

Regional Law
Safety & Justice
Committee



REGIONAL LAW SAFETY AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Thursday, December 3, 2015

7:30 – 9:00 A.M.

Theme: Homelessness

December 3rd RLSJC meeting included three presentations on homelessness in the region. In addition to the presentations, RLSJC changed leadership for 2016. Incoming RLSJC Chair Kate Kruller thanked outgoing Chair Beth Andrus for her service in 2015 and presented her with a plaque. 2016 RLSJC Vice Chair, Robert Merner, Assistant Chief, Seattle Police Department was introduced to the group.

All Home's Homelessness Strategic Plan – Mark Putnam, Director, All Home (formerly the Committee to End Homelessness)

In the meeting's first presentation, Mark Putnam provided an explanation of All Home's strategic plan and the recent State of Emergency declaration. All Home is a coalition of various entities coming together to align local resources for homelessness with federal funds. The strategic plan is organized around the goals of making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time (see slides for detail on these three goals).

All Home collects data on homelessness from the One Night Count, which is also a key community engagement activity and from the Homeless Management Information System, which collects data on the number of homeless individuals, as well as length of homelessness, returns to homelessness and information on last known zip code. King County has over 10,000 homeless individuals on any given night. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, African Americans, and Native Americans/Alaska Natives are disproportionately impacted by homelessness.

Five factors determine homeless, all of which are fairly obvious and all of which are present in King County: housing market, economic conditions, demographic composition, safety net, and transience (see presentation slide for detail). Seattle/King County provides more dedicated housing units for the homeless than all but two jurisdictions nation-wide.

The recently declared State of Emergency added additional local resources and asked state and federal to contribute more funding to this issue.

All Homes name change was intended to highlight the community-oriented nature of the organization. Rather than a single entity, it incorporates business and faith communities and seeks to show how residents can help. The organization seeks to connect community work with government efforts.

While the primary focus of All Home is on building more housing, Mr. Putnam emphasized that the organization knows it takes more than that to end housing. Rather than making assumptions about need, those who come for help are asked what they need to avoid homelessness. Some people are experiencing temporary economic problems and don't need comprehensive services. The organization has been successful diverting individuals by providing an average of \$1300.

Mr. Putnam answered several audience questions:

Question: You said we create homelessness. Can you explain that? No one in this room is creating homelessness.

I think it's important to phrase it like that because people are not choosing to be homelessness. We have income inequality, lack of affordable housing, disinvestment in affordable housing and mental health. That's what I mean.

Question: How many housing units have been created in the last 10 years?

6,300 were created in the last 10 years. We are third in the nation in providing housing.

Question: The increase in housing prices impacts both youth and older people who have finished their work life and are on fixed incomes. Is it different to provide services to older people than to younger people?

We're looking at preservation of affordable housing. City of Seattle has been particularly active there. There's not one reason for homelessness and solutions need a tailored response. One approach is to incentivize owners of older units to renovate, but keep rents affordable.

Question: In Tukwila there is a flood of people coming into the area with good incomes. Landlords are starting to actively not want to accept vouchers. Is this a trend?

There are people moving south. The City of Seattle, Redmond, and Kirkland have legislation against source of income discrimination. This prevents discrimination on the basis of section 8 etc.

Question: Can you provide more detail on the demographics? How many youth? How many mentally ill?

The 1 night count is not a good way to find kids who have run away. In an alternate count of 12-24 year-olds the count was 854, which is based on a broader definition of homelessness.

Around one-third of the homeless population has a mental illness.

From Community Engagement to Community Ownership: Innovations in the Cities of Auburn and Redmond – Nancy Backus, Mayor of Auburn; Colleen Kelly, Asst. Director of Community Planning, Redmond; Ron Gibson, Redmond Police Chief

Mayor Backus began the panel presentation by showing a map of quality of life indicators in King County (see Map). She highlighted the low measures in the south end. South King County is working hard to do the best for its citizens, but the indicators on the map are not surprising as the areas have historically struggled. Mayor Backus explained that looking at the map is difficult because it represents the citizens in her city who are struggling.

