

Recommendations

City of Salem

Downtown Homeless Solutions Task Force

In December of 2017, Mayor Chuck Bennett established the Downtown Homeless Solutions Task Force to examine issues related to homelessness affecting Downtown Salem and to recommend implementable solutions. The scope of the Task Force did not extend to the broader issues of homelessness, such as housing, mental healthcare, addiction treatment, service provision, etc. Additionally, the Task Force did not include any currently homeless stakeholders in its work process, although currently homeless individuals did participate as guest speakers. The City is engaged in multiple efforts to alleviate homelessness and increase affordable housing outside of this Task Force, including:

Homeless Rental Assistance Program

Launched in July 2017, the City of Salem, through the Salem Housing Authority, committed \$1.4 million dollars to support the Homeless Rental Assistance Program. The program links “hardest to house” homeless individuals to housing, food, furnishings, and social services, and is the largest “Housing First” program in Oregon. The “hardest to house” homeless population often deals with untreated mental illness, addiction, and chronic health conditions worsened by long periods of homelessness. In addition, some face preexisting barriers to housing, such as criminal history, evictions, and poor rental history.

Police Behavioral Health Detachments

The Salem Police Department has officers who are specially trained to help people experiencing a mental health crisis in coordination with the Marion County Mental Health Department. These officers work with agencies in both Marion and Polk Counties.

Regional Coordination

Following the recommendation of the Mid-Valley Homeless Initiative, the City of Salem contributed \$45,000 toward the hiring of a regional coordinator at the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments. This person is responsible for planning and coordinating programs and projects to prevent and reduce homelessness with our region’s cities, counties, agencies, and services providers.

Low-Income assistance

The City of Salem partners with the City of Keizer to receive and distribute federal grant funds that support a wide range of activities that build, buy, or rehabilitate affordable housing for rent. These grants also provide direct rental assistance to low-income people through tenant based rental assistance programs. The City of Salem has programs to assist with utility and sewer bills, and awards roughly \$400,000 each year in grants to local non-profits that

provide emergency or essential services to the most vulnerable populations with the highest need.

100-Day Youth Challenge

The City participated in the 100-day Youth Challenge and contributed \$12,000 toward this program that works toward reducing youth homelessness in our community.

Sobering Center

The City of Salem is one of several agencies developing a safe, clean, and supervised space to become sober and connect to further treatment. The Oregon legislature and governor have provided start-up funding for a sobering center in Salem to relieve some of the burden on our regional hospital and jail and connect individuals with treatment resources. The sobering center will open by early 2019.

Affordable Housing

To encourage the development and preservation of affordable housing, in January 2018 the City established a Low Income Rental Housing Property Tax Exemption Program for non-profit owners of low-income rental housing. Additionally, the Salem Housing Authority is developing 86 units of low-income housing and works with developers to encourage construction of affordable housing. Through urban renewal funds, the City is also supporting the construction of 188 affordable apartments on Portland Road.

Downtown Homeless Solutions Task Force

Salem's Downtown Homeless Solutions Task Force met on five occasions between February 1, 2018, and June 30, 2018, and identified four primary challenges to be addressed:

1. Showers/toilets/laundry/hygiene
2. Behavioral expectations
3. Safe downtown for everyone
4. Clean-up garbage/human waste

On August 1, 2018 the Task Force held its last meeting to finalize eight recommendations to the Mayor. These recommendations are as follows:

1. Provide public toilet facilities that are available 24/7.
2. Provide a hygiene center with showers and laundry facilities to serve homeless individuals in the downtown.
3. Establish a Downtown Good Neighbor Partnership for those who live, work, shop, and visit downtown Salem that supports appropriate behavior and ongoing dialogue with stakeholders. In conjunction with the establishment of a Downtown Good Neighbor Partnership, City staff to assess Salem codes and ordinances to ensure that the City is appropriately balancing the rights of those

who live, work, and shop in our downtown, and providing the City of Salem with the tools they need to address behaviors that negatively impact others.

4. Endorse a simplified point of contact system individuals may call for support in dealing with issues related to homelessness and provide the community with easy to understand guidance on when to call 9-1-1 versus when to call the non-emergency number or the point of contact number.
5. Support the development of additional storage for homeless individuals in need of a safe place to store their possessions during the day.
6. Support alternative ways of giving.
7. Encourage property owners to make building and site modifications that implement Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and provide Riverfront-Downtown Urban Renewal Area grants for improvements that meet grant criteria.
8. Pursue options for expanding downtown cleaning services.

