**ACTION PLAN**

***Building a Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness***

**Developed by the Ad Hoc Committee**

**April 2021**

**Ad Hoc Committee**

## This Ad Hoc Committee was created by the Pierce County Council per [County Council Resolution 2021-30](https://online.co.pierce.wa.us/cfapps/council/iview/proposal.cfm?proposal_num=R2021-30s). The committee included the following individuals, identified by their organizations as specified in the council resolution:

Heather Moss, Director, Pierce County Human Services

John Barbee, Community Services Manager, Pierce County Human Services

Jeff Rodgers, Homeless Programs Supervisor, Pierce County Human Services

James Pogue, Continuum of Care Committee representative

Dr. Lamont Green, Continuum of Care Committee representative

Gerrit Nyland, Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness representative

Courtney Chandler, Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness representative Klarissa Monteros, Senior Policy Analyst, City of Tacoma

Tiffany Speir, Long Range Strategic Planning Manager, City of Lakewood

Kirsten Hoffman, Emergency Manager, City of Puyallup

# This plan was created by Pierce County Council Resolution 2021-30. The intent of the resolution is three-fold:

# Establish an Ad Hoc Committee to write an Action Plan (due to the Council by April 24, 2021).

# Direct Pierce County Human Services to use the Action Plan as a guide for writing a Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness (due to the Council by September 24, 2021).

1. Develop and implement an aligned plan to provide adequate shelter for all unhoused individuals (target completion date of November 1, 2021).

The Ad Hoc Committee met four times in the month of April 2021 to develop this action plan.

**History of Past/Current Plans and Other Regional Efforts to End Homelessness**

Since 1996 the Tacoma/Lakewood/Pierce County Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) has received federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to implement new housing programs for homeless. In 2002, the first ever comprehensive plan to address homelessness was developed. This was the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. The goal was to end homelessness by 2013. The plan was robust and identified the resources needed to be successful. Organizations were prepared to expand and develop new housing and supportive services. The challenge was that there were not sufficient resources available to increase housing and services needed to succeed. During this time the CoC increased the amount of federal funding and housing services but not to the level needed to end homelessness.

In 2012, a new plan was developed, the Plan to End Homelessness. This plan had a goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2015, reducing all homelessness by 50% by 2016, and reducing family homelessness by 50% by 2021. During this time there was an increase in public funding provided by the State of Washington Department of Commerce. As in the past the increased resources were still not sufficient to support the need.

In 2017, a plan was developed to realign the CoC Committee and focus on 8 Key Results to address homelessness. By this time resources had significantly increased and access to housing and services had been realigned to ensure that households are prioritized for housing and services based on vulnerabilities and housing barriers. The CoC Committee was focused on ensuring that the implementation of this new plan was the top priority.

In 2018, the State Legislature amended the Homeless Housing and Assistance Act requiring new state and local homeless housing strategic plan requirements. The guidance issued by the Department of Commerce required local jurisdictions to develop a 5-Year Plan to address the identified objectives. Pierce County contracted with a consultant to assist the CoC Committee (local homeless housing task force) with the development of a new plan. The CoC Committee 5-Year Plan to Address Homelessness identifies five strategic priorities that includes the State required objectives. The State guidance also required that the plan be adopted by County Council. In May 2020 the County Council adopted a strategic plan that included only the five State objectives.

Other targeted plans, focusing on populations, have been developed over the years. A Youth Plan was developed in 2014 with a focus on preventing and ending youth homelessness. The plan addressed housing and services as well as education and employment initiatives. The plan targeted homeless youth, ages 12-24. In 2015 the Cognitive Impairments and/or Developmental Disabilities Plan was developed. This plan focused on increased housing and access to existing housing as well as improved health and stability. In 2019 the County commissioned an Ending Veteran Homelessness Task Force that worked on policy updates, resource accessibility for veterans and continuous improvements.

# **Overarching Goals, Definitions and Guiding Principles**

The Ad Hoc Committee held four meetings during the month of April to develop this Action Plan to guide development of a Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness in Pierce County. This section includes guidance on the Plan’s overarching goals, suggestions for key word definitions, and proposed principles to lead the planning efforts.

