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Title: Update to the Colorado Springs City Council on Efforts to Reduce Homelessness in Our Community

Presenter:
Steve Posey, Chief Housing & Community Vitality Officer

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Update to the Colorado Springs City Council on Efforts to Reduce Homelessness in Our Community

Presenter:

Steve Posey, Chief Housing & Community Vitality Officer

Summary:

The presentation highlights the collaborative approach that city personnel and external stakeholders are taking to reduce homelessness by connecting individuals and families to shelter, services, and housing, while responding to ongoing community and business concerns related to illegal camping and environmental impacts. Key data points are included indicating an overall reduction in the number of homeless individuals in our community based on 5 years of point-in-time counts, an overall increase in available shelter beds, an increase in transitional, and permanent supportive housing units, and success in meeting the city's 2022 House America goals.

Background:

The Pikes Peak Region is the only urban area in Colorado that has seen a reduction in the number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness since 2019. According to a report issued by the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless in 2023, the state as a whole saw a 39% increase in homelessness from 2022-2023, while the Pikes Peak Region saw an 8% reduction. Since 2019, homelessness in the Pikes Peak Region has declined by 17%.

Multiple City of Colorado Springs Departments, along with the partner agencies that make up the Pikes Peak Continuum of Care (PPCoC), are largely responsible for the community's success. By combining ready access to a nationally recognized shelter system with a robust network of tireless service providers under the umbrella of the PPCoC, the city has become the model that other communities across the state increasingly turn to for insight and guidance.

Over the last five years, the city's 2019 Homelessness Initiative has been the framework guiding the city's efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness. The 2019 Initiative included 5 Goals:

- 1) Inform the Public on Homelessness Issues
- 2) Increase Access to Shelter and Services
- 3) Decrease Barriers for People Ready to Exit Homelessness
- 4) Increase Access to Housing
- 5) Clean up Illegal Camps and Protect the Environment

As a result of focused, ongoing collaboration between city departments and community partners, the goals have largely been met. Colorado Springs residents have access to a variety of up-to-date reporting on issues related to homelessness; vulnerable individuals and families have access to safe, dignified shelters offering critical services and a supportive community; the Municipal Court has become a setting for decreasing barriers to exiting homelessness; 198 permanent supportive housing units have either been completed or are under construction with 42 additional units in pre-development; and the Homeless Outreach Teams in the Police and Fire Departments, working in tandem with Neighborhood Services, are able to efficiently post and cleanup illegal campsites, enabling the city to enforce ordinances that benefit all residents by protecting the outdoor spaces that are integral to the exceptional quality of life in the region.

Shortly after taking office in 2023, Mayor Yemi Mobolade asked the question: Is there room for improvement? Mayor Yemi directed the Housing & Community Vitality Department to lead a 'refresh' of the city's homeless initiatives with the goal of identifying ways that the city can strengthen its collaboration with community partners to improve outreach efforts, expand access to mental and behavioral health services, recognize and support needed public facilities, and reduce the combined toll on homeless individuals and families and the environment resulting from illegal camping.

In January and early February, 2024, Housing & Community Vitality convened an inter-departmental team made up of representatives from Police, Fire, City Attorney's Office, Transit, Public Works, Parks, Municipal Court, Planning, Neighborhood Services, and IT. The team conducted the 1st SWOT analysis of the city's efforts to date and is preparing a set of recommendations to Mayor Yemi that will inform future policy and reaffirm the city's commitment to ongoing success with preventing and reducing homelessness in Colorado Springs.

Previous Council Action:

City Council has approved ongoing annual funding for the city's low-barrier shelters, as well as approving the Housing & Community Vitality Department's Annual Action Plan guiding the use of grant funding from the federal Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD).

Financial Implications:

The City of Colorado Springs is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) entitlement grantee that receives allocations of federal block grant funds under the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) and Emergency Solutions Grant Program (ESG). The purpose of the funds is to benefit low- and moderate- income residents of Colorado Springs, prevent slum and blight, encourage the development, improvement, and preservation of affordable housing, prevent homelessness, and meet other urgent community needs.

In 2023, the Housing & Community Vitality Department allocated approximately \$2.7M HUD funds toward preventing and reducing homelessness. Funded efforts include development of The Commons, the city's 1st permanent supportive housing serving families, the Launchpad, the city's 1st permanent supportive housing serving at-risk youth, The Salvation Army, shelter and programming for homeless families, The Place, shelter and programming for homeless youth, and Colorado Legal Services, funding for eviction prevention.

The Pikes Peak Continuum of Care (PPCoC) received approximately \$2.5M during the same time period and has recently received a \$2.8M allocation from HUD for program year 2024. All CoC funds are allocated toward preventing and reducing homelessness.

City Council Appointed Board/Commission/Committee Recommendation:
N/A

Stakeholder Process:
Housing & Community Vitality staff continue meeting regularly with internal and external stakeholders to foster collaboration and improve the community's efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness. The internal team that is preparing recommendations to the mayor for a refresh of the city's homeless initiatives intends to meet 2-3 times annually to check in on progress toward meeting the administration's goals and preparing a report out to the community at large.

As the refresh is developed and nears implementation, external partners such as the PPCoC, the Colorado Springs Housing Authority, philanthropic and faith organizations, and other government partners will be engaged for their responses and insights, helping to ensure that the city and its partners share common goals and priorities for the use of available resources.

Housing & Community Vitality also plans to solicit feedback from the Community Development Advisory Committee, a Mayoral committee established to advise the administration on effective use of HUD funds to address high priority community needs.

Alternatives:
N/A

Proposed Motion:
N/A

N/A