

Safe Shelter Task Force Concept

Purpose: Ensure everyone has a safe place for both night and day shelter from November 1, 2019 - March 31, 2020 by determining and funding sufficient functioning day and night safe shelter solutions prior to implementation of proposed Metro Park/City of Tacoma Code Changes re “Temporary Shelters.”

Goal: Prevent harm to unsheltered persons. No homeless person dies this winter.

Why a Task Force? To show the city that we have a more humane, more just solution to people seeking shelter in the parks than removing them or the sides of their tents. To engage shelter providers and outreach workers - the people who know what to do, how to do it, and what needs to be done to shelter everyone - with key stakeholders in a plan to shelter everyone this winter. To include as key stakeholders the people who live without shelter: representatives of unhoused people and people with lived experience in all aspects of the Task Force.

Who would Chair the Task Force? a trusted, local person not currently receiving City money, history of social justice and working on homelessness.

Who should be on the Task Force? Many stakeholders have already been involved in development of the proposed Metro Parks/City Code changes. We note that a Task Force may easily become unwieldy in size but because we are talking about preventing harm to unhoused persons, we believe the following must be invited:

Representatives of unhoused people

Representatives with lived experience of being unhoused

Representatives of Currently Operating Day and Night Shelters: The Rescue Mission, Catholic Community Services, Salvation Army, Comprehensive Life Resources, YWCA

Representatives of homeless outreach programs who do not operate shelters such as:
Managed Care Organizations
Veterans Organizations
Pierce County AIDS Foundation

Representatives of the Faith Community

Associated Ministries
The Ministerial Alliance

Representatives of the Most Affected Neighborhoods

Hilltop Action Coalition
East Side
South End

Representatives of Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness

City of Tacoma

Metro Parks

Hospitals

First Responders: Police, Fire, EMTs

Chamber of Commerce

Who would staff the Task Force? a trusted, local person not currently receiving City money, a history of social justice and working on homelessness with administrative support as requested from the City of Tacoma.

Why only the City of Tacoma? Timing. Offer a solution to the proposed code change before it would take effect and before the cold and wet weather begins.

Open to other jurisdictions? Up to the Mayor of Tacoma

Why Winter? Time limited, nearly here, most dangerous time of the year.

Scope of Task Force: Determine and fund sufficient functioning day and night safe shelter solutions prior to implementation of Metro Park/City of Tacoma Code Changes re “Temporary Shelters.”

Potential Tasks: To include:

1. review operating capacity and overflow capacity of existing shelters.
2. review capacity of homeless outreach programs and services.
3. confirm existing shelters and homeless outreach programs and services are funded and staffed at current levels through March 2020.

4. review shelters' responses to inclement weather and the cost in money, staff and in-kind to respond.
5. identify additional shelters, homeless outreach programs and services required to provide safe day and night shelter to all homeless persons through March 2020.
6. determine and recommend most effective and efficient implementation strategies including cost.
7. identify and secure funding for adequate safe shelter solutions through March 2020. Funders to include City of Tacoma, Metro Parks, private funders and new partners such as the Red Cross.
8. review safe shelter standards and minimum capacities to support community needs until permanent housing affordable to persons with extremely low incomes is available.
9. recommend adoption of any such standards required to meet health and safety requirements.
10. determine usefulness of continuing Safe Shelter Task Force

Some immediate suggestions:

1. Establish safe parking for homeless people living in their cars and/or RVs with a priority on households with children: women and children, families with children, those under 18, (try to find a work around for under-18 year olds).
2. Create daytime shelters scattered around the City and set up in consultation with homeless people in the parks and the outreach folks so there are places homeless people want to go. Distinguish the needs during "inclement weather" from those on cold/wet days - unhoused people may have different desires depending on weather.

Note: ensure safe shelter options for those unhoused people whose disabilities may preclude their ability to maintain within an existing shelter because of the noise, number of people, and behavioral expectations.

3. As required, provide transportation from locations where homeless people are currently taking shelter to designated safe shelters.
4. Employ homeless people to do some of the clean up around areas where there are obvious encampments.
5. Train Metro Parks staff to connect with homeless outreach workers and/or members of the Task Force unless the issue is clearly one for law enforcement.

6. List out in “plain English” the legal and safety requirements “churches”/nonprofits must meet to host either day or night shelters and the costs of such requirements.

7. Revise the City Temporary Shelter notice to include city identification of available public land and buildings, and city invitation of group proposals to minimize costs of multiple small contracts.

Note: Safeguard public land and buildings identified as appropriate for short-term/on-going safe shelter solutions or permanent housing affordable to people with extremely low incomes.

8. Ask shelters to declare how much money and/or staff they need to get through from November to April; what they would need in money and/or staff to expand number of beds and services. Consider using the Salvation Army and CCS St. Joseph Hospital “fees” for holding beds for unhoused people from Puyallup and hospital discharge.

9. Prepare to go to the community for volunteers whom Coalition to End Homelessness shelter and outreach organizations would train - the Salvation Army is working with the Red cross and would be able to quickly implement this program.

10. Prepare to go to the private funders and the community as a whole with a “plan.”

11. Metro Parks to provide communication and media strategy.