## Goals

The Ad Hoc Committee identified the following goals for the Comprehensive Plan to achieve:

1. Prioritize how we spend funds (if we have $X, where does next $ go? What do we fund most, or first?)
2. Clarify intent – are we focusing on long-term versus short-term solutions?
3. Identify what resources our community should advocate/lobby for?
4. Make sure our goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant (SMART)
5. Focus on long-term, high-level policy goals that regional elected officials can support, and that local plans can feed into and/or support
6. Focus not just on what has historically been possible, but consider reach/stretch goals; be innovative, yet practical
7. Aim for “functional zero:” adequate shelter available, and appropriate interventions immediate
8. Develop more than just a plan; include specific steps for action and implementation

## Definitions

In its discussions regarding definitions, the Ad Hoc Committee focused on the following:

* Define a process for how we come to shared key definitions that all entities and jurisdictions can adopt and use.
* Clarify how to balance ideal versus realistic plan (what do we have actual capacity to do, and how far should we stretch?).
* Define these terms/phrases:
  + What does “warm/safe” shelter include (and not include)?
  + How does individual autonomy and choice factor in?
  + How does Targeted Universalism define our approach?
  + What is the common definition of being “homeless” we should collectively use?

County staff proposed to the Ad Hoc committee the “comprehensive” part of the plan be defined to include responses/services along the following continuum:

* + Prevention/Diversion
  + Crisis Response
  + Shelter
  + Supportive Housing
  + Affordable Housing
  + Homeownership

## Principles

The Ad Hoc Committee identified these principles to guide development of the Comprehensive Plan:

1. Focus on diversity, racial equity, and inclusion.
2. Build plans based on the concept of “targeted universalism” and the 5 steps framework; develop a plan to address all homeless, and programs for specific populations (eg., Veterans, families, youth, DV, etc.).
3. Include experts who’ve lived unsheltered and other marginalized populations in the planning/design process.
4. Start with a value statement about overall intent of plan (such as “Ensure a place where all people belong”).
5. Shelter plan should ensure easier, faster access to shelter for all populations, and should include a wide variety of shelter types.
6. Create a regional approach that many can adopt/support/implement (downtown Tacoma cannot be the only answer).
7. Do not reinvent wheel; consider other work already done, such as the SPARC, past surveys, etc.

**Scope**

The Ad Hoc Committee discussed the ideal scope of the Comprehensive Plan and determined the following considerations be made:

* Determine how broad we want the comprehensive plan to be; should it address prevention?
* Encourage collaboration across private, for-profit, non-profit, and governmental systems and institutions.
* Recognize we have a unique chance here – don’t make this too narrow (Council requested “comprehensive” plan!).
* Systems do not work in isolation – we need to recognize and plan for how so many systems are interconnected.
* Be aspirational – lots of smaller plans happening all over (jurisdictions, specific populations, specific funding sources); they should all feed into this larger comprehensive plan.
* Consider narrow focus on building the homeless system, with connections to other systems that are homeless-friendly (we cannot fix all).
* Focus on understanding flow in system, use data to identify inflow, backlog of current people seeking permanent housing through Coordinated Entry, and outflow of successful achievement of permanent housing.
* Look at various “exit strategies” or interventions to homelessness, and identify connections to other systems.
* Consider cash assistance as a viable response/solution.
* Understand and improve connections between shelters and coordinated entry (there is not a tight connection here currently).

**Groups to Include, and How**

Representatives from the Coalition to Prevent Homelessness offer the following list of individuals, groups, and stakeholders to be included in the Comprehensive Plan development process:

* Legal support
* Fair Housing
* Faith Community (including mental health chaplains)
* Public Health
* City and County Council members
* Local jurisdiction staff
* Puyallup Tribe
* Domestic violence and sexual assault
* Private and small housing providers
* Immigrant communities
* Disability community
* Business community/private sector
* Builders/developers
* single room occupancy (SRO) providers
* Landlords
* Youth
* LGBTQ+ advocates and organizations
* BIPOC
* Experts who have lived homeless
  + NOTE: Use trauma-informed practices – be careful to not re-traumatize, ensure safety
* Medical professionals
* Educational professionals
* Community groups
* Behavioral health system (both substance abuse and mental health treatment)
* Providers to assist with identification recovery
* Providers who offer soft skill development programs
* Home ownership assistance
* Shelter providers
* employment and workforce training services

Other members of the Ad Hoc Committee offered these additional suggestions of groups to include in the plan development process:

* Cities and towns associations
* School districts
* Emergency/first responders
* Philanthropy partners
* Justice system
* Foster care system
* City and County Housing Authorities
* State agencies (DSHS, DCYF, Commerce, etc.)
* Veterans Administration and other Veteran service providers
* Continuum of Care Committee

**Public Engagement Goals and Process**

The Ad Hoc Committee had a brief conversation about public engagement goals and processes at their third meeting, and members offered the following input:

* Be sure to include as much public engagement as possible within the time constraints; public dialogue and input should encompass the bulk of time in the comprehensive planning process.
* Go to specific individual groups to identify goals, then take those goals out to public for input on how to achieve them for various targeted sub-populations (adopt a targeted universalism approach).
* Go to where the public is (go to already-established meetings, rather than making new ones).
* Consider focus groups, street surveys.
* Make sure to include experts with lived experience – the plan should be developed by those who use, benefit from, and interact with the system.
* Hire/assign someone on the team to be specifically focused on communications and engagement.
* Be sure to include system mapping and modeling to assess shortcomings and gaps; where are the problems/bottlenecks?
* Talk to people on the streets! However, do not rely solely on the homeless outreach teams to do this engagement; it could conflict with the work they are doing (and appear as though they are promising something they cannot deliver). This work DOES need to be trauma-informed.
* Develop a layer of accountability for the comprehensive planning team (both the steering committee and the work groups).
* Build on what works well in our region; elevate and build on best practices.
* Ensure broad representation on the various teams/committees involved in this effort.
* Consider how to do effective political outreach: include efforts to connect with the Growth Management Committee, Pierce County Cities and Towns, the Puget Sound Regional Council, and other conveners of elected officials and local leaders.
* Reach out as part of “regular” community events, such as local farmers markets, to seek public input.

When discussing who should lead this work and oversee the larger comprehensive planning process, the Ad Hoc Committee generally supported creation of a steering committee. Many of the members of the Committee expressed interest in being part of the steering committee, and offered the following additional suggestions:

* Consider a workable size for the steering committee – large enough to be representative, but small enough to encourage meaningful engagement and input.
* Develop a feedback loop for the larger population of interested parties so they can stay apprised with what’s happening and to amplify the work.
* Broaden the steering committee to include additional representation from the provider community, and from constituents representing East Pierce and unincorporated Pierce County.
* Be clear about who/what the steering committee members represent – themselves and/or their organizations?
* Include the Continuum of Care Committee (COC) in a meaningful way.
* Include and compensate experts with lived experience of being homeless.

Based on conversation with the Ad Hoc Committee, County staff propose to develop a core team that will do the bulk of the work outlined by this action plan:

* Facilitator to manage the steering committee meetings; this individual can also help strike the right balance between meaningful community engagement and the short timeline for these projects.
* Project manager to oversee work in both the comprehensive plan and the shelter plan
* Communications expertise
* Public engagement support
* Homeless program expertise

Additional information on these resources is in the final sections of this plan.

**Meeting Council’s Commitment to Providing Adequate Shelter to All by November 2021**

The Ad Hoc Committee recommends separating this specific assignment from the larger comprehensive plan in order to meet the more ambitious deadline of developing and implementing a plan to provide adequate shelter by November 1 of this year. The committee suggests a work group focus solely on this effort, but under the general oversight of the steering committee convened for the comprehensive planning process.

The Ad Hoc Committee is also generally supportive of the Pierce County Human Services (PCHS) staff proposal to organize this work around an interactive program and cost model reviewed in the committee’s third meeting. The model contemplates a multi-step process for building a plan to provide adequate shelter before the end of 2021:

1. Determine the approximate number of people who are unsheltered in Pierce County (PCHS current estimate is approximately 1,350 individuals).
2. Identify all of the types of shelters and other interventions we should increase in order to adequately house everyone; those could include:
   1. Diversion
   2. Rapid Rehousing (*NOTE: the Ad Hoc Committee suggests this may not be appropriate to keep in the shelter model)*
   3. Critical Time Intervention
   4. Expanded capacity at existing or new congregate shelters
   5. New non-congregate shelters (hotel, pallet shelters, tiny homes, etc.)
   6. Sanctioned encampments and/or safe parking areas
   7. In-patient behavioral health treatment
   8. Medical respite
   9. Others (*NOTE: PSH was suggested, but then dismissed because it is not considered emergency shelter*)
3. Identify other expanded services for people who are sheltered and may need additional immediate services beyond a place to sleep, such as out-patient behavioral health treatment, transportation to/from work, and storage for belongings.
4. Determine approximate volume of our unsheltered homeless population who will access each type of intervention listed above and determine per unit costs for each.
5. Build a proposed budget based on analysis, and present to Council for funding.
6. Once funding is identified and approved, work with providers on plans to expand services and create the new shelter options listed in the plan.

