, guests/clients, and neighbors)
- June 14 – core team presents draft plan to steering committee
- June – July – community input
- July 12 – core team finalizes shelter plan, including spending request and timeline
- July – August – identify funding, including requests of local governments
- Aug – October -- implementation
- Nov 1 – all contracts in place for expanded shelter beds

Resources Needed

Data

In order to inform the Comprehensive Planning process, the Ad Hoc Committee briefly reviewed homeless data available from the County from both the annual Point in Time Count (PIT) and the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The Committee made the following observations:

Regarding the Point in Time Counts for 2020 and 2021

- PIT is generally known to be an undercount.
- 2021 Point in Time Count did NOT include a count of unsheltered population due to COVID-caused constraints on recruiting volunteers and ensuring public safety.
- According to PCHS staff, HUD requires an interpolation methodology to estimate race and ethnicity data across whole distribution based on those who answered PIT survey (there are no “NA” or “unknown”).

Regarding HMIS

- According to PCHS staff, there are large differences in data quality across providers, leading to overall data quality inconsistencies.
- The Committee specifically encourages those involved in the comprehensive planning process to “look at HMIS data with a critical eye,” given variability in data quality.
- As the data collection tool for Street Outreach, it’s important to note that not every service provider has access to or uses HMIS; we need to broaden use of HMIS across system or recognize there are other access points to homeless services.

The Ad Hoc Committee suggested the Comprehensive Plan include the following data considerations:

- Focus on racial/ethnic demographics, geographic distribution, gender identity, program success in housing permanency, etc.
- Use data to highlight various pathways and their inflow/outflow rates.
- Add qualitative data to highlight the realities of those experiencing in homelessness that are not found/explained in quantitative data.
- Consider indicators (why people become homeless) to understand need and to focus on prevention efforts.
- Existing system mapping and modeling.

- Include additional data sources with homeless data, such as McKinney-Vento information tracked by school districts, as well as prison, jail, health care and other data systems that interact with people experiencing homelessness.

Funding, Coordination, Meeting Support, Staffing

The Ad Hoc Committee emphasized the need to staff and fund this work adequately to ensure success. PCHS staff proposed the following composition of a core team to lead the work described in this action plan:

- Facilitator (contract hire)
- Project Manager (contract or temporary hire; may be same as facilitator)
- Data Analyst (limited duration staff)
- Marketing/Communication support (use current staff; backfill as needed)
- Community Engagement support (contract hire; may be done by facilitator)
- Policy expertise (use current staff; backfill as needed)
- Administrative support (use current staff; backfill as needed)

The Ad Hoc Committee was generally supportive of this approach, noting the importance of building a core team that is culturally diverse and representative of the homeless population served.

They also underscored the importance of community engagement, further suggesting a formal campaign.

The facilitator chosen should have strong communication skills and some background in homeless services.

Administrative support should include building and maintaining a strong online presence for this work.

Recommendations to Pierce County Council

1. Accept Action Plan, authorize continued work and expansion of Ad Hoc Committee.
2. Identify and approve funds for identified resources:
 - a. Approve 3 limited duration FTEs
 - i. Project Manager
 - ii. Data Analyst
 - iii. Backfill to county staff
 - b. Approve budget (\$250K):

i. FTEs (3)	\$100K
ii. Facilitator/Comm Engagement contract	\$100K
iii. Marketing/meetings	\$ 50K
3. Clarify budget parameters for shelter plan, including budget review and funding approval.

Resources

[Council Resolution R2021-30s](#)

[Pierce County Five-Year Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness, Pierce County Human Services](#)

[Five-Year Plan to Address Homelessness, Pierce County's Continuum of Care Committee](#)

[Building Changes Reports on Homelessness](#)

[Point in Time Count Data](#)

[Ending Veterans Homelessness Task Force Initial Recommendations, Pierce County Human Services](#)