

# Report of the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness

Presenters: Task Force Co-Chairs Denise Daniels  
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# In response to community concerns about homelessness in Auburn

- Mayor Backus convened the 17-member Task Force in November
- Task Force Members include: Residents, business owners, faith community representatives, leaders from nonprofit service providers operating in Auburn
- Met 7 times
- Presenting 46 recommendations for the community's consideration

# Our Mission

*“...seek to better understand the scope and causes of homelessness in Auburn, the systems in place to address homelessness, and...consider the range of concerns and ideas identified by the community. The Task force will identify and recommend a set of short-term and longer-term actions that our community can undertake to address these issues.”*

# The Task Force process

- 7 meetings
- **Site visits**
- **Public comments**
- **Interviews with homeless individuals**
- **Staff Support:** City, Valley Regional Fire Authority staff, King County Housing Authority, Independent facilitator
- **Series of panel presentations**

# Panel-driven recommendations

- 56 ideas offered by Task Force members and staff
- Staff evaluated all ideas at a high level – cost, partners, time to complete
- Task Force Members individually rated all ideas
- Ratings tallied
- Group deliberated on tally results, re-voted some items
- **Result: 46 recommendations**
  - 28 consensus items (80%+ support)
  - 18 recommendation items (60%- 79% support)

# Key learnings

- Primary causes of homelessness:
  - Inability to find affordable housing
    - Rents in South King County have gone up 27% since 2010.
  - Increase in poverty
    - Stagnant wages
    - Fewer benefits
    - Diminished safety net
  - Mental illness (25% of homeless population est.); health care; domestic violence; addiction disorders

# One Night Count of Homelessness

## In King County:

2015-2016: 19% increase -- *53% increase in South King County*

2014-2015: 21% increase

## In Auburn:

2016: 110 (decline believed to be caused by people moving to avoid floods)

2015: 132

2014: 98

2013: 57

2012: 44

# Poverty & Homelessness in Auburn:

- >17% of the City's population lives below the federal poverty line
- 871 Auburn families applied for public housing assistance last year...only 95 made it to the waiting list—and they could wait as long as 5 years
- >41% of Auburn households pay more than 30% of their income for housing
- The Auburn Food bank served 118,000 people in 2015
- Other than the winter shelter, there are no emergency shelter beds in Auburn



# Concerns of Citizens, Businesses

- Concern for safety of homes, businesses, public spaces, parks
- Concern for safety of the homeless themselves.
- The “Talk Auburn” website has received more blog responses than any other blog on the City’s website.
  - Most blog respondents (>60%) support providing more resources to help the homeless in our City.

**We cannot arrest our way out of homelessness.**

# Key learnings

- We are seeing the impact of decades of systemic failure at the state and federal level
  - Mental health care
  - Substance abuse disorder treatment
  - Inability of public housing providers to keep pace with growing numbers who cannot afford private market rentals

# Our conclusion

**There is much we can do as a community – City and its partners – to address homelessness in Auburn**

**But we also need a stronger state and federal response and regional collaboration.**

# Our recommendations

- 46 recommendations
- 15 priority items (received most votes)
- Framework: 7 categories of action:
  - Improve public safety, sense of wellbeing
  - Expand emergency shelter options
  - Expand services
  - Expand permanent housing and related services
  - Improve public understanding, ability to assist
  - Advocacy
  - Other

# Criteria for recommendations

- Actionable
- Positive community impact
- Consistent with federal law
- Sustainable

*Our **15 priority recommendations** (those receiving the most votes in each of the 7 framework categories) follow...*

# Improving public safety, sense of wellbeing

- Create a program where homeless are hired daily to help clean the community (*Lead: Non-profit service providers*)
- Ensure police have information to provide service and shelter referrals to homeless individuals (*Lead: City*)

# Expand emergency shelter options

- Open additional shelter in City –more than just the existing winter shelter for cold nights (*Lead: Low income housing providers*)
- Expand shelter services to youth under the age of 18 (*Lead: Nonprofit shelter/service providers*)
- Increase the supply of low-barrier shelter beds in the City (*Lead: Nonprofit shelter/service providers*)

# Expand services

- Create a hygiene center / day center with storage, showers, laundry and access to resources. Explore siting in an existing vacant building (*Lead: Nonprofit service providers*)
- Expand programs, facilities and services available to address behavioral health issues of homeless individuals (*Lead: Other government agencies*)



# Expand permanent housing and related service capacity

- Provide additional subsidized housing for single adults without disabilities, children, or veteran status: currently, there are very limited resources for this population (*Lead: Low income housing providers*)
- Provide landlord assistance for damages as well as rent guarantee / support the countywide Landlord Liaison Program (*Lead: other government agencies*)

# Improve public understanding and ability to assist

- Implement a program to help educate residents about homelessness (*Lead: City*)
- Continue to expand City's involvement with county, state and the federal government to better support funding for and awareness of homelessness in South King County (*Lead: City*)

# Advocacy -- *by City, community partners*

- Advocate for more state funding for all types of behavioral health services-- mental health, substance abuse, detox beds, etc.
- Advocate for funding for individuals without state insurance/on disability to access mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Advocate to require utilities to expand subsidy for low income customers

# Other

- Create best practice training for all systems to build connections between agencies (*Lead: Nonprofit shelter/service providers*)

# 31 other recommendations

- It will take committed action by all parts of our community to make sustainable progress.

# Moving forward

- The challenge is complex. There are many paths into homelessness. There is not a simple, one-size-fits-all path out of homelessness. There is no quick fix.
- But -- there are things we can and should do as a community to address homelessness.
- Remember that many of the homeless are our neighbors.
- We have asked for the creation of an “implementation committee” to help drive forward our recommendation.
- We have asked to be reconvened in six months to review progress.

*Thank you!*