At the final meeting the Task Force was provided with an opportunity to provide prioritization input on these recommendations. Each Task Force member was provided with four blue dots to vote for the recommendations they considered to be the highest priorities and four red dots for those recommendations considered to be the lowest priorities. The results of this exercise are included below, including further discussion on the recommendation challenges, and issues. Additionally, each recommendation identifies options for consideration prepared by staff. Staff identified these options from prior meeting minutes, through staff research, best practices from other communities, and public input through email and at meetings. These options are not recommendations and are listed solely to provide additional information regarding ideas that were generated and to reflect the context of discussions.

1. Showers/toilets/laundry/hygiene

Issue: Public urination and defecation

Downtown business and property owners are experiencing an increase in defecation and urination on public sidewalks, in alleys, in private parking lots, and in the stairwells of public facilities. While public restrooms are available in the downtown area during business hours and into the evening, there are no facilities available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for use by the general public and by those experiencing homelessness. Riverfront Park and Marion Square Park restroom buildings are not open 24/7 due to illegal activity, vandalism, and maintenance challenges, and portable/chemical toilets in the downtown have had similar challenges. Mid-Valley Community Action Agency's ARCHES Project (ARCHES), Northwest Human Services' Homeless Outreach & Advocacy Project (HOAP), and the Union Gospel Mission (UGM) have restrooms that are available during the daytime, but there is a gap in restroom availability overnight. There is a need for resources for when these services are closed or at capacity, or when there are homeless individuals who cannot engage with services. As a general

rule, these organizations do not turn people away unless there are extreme circumstances. However, on occasion homeless individuals are banned based on behavioral issues. It has been shared that there is an enormous need in the City for expanded hygiene services (showers, toilets, and laundry) for homeless individuals who, for various reasons, are unable to engage with the agencies or other programs.

Recommendation #1: Provide public toilet facilities that are available 24/7.

Priority: #1 (13 blue dots)

Options:

1. Keep restrooms in Marion Park and Riverfront Park open 24/7. This option presents security, safety, and maintenance challenges. Service providers and the Salem Police Department recommend that 24/7 restrooms be staffed.
2. Include public restrooms in the new Salem Police Department building.
3. Construct Portland Loo type facilities on highly visible public property in the downtown that are designed using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles that allow limited privacy at the top and bottom of the structure.

Issue: Showers and laundry facilities

Homeless individuals have limited access to locations to engage in basic hygiene. Businesses downtown experience homeless individuals making use of customer restroom facilities for bathing and washing clothing. ARCHES is completing Phase I of their new downtown facility renovation and in July will begin providing indoor space for rest, meals, computer and telephone access, mailing services, housing assessments, public restrooms, and charging stations. Phase 2 improvements are planned to begin after Phase 1 improvements are complete. Phase 2 will include three showers and laundry, and a full commercial kitchen (for hot meals). These services will be open from 8:30-3:00 Monday-Friday, and will make a big impact on the usage patterns for the homeless living downtown. The United Way is also making headway on a mobile shower unit project that will include two showers on a bus. The bus will have limited benefit to homeless individuals in the downtown as the service will be provided across all three counties represented by the United Way.

Recommendation #2: Provide a hygiene center with showers and laundry facilities to serve homeless individuals in the downtown.

Priority: #6 (6 blue dots)

Options:

1. Design and construct a hygiene center that would be managed through partnerships with non-profit service providers.
2. Provide any needed gap funding to complete the ARCHES project.

2. Behavioral Expectations

Issue: Good Neighbor Policy with expectations for behavior

Some individuals experiencing homelessness and some individuals interacting with the homeless community engage in behaviors and activities that negatively impact the downtown and business activity. Some, but not all, of these behaviors are criminal in nature. Reported behaviors include: verbal harassment and threats by shoppers and downtown visitors. Some homeless individuals have been observed engaging in drug use, littering, threats, wandering into offices and loitering, sidewalk, storefront, and doorway, fighting, vandalism, shoplifting, solicitation, verbally accosting and cursing at pedestrians and shoppers, retaliatory behaviors including urination and defecation in business doorways, non-retaliatory urination and defecation, arguing and yelling, and making racial slurs and insults at business owners.

HOAP and the UGM have instituted good neighbor policies. The policies are not enforceable by the Police. The UGM policy limits services to those who do not loiter, camp, sleep, toilet, panhandle, store or abandon items, or otherwise obstruct public rights-of-way, during either the daytime or nighttime. Abusers of this policy will not receive meals and will, potentially, be barred from all services for 30 days. Mission leadership has also met with business owners on the full block where the Men's Mission resides. The UGM Search and Rescue Team is meeting with business owners in the core downtown area to provide advice, assistance, and information regarding homeless people in front of, or impeding access to, their business. The first meeting was held early in May at Ritter's restaurant.

