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Presenter:
Andy Phelps, Homelessness Prevention and Response Coordinator, Planning and Community Development

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Colorado Springs Homelessness Initiative Annual Report

Presenter:

Andy Phelps, Homelessness Prevention and Response Coordinator, Planning and Community Development

Summary:

In, 2019, the City sought community input in how to best respond to issues surrounding homelessness in our community. The City used that community input to develop the 2019 Colorado Springs Homelessness Initiative. This Initiative is a set of 5 short term and attainable goals for our community in order to improve issues surrounding homelessness in our community. The City has met all 5 of the goals.

Background:

As the population continues to grow in Colorado Springs, the number of people experiencing homelessness has also increased. In January 2019, the Pikes Peak Continuum of Care recruited volunteers to facilitate the Point-in-Time count. The 2019 Point-in-Time count showed that there were at least 1,562 people experiencing homelessness in El Paso County on the night of January 28th, 2018. This number includes people in shelters, transitional housing, and those unsheltered. The total unsheltered count was 444, a 13% decrease from 2018. The Point-in-Time count, although considered a conservative estimate, is the best objective data we have available to help us understand long term trends of homelessness in our community.

Homelessness related issues are among the most frequent complaints that the City receives. Our

community is concerned about the health and safety of those surviving outside as well as the substantial impact illegal camping has on the environment. Although not a service provider, the City of Colorado Springs remains committed to championing strategies that prevent and reduce homelessness in our community by assessing gaps across landscapes, planning, building awareness, convening stakeholder groups, identifying public-private partnerships, and leveraging resources. It is clear that the costs of homelessness are significant in human suffering, actual dollars, and public perceptions about the safety and vitality of the Pikes Peak region.

Even though progress has been made on the issue of homelessness in our community, there is still work to be done. The 2019 Colorado Springs Homelessness Initiative is a renewed commitment by the City of Colorado Springs to address homelessness related issues. This initiative does not set out to end homelessness, but to improve homelessness related issues in our community.

Goal #1: Educate the Public on Homelessness Issues

Hand Outs Don't Help Signage

The City's text-to-give program sought to inform the public about the most effective ways to assist those in need by collecting funds that will now support the Work Engagement Program at the Springs Rescue Mission. The Work Engagement program incentivizes guests at the Rescue Mission to engage in regular work in exchange for job coaching, benefits at the Mission, the development of a positive work history and referrals to full-time work.

www.helpcos.org

The City's comprehensive website provides a clearinghouse of information where the public can learn about available resources for those experiencing homelessness and how they can get involved.

Goal #2: Increase Access to Shelter & Services

Over 250 low barrier shelter beds added in our community

Originally funded via a City Council special appropriation ordinance, this \$500,000 of funding continues in the 2020 City Budget, helping to ensure an adequate number of low barrier shelter beds at the Springs Rescue Mission and Salvation Army. This helps to ensure that no one is forced to sleep outside and also enables law enforcement to enforce the city's no camping ordinances.

Options Increased for families experiencing homelessness

The Homeless Family Solutions Collaborative was formed to address this issue. This collaborative between Catholic Charities, Family Promise and Partners in Housing is actively working on a range of goals to improve service delivery for local families experiencing homelessness.

Street Outreach Increased

The City collaborated with community partners to launch a homeless outreach pilot project. This pilot, led by the Colorado Springs Fire Department CARES Team, targets police and fire department "super utilizers" in the Downtown area with the goal of connecting people experiencing homelessness

to needed services, shelter, and housing. An anticipated result of this targeted outreach is a decrease in police and fire department utilization and an increase in shelter utilization and housing placement.

Goal #3: Decrease Barriers for People Ready to Exit Homelessness

Participation in case management incentivized via the creation of Outreach Court

Outreach Court is a unique community-centric approach to criminal justice. By bringing government and nonprofit stakeholders across the entire services spectrum into the court to work collaboratively to address the needs of each homeless person, Outreach Court is able to marshal the expertise and resources of the broader community to both reduce homelessness and reduce the strain on Colorado Springs City services.

The goal of Outreach Court is to help those experiencing homelessness move forward from life on the streets. Many people experiencing homelessness in our community have multiple pending cases, usually nuisance-type crimes. Most of these cases go unresolved because people lack the necessary resources to close them. These cases not only tie up our municipal court system, but also act as a barrier to employment and housing for those ready to escape homelessness. In lieu of assessing fines and costs, the Homeless Outreach Court connects individuals with case managers who can help guide them to the services they need. By doing so, Outreach Court will address the root causes of the offending behavior and empower individuals to take concrete steps to move out of homelessness. To date, 32 defendants have been referred to this program (totaling 62 cases).

The Outreach Court Program also aims to reduce the number of arrest warrants for municipal level citations due to failure to appear by offering quarterly “Amnesty Days” at the Springs Rescue Mission, where warrants can be quashed, attorneys can be appointed where appropriate, and new court dates are given. To date, two Amnesty Days have occurred helping 37 individuals (totaling 58 cases) to get their cases back on track,

Established Homeless Work Programs

HelpCOS “My City Project”

The City launched the HelpCOS My City Project in collaboration with the Springs Rescue Mission. This is a monthly cleanup in the Mill St. Neighborhood performed by guests staying at the Springs Rescue Mission. As a part of Springs Rescue Mission’s existing Work Engagement Program, the My City Project aims to support individuals in achieving greater self-sufficiency by providing access to quality employability training, valuable work experience, and job search support, all while helping to keep the Mill St. Neighborhood clean.

WorkCOS Program

The City has launched the WorkCOS program. This program provides temporary City employment for people experiencing homelessness to do median maintenance projects in our community. Case management is provided by non-profits in our community that offer employment training programs for people experiencing homelessness.

Goal #4: Increase Access to Housing

HomeCOS, Housing Our Future

Addressing the region’s housing affordability challenges is a priority of Mayor John Suthers. In his 2018 State of the City address, Mayor Suthers established “...a community goal to build, preserve and create opportunities for an average of 1,000 affordable units per year over the next five years.” HomeCOS, Housing Our Future, is the blueprint for reaching the goal. HomeCOS is a comprehensive affordable and attainable housing plan that combines current analysis of the local housing and job markets with insights gathered from our community.

Veteran’s Incentive Fund

Fund established to help house veterans in collaboration with Rocky Mountain Human Services Homes for All Veterans and Home Front Military Network, which will aim to incentivize landlords in housing military veterans experiencing homelessness in our community.

Over \$75,000 in private donations has been raised to date.

Goal #5: Clean Up Illegal Camps and Protect the Environment

Additional Neighborhood Services Staff Added

The City added three full time employees dedicated solely to illegal camp remediation. This led to a substantial decrease in response time and a marked increase in the quantity of illegal camps being cleaned up within 24 hours of being reported.

CSPD Enhances Homelessness Response Capabilities

CSPD has increased the size of the Homeless Outreach Team from four officers to six officers. CSPD has also developed a subject matter expert (SME) program in each of the four CSPD subdivisions that trains additional officers to respond to illegal camping. This has resulted in an increase in illegal camps being identified and a quicker response time to citizen complaints about these camps.

CSPD has also added two officers (seven days a week) on walking patrol in the downtown area in order to help ensure that all residents can enjoy the Downtown area.

Previous Council Action:

N/A

Financial Implications:

N/A

City Council Appointed Board/Commission/Committee Recommendation:

N/A

Stakeholder Process:

N/A

Alternatives:

N/A

Proposed Motion:

No action required.

N/A