

Council Business Meeting

January 19, 2021

Agenda Item	Update on Homeless Services Programs, Funding, and Opportunities	
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SUMMARY

At the regular City Council business meeting held on January 5, 2021, the Council requested that staff provide an update regarding the City's efforts to identify solutions to provide emergency housing options for the unhoused. This update focuses on recent actions City staff has undertaken to expand existing programs and explore options related to alleviating the issues of homelessness during the current public health crisis.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED

B. Tier 2: Moderate Priority

- c. Housing Needs
- e. Homeless Services

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

[October 19, 2020](#) – Housing Program - Overview of Projects and Homeless Services Funding

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The City of Ashland Housing Program administers three sources of funding:

- Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- Social Service Grant Fund
- Community Development Block Grant funds.

The City has also received additional federal funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to address issues related to the pandemic. Since the onset of the pandemic, these funding sources have primarily been utilized to provide resources to assist area non-profit agencies in providing a range of services and housing activities to support the continuum of housing needs, from emergency shelter, case management and navigation services, to funding to support essential services for homeless populations.

The City has provided funding to support a variety of shelter and housing related activities, including OHRA's Winter shelter program, and funding for OHRA and Maslow Project to house vulnerable households in hotels. The City has also continued support for essential services such as operational support for the shower trailer and funding to support meal preparation and delivery to the most vulnerable. However, these resources have not been enough to address the many needs created by the ongoing pandemic which have been amplified by the Almeda wildfire, and City staff has been exploring creative solutions to meet these urgent needs.

The State of Oregon received an additional allocation of Emergency Shelter Grant-Corona Virus (ESG-CV) funds through the CARES Act from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. This funding is required to be used to provide resources and services for homeless populations, specifically to prevent, prepare for, and respond to issues created by the pandemic. For the first time the State has offered this funding to entities throughout the State through a competitive process. The City has submitted an application for funding to address the need for emergency non-congregate shelter. The City has applied for \$300,000 in

ESG funding to purchase additional pallet shelter buildings and to work with Rogue Retreat to establish and oversee an urban campground similar to the one that organization is currently running in Medford. Oregon Housing and Community Services is scheduled to make award announcements in mid-February.

The City is also working with the Rogue Valley Universal Unitarian Fellowship on a pilot program which will provide non-congregate sheltering for homeless populations in three pallet shelters purchased by the City utilizing expiring Capital funding through the CDBG program. This program is a work in progress and some of the forms and processes are currently established and refined. The pallet shelters are expected to be available for use in mid-January.

Options for Helping Residents of Ashland (OHRA) opened an emergency winter shelter at 1615 Clark Ave accommodating up to 40 individuals experiencing homelessness. This shelter was supported by the City through the award of \$174,000 in combined Affordable Housing Trust and CDBG Funds by the City Council on October 6, 2020. In an effort to reduce the risk of spread of COVID 19, a portion of the AHTF grant was utilized to install barrier separations between occupant beds and maintain adequate separation between those utilizing the shelter. The OHRA winter shelter opened on November 1, 2020, and is scheduled to continue through March 2021.

Due to the impacts of the wildfire and the pandemic, City staff has taken on the responsibility of organizing the Inclement Weather shelter. This temporary emergency shelter is called in times of extreme weather conditions including hazardous weather events, and extreme temperatures. Traditionally this shelter has been organized and run by community volunteers and utilized donated space. In prior years the City has provided funding to pay organizations to organize the shelters and pay staff and has also provided space for the shelter in Pioneer Hall.

Due to structural deficiencies, Pioneer Hall is no longer a viable option for overnight sheltering. Consequently, City staff has worked with community volunteers to organize staffing, with local non-profit and faith based groups to provide overnight shelter space, and with non-profit partners to supply limited personal protective equipment to shelter volunteers and patrons in an effort to meet Oregon Health Authority guidelines for emergency congregate shelters. So far this winter the City has opened the Inclement Weather shelter for two nights, which served at total of 18 individuals. City staff continues to monitor upcoming weather conditions and communicate with volunteer coordinators to prepare for inclement weather shelter events.

FISCAL IMPACTS

The City has the potential to receive additional funding from the State of Oregon to address the needs of the homeless population. Should the City receive a funding award from the State, the majority of the grant funding will be provided as a pass through grant to Rogue Retreat. City staffing costs to administer the grant funding will be incurred.

The Pallet Pilot Project has utilized \$25,080 in previously unallocated restricted CDBG funding and an additional \$5,000 in Affordable Housing Trust funds. Inclement Weather Shelter program administration incurs staffing costs to organize shelter volunteers and space, and has the potential to incur costs to rent shelter space as needed. The cost to rent shelter space is estimated to be \$200 per night.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION,

Action is not required. This item is for informational purposes only.

ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS

No action is requested.

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

None