Issue: Assess codes and ordinances to confirm whether or not they meet community needs

City staff and elected officials are regularly contacted by downtown customers, residents, and business and property owners regarding littering, public urination and defecation, and inappropriate behavior. The Salem Police Department is limited in their resources and legal ability to respond to these complaints and address such offenses. Balancing the rights and needs of diverse individuals is a challenge, particularly in a downtown environment where business and property owners have a legal responsibility to maintain clean and safe sidewalks and building facades, yet have no legal right to prevent individuals from littering or leaving hazardous biological waste that they must clean up. Unless the police are able to witness or otherwise identify such offenders in the act, they cannot cite the offenders or remove them from the downtown.

Additionally, camping on downtown sidewalks, either overnight or during the daytime, is legal, unless they are trespassing on private property or intentionally and willfully obstructing pedestrians so that pedestrians cannot use the public sidewalk. An individual could erect a campsite in front of a downtown business's window that blocked their display, prevented a shopper from stepping close to the window to look at the display, or that blocked the views of those shopping or dining inside a restaurant. An individual could also erect a camp curbside that would prevent a driver from easily stepping from their vehicle onto the sidewalk without forcing them to navigate around the camper's possessions. As long as pedestrians are able to navigate around such camps and possessions, business owners have no recourse and police are not able to provide assistance.

During Task Force meetings it was mentioned on multiple occasions that there should be a place for homeless individuals to go during daytime hours before any ordinance should be considered to prevent sidewalk camping or the storage of camper possessions on downtown sidewalks. In the summer of 2018 ARCHES opened a new day room at the north end of the downtown which adds capacity to existing facilities at the UGM and HOAP.

NOTE: Task Force recommended combining the issues of developing a good neighbor policy and assessment of codes/ordinances issues under the category of Behavioral Expectations into one Recommendation (Recommendation #3).

Recommendation #3: Establish a Downtown Good Neighbor Partnership for those who live, work, shop, and visit downtown Salem that supports appropriate behavior and ongoing dialogue with stakeholders. In conjunction with the establishment of a Downtown Good Neighbor Partnership, City staff to assess Salem codes and ordinances to ensure that the City is appropriately balancing the rights of those who live, work, and shop in our downtown, and providing the City of Salem with the tools they need to address behaviors that negatively impact others.

Priority: #3 (12 blue dots, 2 red dots)

Options:

1. Consider examples of similar policies already used by our social service providers.
2. Develop a card or flyer that can be shared with business owners and with homeless individuals to inform them of alternatives for daytime hours.
3. Revise Salem's ordinances to provide restrictions to camping or storing personal items on downtown sidewalks during business hours. The Task Force was not in consensus on this option and some felt it should not be included.
4. Require site cleanup by campers who camp overnight on downtown sidewalks.

3. Safe downtown for everyone

Issue: Contact numbers and protocols for seeking assistance

Individuals who are currently, or at risk of becoming, homeless, landlords, businesses, and customers report that it is difficult to navigate public and social service agencies to seek assistance for homeless individuals, particularly in non-emergency situations. The resource sheet that has been available for use identifies more than one hundred entities that provide a wide range of services. There is a community need for a much simpler entry point for obtaining guidance and assistance.

Northwest Human Services has recently purchased and is implementing a product called "iCarol" into their Crisis and Information Hotline. When completed, NWHS will be able to provide up-to-date resource and referral information via phone and internet for Marion and

Polk Counties 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This information will exceed the 211 system in its accuracy of up-to-date data, as well as potentially serve as a single phone number to field calls from business owners seeking help or direction in dealing with issues that arise with downtown visitors.

Individuals living, working, and shopping in our downtown have also expressed that they often do not know when they should call 9-1-1 and when they should call the non-emergency number.

Recommendation #4: Endorse a simplified point of contact system individuals may call for support in dealing with issues related to homelessness and provide the community with easy to understand guidance on when to call 9-1-1 versus when to call the non-emergency number or the point of contact number.

Priority: #2 (12 blue dots)

Options:

1. Partner with Northwest Human Services and other social service providers to endorse and promote the iCarol system as the go-to resource for issues related to homelessness.
2. Develop communication materials to share with downtown businesses and residents and the broader community that provide guidance on when to call 9-1-1 versus when to call the non-emergency number or the point of contact number.
3. Encourage and facilitate ongoing dialogue between the Salem Police Department, other City staff, social service providers, and downtown businesses, property owners, shoppers, and residents on issues relating to homelessness, including periodic updates on community efforts and resources.

Issue: Limited options for safely storing possessions during the day

Limited storage impacts individuals who are homeless as well as those who live, work, and shop in our downtown. According to Task Force testimony, without a safe place to store their possessions, homeless individuals are often confronted with the difficult choice of missing important appointments with health care providers, social workers, potential employers, and potential landlords or leaving their worldly goods unsecured and subject to theft or destruction. The alternative is to take all of their possessions with them as they go about business, which comes with its own set of complications, barriers, and impacts to downtown.