Auburn recently started a homeless task force, which is rooted in moving community engagement to community *ownership*. Mayor Backus sent a request to citizens and was overwhelmed with the positive response from citizens who wanted to serve on the task force.

The Mayor receives emails on homelessness that are divided between constituents who think the city should remove the homeless population and those who think additional services should be provided. Some constituents really believe the homeless population should be in Seattle where there are services, but Mayor Backus believes the services should be where the people who need them are. South King County has a lower cost of living, which means lower-income people live there.

Law enforcement have been trained and empowered to approach those who appear homeless to assist them. An approach that arrests homeless individuals is expensive in the short term and creates additional barriers to employment, as someone with an arrest record has a harder time finding employment. Mayor Backus believes money is better spent providing services than jail. However a safe and secure community is a priority and there will continue to be arrests to maintain safety and law, but jailing is not the first approach. Mayor Backus recounted a conversation with an officer who had collected information on 90 individuals who are experiencing homelessness, including photos. Many of them don't have ID, and the officer wanted a way of identifying them if they passed away.

Auburn's task force intentionally includes individuals whose first impulse is to remove homeless people from the community. By serving on the task force, they are put in a position where homeless people are humanized. Some are concerned that by providing services, the city will become a destination for homeless people from outside the area, but most homeless people are in the area where they grew up. Mayor Backus framed the issue as helping "our people". However, it's a regional issue and not something any one city can solve. Mayor Backus attends All Home meeting for people that are homeless to learn from the community. She provided an example of community efforts to address issues at the library that has been successful. The task force also has the goal of ensuring public parks are used by everyone.

The task force will meet for four months to develop an action plan. The group plans to screen a film December 16 in Auburn on homeless issues. At the end of the movie, community comments will be filmed.

Mayor Backus emphasized the underlying mental health issues that contribute to homelessness. She is part of South Sound Behavioral Health Committee and may be contacting RLSJC members for support in increasing the number of mental health beds in the region.

Mayor Backus ended by acknowledging that homeless may never be ended, but by getting to the root of the problem it can be made rare, brief, and one time.

Next on the panel, Colleen Kelly spoke about Redmond's experience with a homelessness task force. She spoke at a recent Association of Washington Cities meeting specifically about homelessness issues. The resounding theme in the room was the marked increase in visible homelessness in the last 12 months. Ms. Kelly served on the interagency council which contributes to the preventative effort. Local efforts have ramped up. Ms. Kelly described Redmond's recent efforts (see handout for detail on the task force recommendations). The theme on the eastside is about community ownership, as it is not a problem the government can solve without community ownership.

Chief Gibson then spoke on the law enforcement perspective in Redmond. The area saw an increase in homelessness starting about 18 months ago. Eastside meetings were held to share lessons learned and best practices. The group focused on issues of tent siting and permitting tent cities and on how to work with the King County Library District to resolve problems. The library work has been a success story. No arrests were made and residents are no longer complaining about difficulty accessing the library.

Redmond held a community meeting in March, which was attended by over 200 people. Attendees included those who were fearful and those who were concerned about what services we were providing.

In April, the city formed a 14 person task force. The group had a total of six three-hour meetings. Members also did substantial work in between meetings. While the task force was influenced by the Everett task force, the approach was slightly different. The charge was to address the issue very locally. One of the recommendations was for an implementation committee. Three members of the task force continue as the implementation committee.

Chief Gibson described the current situation, where the winter shelter is at capacity. The providers were turning families away when it was below freezing. One of the eastside churches opened their doors. While the city is not currently in crisis mode, there are several more months of winter.

Redmond wanted a balanced committee that would address business owners and property owner voices. Some of the task force's six recommendations were consensus and some were recommended on majority. The city's levy in August would have funded new officers, but it failed. Instead the agency is in the process of reprioritizing so that they can provide more patrols. The city has seen a 33% increase in property crime since 2012. Another recommendation was around directing people to give money to social services rather than directly. Priorities are to provide transportation to get to a job interview, service and to create a day center on the eastside as there is not a designated place for people to go during the day.

