

# Homelessness Proposal for the City of Ashland Ad Hoc Steering Committee

**From:** Ashland Chamber of Commerce’s Visitor & Convention Bureau Task Force

**Background:** The Ashland Chamber Visitor & Convention Bureau appointed a Task Force on the issue of homelessness in Ashland to identify issues affecting visitors, residents and business and possible solutions for implementation. The members of the Task Force are members of the Ashland Visitor & Convention Bureau who volunteered their time to serve on the committee.

**Members:** Maddy DiRienzo, Mistletoe Self Storage/ Visitor & Convention Bureau Co-Chair/  
Deb Cleland, Waterstone Spa & Salon, VCB committee member  
Katharine Flanagan, Ashland Chamber’s Visitor & Convention Bureau  
Sandra Slattery, Ashland Chamber of Commerce

**Date:** May 26, 2011

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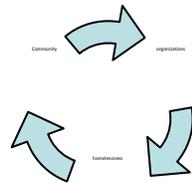
## The issue:

The task force felt the homelessness issue needed to be looked at in a wider scope by stepping back and looking at the bigger picture, holistically. The task force felt we needed to create new solutions to a long-existing problem. They felt we needed to look at “how” we approach the problem before we attempt to create solutions. The “cycle” was at the center point of the discussion. The group identified the “balanced cycle” as that of a healthy community that involves everyone contributing to and building together. The balanced cycle can enable a community to thrive when there is reciprocity. The task force found that Ashland lacked this balance due to the individuals associated with the homelessness issue not contributing to the community but instead expecting to be supported by the community without the expectation they will give back. Residents who contribute to the community by paying taxes help to create the boundaries and social standards of our community. The task force felt that the individuals associated with the homelessness issue have no stake or ownership of the community which then creates a lack of caring about the overall success and health of our community. The task force felt that the cycle could be balanced out if we looked at the homelessness issue from a humanitarian, needs based scope. Here are the 2 diagrams the task force discussed to illustrate the point.

(Diagram 1: Not sustainable – community gives to individuals associated with homelessness issue & they take with no reciprocity.)



(Diagram 2; Sustainable Balanced cycle, community contributes to all and all help to contribute back)



**Who:** The task force focused on the youth element of the homelessness issue.

**The environment:** The task force discussed the environment created by the individuals associated with the homelessness issue to include: smoking, cigarette butts, trash, urine, offensive language, sexual harassment, vulgarity, intimidation, selling merchandise that takes away from businesses with business licenses, offensive smell, inability to care for dogs, drug use, public intoxication, panhandling and loitering. The task force looked at these undesirable behaviors not only from a business owner perspective but from a parent's, resident's and visitor's perspective as well.

The task force made a distinction between those who are in need and those who choose to be home free. Defining the differences was noted as being key to defining the problem/solutions. Another group within the issue is that of the mentally ill and chronically transient. The task force found it interesting that Ashland was said to be the "safest" place to be homeless by those living on the street. Those who choose to be home free are still concerned with their safety and not being vulnerable, despite the misconceptions and attitudes.

The task force discussed the behavior of musicians. The noise level is consistently disturbing to businesses (example: spa/salon- trying to create a relaxing experience). The high noise level also affects office settings and multiple services that are offered in the downtown core. The presence of the homeless groups also prevents access to our parks, benches, sidewalks and pedestrian areas.

The visitor's voice was discussed by the task force defining the visitor experience to be fragile and easily affected. All it takes is one negative visitor experience to make them not want to return. Ashland's visitor base is very loyal, returning each year for decades. As the front door to our economy the visitor experience should be valued, acknowledged and preserved as we move through this process of creating new solutions. The task force felt by educating the visitors at their point of check in or other would help to explain how visitors could truly help rather than perpetuate the problem by providing money to the homelessness issue.

**Possible Solutions:** Create an opportunity for stewardship and encouragement to have them contribute to the beautification of the community. The task force felt that if the youth within the homelessness issue could be empowered to be a part of the community, reciprocate and be connected with clear boundaries of social standards this would lessen their desire to continue harmful behavior and illegal activity.

The task force suggested that trained psychologists, community advocates and city officials work directly with individuals that want and need assistance. The task force discussed the NLP (Neuro linguistic programming) method of counseling and possibly creating a program to connect organizations such as St. Vincent de Paul. Experts such as LindaGail Campbell and locally, Eric Guyer, from the youth correctional facility were suggested as good people to involve in the discussion.

These solutions and ideas are within a holistic, humanitarian approach that seeks to find the skill set or passions within an individual to discover the root of who they are and the choices they have made. Continuing to focus on the youth aspect of the homelessness issue, the task force felt that by creating opportunities for youth homeless to find a purpose or a sense of place in the community could then help bring them out of a desperate place of survival.

The task force felt if Ashland was able to set up a sustainable system for solving the homelessness issue and creating positive solutions, we could become a model for other communities by appreciating all parts of the community and inviting all parts to co-exist.

The task forces' vision for the community is that everyone has a willingness to be involved and stewards of the community and our town. When individuals are empowered and feel a part of the community they become connected and respect the clear boundaries and standards of that community.

