



# MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** May 24, 2021  
**TO:** Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Eric Holmes  
**RE:** **2021 Vancouver Homelessness Planning**

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The purpose of the May 24<sup>th</sup> workshop with Council is to:

- Provide an overview of the current state of unsheltered homelessness in Vancouver and its impacts
- Present the recommended plan for mitigation of those impacts
- Solicit feedback from Council to ensure plan is in alignment with Council's expectations and values
- Discuss next steps and future Council action needed for implementation

## **Background**

In October of 2020, the County and City Councils approved a memorandum of agreement between the two jurisdictions that established Clark County as the lead agency on regional homeless response, with the City of Vancouver playing a significant supporting role. It also created the Joint Executive Group on Homelessness, which serves as a policy forum to identify possible gaps and opportunities for further coordination and investments to address homelessness and its impacts. The Joint Executive Group on Homelessness charter has been included for reference.

While the Joint Executive Group on Homelessness is, and has been, meeting regularly to discuss and coordinate joint efforts to address homelessness systemically, the City of Vancouver also acknowledges that the community is experiencing significant negative impacts as a result of continued and increasing unsheltered homelessness. As a result, Jamie Spinelli was hired in February 2021 as the Homeless Response Coordinator, and tasked with leading the COV Homeless Assistance and Resource Team (HART) in its encampment outreach, engagement and clean-up efforts, as well as mapping out a plan for mitigating the impacts of unsheltered homelessness.

## **Recent & Current Efforts**

The City of Vancouver has historically focused its efforts on aligning funding strategies and priorities with the rest of the local Homeless Crisis Response System by prioritizing affordable housing development, and homelessness prevention, diversion and supportive housing programs.

This has been done utilizing federal CDBG & HOME funding and local revenue through the Affordable Housing Fund (AHF) and recently adopted Affordable Housing Sales Tax. Below is a very brief overview of some of the recent contributions we have made to addressing homelessness systemically.

System-Wide Contributions

- Increased shelter capacity by 30 beds through AHF (~ \$1.5 million in total for shelter since 2020)
- Built 172 of housing units through the AHF, with 137 of those for people exiting homelessness
- Rental assistance through AHF and HOME (~ \$4.5 million since 2020)
- \$315k for Enhanced Mobile Crisis Response Team (Co-Responder team)
- Contributed \$2.5 million to purchase of Bertha Cain Baugh Place, which is owned by VHA and managed by the County through a contract with Catholic Community Services
- Facilitate increased response from faith-based community (Safe Park, Winter Shelter, etc.)

Despite the resources the City has contributed to addressing homelessness collaboratively and systemically, largely focused on housing, we are seeing growing numbers of individuals living outdoors and in vehicles in the public ROW.

Current Mitigation Efforts

Based on information from law enforcement and community outreach, there are still at least 500-600 people living in tents or vehicles within the City of Vancouver. Below is information about the current efforts used for mitigation, all of which began in the last year, except for Talkin’ Trash, which has been operating since 2017. Most of these began as a response to COVID-19 and will need to continue for as long as people are living unsheltered.

<b>Current Strategy</b>	<b>About</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>Mail Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mail distribution at Navigation Center</li> </ul>	\$200,00/year – temp staff & security
<b>Sanitation Sites</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portable toilets, handwashing stations, garbage service</li> <li>• 6 locations</li> </ul>	\$60,000/year
<b>Talkin’ Trash</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 tons of solid waste/month</li> <li>• low-barrier employment</li> <li>• Contract w/ Share</li> </ul>	\$168,000
<b>HART</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encampment engagement and clean-up coordination</li> </ul>	Homeless Response Coordinator, VPD HART Officer, and Public Works Encampment Response Coordinator (not hired yet)
<b>Camp Clean-Ups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 clean-ups since March 2020</li> <li>• 48 tons of solid waste removed</li> </ul>	\$3000-\$5000/clean-up – cost for Public Works, Rapid, and Dump Fees only
<b>Safe Park Zone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 44 Vehicles (22 RVs)</li> <li>• 70 adults/10 kids</li> </ul>	\$320,000/year – temp staff, security, towing

## **How We Got Here**

### Legal Landscape

In 2018, the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit ruled, in *Martin v. Boise*, that punishing an individual experiencing homelessness for sleeping on publicly owned land, in the absence of adequate alternatives, is a violation of their 8<sup>th</sup> amendment rights. In 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court denied a petition by the City of Boise to review the case, leaving in place the previous 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit ruling.

