

FINAL REPORT - HRC/HAB JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE UNHOUSED - 11/19/20

The HRC/HAB Joint Committee on the Unhoused commenced work in mid-July 2020 to research the (attached) June 29th joint recommendations from HRC (Boulder's Human Relations Commission) and HAB (Boulder's Housing Advisory Board).

The joint committee was mindful of City Council members' suggestions, including the city's indication that staff was not to be asked to assist in this project, that city funds would not be available for additions to Boulder's Strategy for Homelessness, and that Council Member Swetlik serve as liaison. The committee thanks Council Member Swetlik for his support, as well as numerous members of the community for helpful information and insights.

The joint committee appreciates staff and Council's hard work and dedication to issues surrounding people who are unhoused. Impressive and laudable progress has been accomplished in increasing permanently affordable housing. However, the committee strongly feels that many unhoused individuals are underserved as they await housing. Many cost-effective programs could provide transitional housing and other services to assist people for whom permanently affordable housing is not yet available and those not likely to receive support.

The committee prioritized the most viable recommendations from the June 29th HRC/HAB meeting and pursued in-depth research into the several areas:

- *Tiny Homes Village pilot.* The joint committee prepared a report on a tiny homes village pilot (attached) with specific characteristics. The report demonstrates with an abundance of evidence that a pilot program with specific characteristics in Boulder would be cost-effective, evidence-based, and address the city's key criteria for their strategy for homelessness. It would assist unhoused individuals who are not able to use existing services. Such a pilot would provide much-needed transition into permanent housing with expected high outcomes for success, thus meeting Housing First goals. **The committee has carefully documented the feasibility of a tiny homes village pilot for Boulder.**
- *Safe Parking Lot pilot.* Similarly, a detailed report (attached) demonstrates that a safe parking lot pilot with specific characteristics has great potential in Boulder. It would be cost-effective, evidence-based, address key criteria in the city's Strategy for Homelessness and assist unhoused individuals who aren't able to use existing services. A Safe Parking Lot pilot would provide a transition into permanent housing with expected high outcomes for success, as meets Housing First goals. **The committee has carefully documented the feasibility of a safe parking lot pilot for Boulder.**
- *Sanctioned encampments.* Much work has been done by local individuals to research this topic. The committee has reviewed this information and talked with several people. **The committee believes that others have successfully documented the feasibility of a small sanctioned encampment as a pilot for Boulder.**
- *Data and dashboard.* After an extensive look into the dashboard, the committee determined that the dashboard itself is not the issue. Rather current data is insufficient to ascertain appropriate information about unhoused individuals who are underserved.

Whether the city's budget or policy decisions impact staff ability for more research, there simply is not enough appropriate data.

For example, city staff reported they do not collect information on "negative scenarios". From our interviews, these "negative scenarios", often called by staff "service-resistant", are real people with specific life circumstances that render existing sheltering options untenable. These circumstances include, though are not limited to, individuals with animals that provide critical support, individuals in partnerships, individuals with specific medical conditions (like PTSD), for which group sheltering is frightening or disorienting, and individuals who have had bad experiences with the system.

Further, since city and county data are combined, an understanding of sheltering needs within the city is difficult to determine. The two-year exclusion from Coordinated Entry after an initial diversion leads to a significant number of undocumented and unserved unhoused people within the city. This undercount combined with uncounted unhoused individuals currently residing in vehicles renders the determination of actual needs very difficult. **The committee believes that additional data should be collected and utilized for needs assessment.**

- *Oversight Committee.* The first priority of HRC and HAB at the June 29th meeting was the establishment of an oversight committee. Although the county has some input from individuals with lived experience, county oversight is limited. Oversight in the city of Boulder is needed. Such an oversight committee could provide necessary community engagement and fresh input.

In addition to an Oversight Committee's other functions, specific areas of interest were revealed during this committee's research that could be included. Those specific areas are: inaccuracies in data or incomplete data; a review of the six-month residency requirement; the implementation of regional coordination in addition to the regional Housing First effort; the need for increased mental health and addiction rehabilitation services countywide; the need for "promising practices" to be added to the city's Strategy for Homelessness; and more appropriate use of language promoted by the city (including replacing terms like "service resistant" that carries a negative connotation). **The committee believes that an Oversight Committee is worthy of serious consideration.**

Notwithstanding the great strides in permanently affordable housing, a significant number of underserved individuals are present in our community. Not only are these individuals left in highly vulnerable situations, but their presence often leads to other community stresses. The committee hopes that this final report and the two attached reports will be helpful to HRC, HAB, Council and the community as both a foundation and a springboard for the expansion of services to unhoused individuals and families appropriate to the health and wellbeing of the Boulder community.

Committee Members – Stan Deetz (HRC), Lindsey Loberg (HRC), Judy Nogg (HAB)