When there is no safe place to store possessions during the daytime, individuals will keep their possession with them as they spend time in our downtown. Sometimes these possessions are abandoned and create a litter situation. Sometimes they become spread out across sidewalks and present barriers and obstacles to others.

Social service providers are increasing storage capacity for their clients. Some of this added capacity has recently become available. Additional capacity will be available after the UGM

develops their new men's shelter. Social service providers have made the intentional decision of not accommodating or condoning the use of shopping carts and instead encourage the use of backpacks and luggage. They have also shared the need for bike storage for their clients.

Recommendation #5: Support the development of additional storage for homeless individuals in need of a safe place to store their possessions during the day.

Priority: #5 (7 blue dots)

Options:

1. Partner with social service providers to support increased storage capacity at their facilities.
2. Procure or construct storage facilities on municipally-owned property.

Issue: Support alternative ways of giving for those who do not want to contribute to panhandling

The City receives complaints throughout the year regarding "panhandling." Complaints range from aggressive and threatening conduct, to obstructing traffic or sidewalks, to reflecting poorly on the community. There are individuals in the community who would like to contribute financially to help those who are homeless, but who do not want to give directly to panhandlers.

Recommendation #6: Support alternative ways of giving.

Priority: #7 (tie - 10 red dots)

Options:

1. Reinvigorate the Give Hope Not Money Campaign to educate the public on alternate ways to give.
2. Repurpose coin parking meters downtown to be donation stations with proceeds used to fund downtown cleaning work programs.
3. Establish a text to donate program modeling the Salem, MA program to encourage alternate ways of giving, with proceeds used to fund downtown cleaning work programs.

Issue: Illegal activities are taking place on downtown sidewalks and in parking spaces and alleys

Businesses, shoppers, and residents in our downtown report incidences of prostitution, drug use, indecent exposure, theft, and vandalism. Often the witnesses or victims do not know if they should call 9-1-1 or the non-emergency number, and on many occasions, particularly when the non-emergency number is called, those perpetrating these behaviors are gone before police can respond. According to complaints, these incidents often occur in alleys, in surface parking lots or parking garages, in vehicles parked in on-street spaces, and in building alcoves and exterior stairwells.

Recommendation #7: Encourage property owners to make building and site

modifications that implement Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and provide Riverfront-Downtown Urban Renewal Area grants for improvements that meet grant criteria.

CPTED can help reduce the chance that environmental factors will create an opportunity for crime. Elements of CPTED include secure fencing and barriers, securely locked entry points, good visibility around a property, removal of items that reduce visibility, clean structures, clean and/or secured dumpsters and bins, sufficient lighting, surveillance cameras, and visible signs noting surveillance and no trespassing, etc.

Priority: #7 (tie - 10 red dots)

Options:

1. Provide property and business owners within the Riverfront-Downtown Urban Renewal Area with information on what types of CPTED improvements would qualify for a grant through the Urban Renewal Agency.

4. Clean-up garbage/human waste

Issue: Litter, abandoned possessions, and human waste

If individuals leave food waste, human waste, or abandoned property on a sidewalk in front of a downtown business, according to Salem code, it is the property or business owner's responsibility to remove the waste. The City does not operate a dispatch service to respond to cleaning needs. The Downtown Parking District tax funds the Downtown Clean Team at \$90,000 per year. Due to staffing challenges, the three-person team is currently operating with only one individual. The Clean Team focuses on monitoring and emptying public trash cans when they are full after normal scheduled trash pickup (collecting about 70 bags of garbage a day), cleaning up tree wells, blowing down sidewalks to remove debris, cleaning public furnishings such as benches, and signs, and assisting with cleaning public parking garages. They work a set schedule and route, do not function as a dispatched response team to assist individual property owners, and they do not provide services on private property. The UGM has committed to actively conducting litter and safety patrols around the Men's Mission on a daily basis, every two hours.

Recommendation #8: Pursue options for expanding downtown cleaning services.

Priority: #4 (8 blue dots)

Options:

1. Explore replacing the Downtown Clean Team with a dignity of work model used in other parts of the country where the City partners with service providers to employ homeless individuals to assist in clean-up efforts.
2. Business outreach to and mentorship of homeless individuals to create partnerships that would encourage homeless individuals to clean up spaces where they camp in front of businesses prior to business hours.
3. Ensure there are sufficient trash receptacles and methods for disposing of hazardous materials, such as needles.

Conclusion

While outside of the scope of this Task Force, there was a general opinion among members that Salem needs to do more to address the broader issues of homelessness and that more shelter and housing capacity is needed. Members of the Task Force believe there is value in ongoing dialogue between business owners, service providers, Police, City Council representatives, and homeless and formerly homeless individuals.

These recommendations will be shared with Mayor Bennett and the City Manager for their input regarding next steps.