

## **Six Month Framework to Reduce Harm for People Living Outside**

### **DISCUSSION DRAFT**

#### **Multnomah County Commissioner Sharon Meieran**

Introduction: One of the most pressing issues facing Multnomah County is the public health, safety and humanitarian crisis of people living unsheltered on our streets. We need to address this crisis effectively and urgently, in a way that acknowledges that people will tragically continue to live outside as we continue our work to end homelessness over the long term. Multnomah County's Local Implementation Plan for the Metro Supportive Housing Services measure clearly and specifically identifies an urgent need for additional hygiene, street safety, outreach, and other alternative shelter options to better meet the needs of people living unsheltered. Toward that end, I propose that over six months we take dedicated actions toward creating a broad, coordinated network of alternative shelter options and basic hygiene services that will support and reduce harm for people living outside.

#### **Plan:**

##### ***Months 1-3***

- **Dedicate staff capacity in JOHS to oversee strategy:** The Joint Office of Homeless Services will employ dedicated staff to quickly build and implement this plan as part of a more expansive portfolio of alternative shelters and aligned services. JOHS will require the staffing resources and policy directive to take up this plan. This can potentially be resourced through American Rescue Plan funding, SHS Measure funds, and/or other funding dedicated to the JOHS.
- **Identify available land and facilities:** The City and County will identify facilities and parcels of land that can be used as alternative shelter sites, ranging from parking lots and city blocks, to smaller sites that could accommodate 10-15 tents. The City and County should also consider pursuing privately-owned sites, and actively engage with the private sector to borrow, lease or purchase land for this use, and offer property tax abatement and/or other incentives to assist in this effort.
- **Estimate rough site costs:** There are a number of versatile structures that can serve as alternative shelter units. In addition, all shelter sites would need to include power and lighting, generators and radiant heat, shower and laundry services, toilets, handwashing/hygiene stations and weekly garbage collection/recycling. Costs for all of these are readily available.

##### ***Months 2-4***

- **Select sites:** Considerations will need to include accessibility to transportation and services, proximity to other structures, geographical distribution, and coordination with

other sites. Sites may accommodate a range of shelter opportunities such as larger encampments or villages; safe parking sites with services; or smaller safe sleep sites.

- **Reach out to neighborhoods:** Connect with neighbors and other community members about potential site development. Provide information and answer questions.
- **Develop models for site support:** Some sites might need more structured/full time staff, others might just need people who check in over the course of a week to ensure there are no specific needs or safety issues. The people who best understand the needs of people living unsheltered are those who have lived the experience themselves, and so peers should be employed whenever possible.
- **Design sites:** Sites would all include individual units, power and lighting, generators and radiant heat, shower and laundry, toilets, handwashing/hygiene stations and weekly garbage collection/recycling.
- **Determine additional services that might be needed:** Site types will vary, as will service needs. Services can include behavioral and physical health services, peer support, employment and housing assistance, skills development, and others.

### *Months 3-6*

- **Reach out to potential residents:** Share information about sites directly with unsheltered residents through trusted community partners. Answer questions and spend time engaging about the opportunities.
- **Set up sites:** A network of volunteers will set up sites around the County, coordinated and overseen by paid or volunteer staff.
- **Facilitate and support move-in:** Provide effective assistance to people in moving themselves, their belongings, their pets, etc. to places where they can sleep without fear of being uprooted, and where they have access to a safe and healthy place to live with dignity until they can access transitional or permanent housing.

**Goal:** A coordinated network of sites located throughout Multnomah County that provide safe, stable space for people to stay. This alternative shelter network should be closely coordinated with existing shelter, outreach and housing placement activities of the JOHS.

### **Funding and staffing requirements**

*Estimated staffing in JOHS* - 3-5 FTE to coordinate and implement this plan including but not limited to: dedicated program management; communications, outreach and engagement; contract oversight; volunteer management; data tracking and analysis; and other functions. These positions may be shared across other portfolios of work in the JOHS, but there should be a minimum of 1.0 FTE dedicated to oversight and management of this work.

*Proposed implementation cost* - \$6-9 million to invest in sites and services. Specific service and support costs will vary according to the needs of each site, and total cost will depend on the mix of site types (e.g. small safe sleep sites, parking sites, larger villages, etc).

*Proposed funding source(s)* - this work should be funded initially through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) resources. After one year of implementation, the County should reassess the need for these services to inform continued investment either through future ARPA allocation and/or through anticipated Metro Supportive Housing Services Program funding.

**Conclusion:** A short-term action-oriented approach is essential to address the urgent public health and safety crisis of people living unsheltered on our streets. This approach to improve people's health, safety and dignity can then serve as a basis for understanding and ultimately meeting their longer term housing and service needs.

This proposed framework should be considered in the context of (1) expanding the Joint Office of Homeless Services, including adding a team dedicated specifically to addressing alternative approaches to unsheltered homelessness; (2) implementing the Local Implementation Plan of the Metro Supportive Housing Services Measure; (3) ensuring community proposals around alternative shelters through the current RFPQ process are incorporated into and coordinated with the plan; and (4) the following Guiding Principles:

### **Guiding Principles:**

**Equity** - *Be guided by, include, and appropriately compensate people with lived experience throughout the process, with intentional focus on people who have been historically marginalized, excluded and disproportionately impacted by homelessness, including Black, Indigenous and other People of Color, those who are LGBTQ+, people with a history of behavioral health issues and/or physical disability, elders, and others.*

**Harm reduction** - *Be trauma-informed; focus on improvements in health and safety; and promote individual dignity.*

**Facilitation and support** - *Ensure people have dedicated outreach in moving themselves, their belongings and their pets in a supportive and trauma-informed way.*

**Choice and self-determination** - *Provide an array of options rather than one size fits all - people who are homeless are not a monolithic group, and individuals have different needs at different times.*

**Community** - *Many encampments have established communities. Community is often as essential to people as shelter. Maintain existing communities and facilitate the creation of community whenever possible.*

**Coordination and systems approach** - *Each site can reduce harm and improve the health, safety and dignity of individuals. But the real impact is in collective systems transformation and the ability to meaningfully identify and serve people and facilitate transition to supportive housing and other permanent housing. This can only occur through a coordinated and intentional network.*

**Urgency** - *People living outside are subject to potential violence, lack of sanitary and healthy conditions, and risk of harm every day. The conditions truly constitute a humanitarian crisis, and should be treated as such.*

\*\*\*\*Please note that this document - though informed by listening sessions, dedicated forums, and conversations with many individuals throughout the community, including people with lived experience of being houseless, advocates, and other community members - is only a draft. I welcome your questions, suggestions, critique, and feedback. You can reach me at [district1@multco.us](mailto:district1@multco.us) ([link sends e-mail](#))\*\*\*\*