In anticipation of these rulings, the City of Vancouver amended its camping ordinance, permitting camping on most publicly owned land (excluding city parks and public libraries) from 9:30 pm to 6:30 a.m., provided sidewalks and roadways are not obstructed, when shelter capacity is full.

In 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor, public health authorities, and the CDC issued orders and recommendations to help slow the spread of the virus, and they included not forcing encampments to move and, in some cases, providing hygiene and sanitation services to large encampments. The City of Vancouver has responded to those orders/recommendations by placing dumpsters, portable latrines and hand washing stations in a handful of locations around the city to assist with sanitation and hygiene in areas that have larger encampments. Additionally, individuals camping on public ROW (excluding public parks and libraries) have been allowed to remain unless there are clear significant health and/or safety risks present.

In April 2021, both the City and County of Los Angeles were ordered to house or shelter all unhoused residents of Skid Row within 180 days. As part of that order, Los Angeles was required to place \$1 billion in escrow to accomplish that task and report the spending plan to the court within 7 days. Finally, the L.A. City Auditor was mandated to examine all public funds spent in recent years to combat homelessness. The lawsuit had accused the City and County of failing to comprehensively address the desperate living conditions of individuals experiencing homelessness, citing hunger, crime, squalor, and the pandemic as some of those conditions.

In light of recent court rulings, and because our community is experiencing increasing negative impacts due to unsheltered homelessness, including significant health, safety and sanitation concerns, it is imperative that we implement a plan that both addresses the visible impacts of unsheltered homelessness, and provides for safer and healthier living conditions for those living unsheltered as we work toward more permanent solutions.

## **Recommended Strategies for Mitigation**

The following strategies are designed to mitigate the negative impacts of unsheltered homelessness as we continue to support the County in their larger efforts to address homelessness with housing, behavioral health and other supportive services. The strategies below are meant to build upon the current efforts listed in the chart above. This plan is intended to address the immediate health, safety and sanitation needs of the entire community, both housed and unhoused, and is not intended or designed to end homelessness. It provides access to basic needs, safe and supportive places for people to be as they work towards housing, employment, and/or other services, additional low-barrier employment opportunities, and more equitable access to healthcare.

Strategy	About	Est. Start Date	Est. Annual Costs
<b>Mail Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add mail service to AHF contract with Outsiders Inn</li> <li>• Mail to be distributed at St. Paul Lutheran Church and Living Hope church</li> </ul>	May-21	\$50,000
<b>Talkin' Trash</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand Team</li> <li>• Expand scope to include intentional outreach/engagement in camps</li> </ul>	Jun-21	TBD
<b>HART</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contract w/ Columbia River Mental Health to add Street Treatment Team</li> <li>• Mental Health Professional/Substance Use Disorder Professional, Minor Medical, Peer, Prescriber</li> <li>• Proactive engagement, not crisis response</li> <li>• Some outside funding already committed</li> </ul>	Sep-21	TBD
<b>Additional Safe Park</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locate other properties or partner with other entities for add'l 24/7 Safe Park capacity</li> <li>• Contract with nonprofit for operations</li> </ul>	Jul-21	\$320,000
<b>Supported Campsites</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit to 20 tents/camps per site</li> <li>• Spread throughout city</li> <li>• Contract with nonprofit(s) to host/support camps</li> <li>• Provide fencing, sanitation, garbage</li> <li>• Community based services can be provided on-site</li> </ul>	Jun-21	\$320,000/site
<b>Future Strategies</b>			
<b>Bridge Shelter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 150 beds</li> <li>• Contract with nonprofit</li> </ul>	TBD	TBD
<b>Community Court</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locate New Venue</li> </ul>	TBD	TBD

Greater detail about components of the plan will be provided at Council Workshop on May 24th, and I look forward to the discussion and feedback from Council.

Attachments:

[Joint Executive Group on Homelessness MOACharter.pdf](#)

[The High Cost of Clearing Homeless Encampments - Bloomberg](#)

[Chronic Homelessness: A Crossroad](#)