The next recommendation was about facilities. Siting was done with community involvement. The facility needs to be a good neighbor and the task force wanted to ensure communities were involved early on.

The task force also recommended the business community receive more information on how they can help – provide internships etc. Landlords set aside units for high-risk renters and partner with an agency who is providing services.

Finally the task force recommended community advocacy – anyone in the community should be able to contact their representatives. The task force advocated for BSK. The task force will check in periodically with the implementation team. Implementation is in the very early stages. Chief Gibson hopes to provide an update on outcomes in a year.

The biggest challenge is getting communities and non-government entities to step up and take ownership.

Comment: One suggestion is the 2x2 program – which started by Attorney General of Louisiana. The program gets businesses to hire 2 felons for 2 years and provide mentorship. That program is working. I'm a citizen in Redmond and have been burglarized 3 times. It is a traumatic experience. That makes me very nervous and my patience is gone. People feel victimized. I think we need to do more to make citizens feel more comfortable.

Homelessness from the City's Perspective – Catherine Lester, Director, Seattle Human Services Department

Catherine Lester provided the final presentation of the meeting, which provided context for what is happening in the City of Seattle related to the State of Emergency and Seattle's rethinking of city investments to move funding further upstream.

Ms. Lester has been the Director of Seattle's Human Services Department for 7-8 months and is focused on results culture and reducing racial discrepancies. Ms. Lester noted that contrary to other places she's lived, Seattle is in an area of prosperity with a significant base of resources. Despite these resources, there are significant disparities including low graduation rates for children of color. These factors matter for the trajectory of homelessness. Like other cities, Seattle is facing a homelessness crisis. The one night count has increased 21% since 2004 for a variety of complex and nuanced reasons. The erosion in funding over time is a significant part of that. (See slides.)

More recently, Seattle's base budget dedicated to homelessness has increased almost 10%. There has also been some significant one-time funding.

Mayor Murray created something similar to the homelessness task forces described by other presenters. That task force resulted in three key recommendations:

1. Policy decision around authorized encampments on city property: Encampments in Ballard and Interbay have been set up.
2. Shelter capacity. Use city owned buildings to increase capacity (or ensure there's no decrease).
3. A call to action to state and federal partners , which led to the State of Emergency declaration.

Ms. Lester emphasized that the situation with homelessness is not a new emergency. The declaration allows for \$7.2 million in spending to make a dent in people living unhoused. It also allows local government to formalize a call to action for resources to address the root causes of homelessness.

The State of Emergency focuses on three issues that echo All Home's strategic goals (see slide 7 for details and the implementation framework):

1. Prevention efforts - make homelessness rare- flexible funds are needed for diversion and rapid rehousing. In particular Seattle public schools have 3,000 known homeless students who could be better served. In order to act on prevention, data needs to be addressed differently. Most data now is anecdotal.
2. Encampment outreach – make homelessness brief. This strategy is focused on providing physical and behavioral health resources.. There's been an outburst of tents in unauthorized encampments, which need to be reached by health services. The mobile van meets this need.
3. Meeting basic needs - make homelessness one-time. This effort is focused on bringing on additional shelter beds.

The State of Emergency is an opportunity to stay focused on the long-term shifts. Seattle analyzed the \$40 million base of homelessness services, which serve a range of populations and will focus on:

1. A portfolio contract model to reduce the number of contracts, which will reduce the burden on the city and on contract organizations.
2. Evaluation of new pilots for scalability including diversion, rapid rehousing. Expansion will be based on close analysis, rather than an "intuitive gut-check".
3. System readiness and capacity. The city is working with a national consultant to focus on results-driven work with a focus on racial equity.

Ms. Lester ended her presentation by showing a photo of an area above South Lake Union where young people camp. She emphasized the importance of remembering the real impact of this issue. Decision makers sometimes aren't connected to the reality.