The Ad Hoc Committee offered the following additional suggestions for this effort during its final meeting:

* It will be important to start with a clear definition of what emergency shelter is, and what it includes, in order to clarify what is in or out of the model suggested above.
* Be clear on how this plan intersects with the larger comprehensive plan to eliminate risk of gaps and how they complement one another.
* Create a shelter plan that accomplishes more than merely setting up expanded shelter for inclement weather (one member suggested becoming a “right to dignified shelter” county).
* It is important to maintain focus on substantial implementation by November 1; it is good to maintain urgency.

NOTE on legal intervention: “Legal intervention” is one option PCHS staff included in the original model proposed as a place some homeless individuals may go; that is, despite being offered multiple choices for shelter, some individuals may decline all services. At that point, the community needs to determine a response: do we allow individuals to continue to live unsheltered, if that is their wish, or do we create a “zero tolerance” policy within the community and enforce loitering laws, detaining them either through law enforcement or civil commitment interventions? County staff proposed including this as one option in the model, and the Ad Hoc Committee had varied responses: some members supported the idea, while others thought this may be assumed, but should NOT be part of any model or planning (or budgeting) efforts. Still others thought it should not even be an optional response. There was considerable agreement that non-law enforcement individuals could be successful in doing this work.

See the timeline section below for details on how the committee proposes this work occur over the next six months.

**Project Timelines**

As indicated in the Council Resolution driving this effort, there is a six-month window to achieve a comprehensive plan from start to finish once the Action plan is submitted and approved. It is anticipated this will occur on May 4, 2021, therefore establishing the due date for the comprehensive plan on or around November 4, 2021. The Ad Hoc Committee recognizes the ambitious nature of this deadline but indicated that “this aggressive timeline spurs action!”

This comprehensive plan may facilitate contemplation of County budgeting priorities in the upcoming 2022-23 biennial budget, as well as spending priorities for funds received from the American Rescue Plan, among other possible revenue sources**.**

After initial discussion of general timeline requirements, a member of the committee offered the following timeline for consideration:

Proposed Timeline – Comprehensive Plan

* May 3 - core team of County staff and consultants formed
* May 10 - steering committee begins meeting every 2 weeks; begins by setting universal goals
* May 31 – core team develops plan outline based on steering committee goals
* June – August - outreach to stakeholders, providers, and advocates for input
* August 30 - core team publishes final draft plan
* September – October – plan shared with general public
* October - final steering committee meetings
* November 4 – core team delivers report to County Council

The Committee was clear that the bulk of the time dedicated to this effort should focus on collecting input and feedback. Committee members representing partner jurisdictions also reminded others that their elected officials will also need time to review and formally adopt (vote on) both this action plan and the comprehensive plan.

Council staff also provided two additional suggestions regarding timing of the Comprehensive Plan:

1. Build in scheduled maintenance for the comprehensive plan to allow for a natural and reasonable extension of the planning process; one component of the plan should be regularly revisiting strategies and recalibrating.
2. Include a first phase of the planning process to use data to clearly define the issue (both for the comprehensive plan and the street homelessness plan).

As described earlier in this Action Plan, the Ad Hoc Committee does recommend this effort be clearly divided into two separate efforts: the Comprehensive plan, due by November 4, and the Street Homelessness Plan, due and implemented by November 1. Accordingly, the committee generally agreed on the following timeline for consideration:

Timeline – Shelter Plan

* May 3 – homeless work group convened; clarify scope and goals
* May 17 - shelter provider focus groups (include providers, guests/clients, and neighbors)
* June 14 – core team presents draft plan to steering committee
* June – July – community input
* July 12 – core team finalizes shelter plan, including spending request and timeline
* Aug – October -- implementation
* Nov 1 – contracts in place for expanded shelter beds

**Resources Needed**

Data

In order to inform the Comprehensive Planning process, the Ad Hoc Committee briefly reviewed homeless data available from the County from both the annual Point in Time Count (PIT) and the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The Committee made the following observations:

*Regarding the Point in Time Counts for 2020 and 2021*

* PIT is generally known to be an undercount.
* 2021 Point in Time Count did NOT include a count of unsheltered population due to COVID-caused constraints on recruiting volunteers and ensuring public safety.
* Note that minority pops almost doubled from last year to this year (perhaps this is an issue of not counting street homelessness in 2021?).
* According to PCHS staff, HUD uses an extrapolation methodology to estimate race and ethnicity data across whole distribution based on those who answered PIT survey (there are no “NA” or “unknown”).

*Regarding HMIS*

* According to PCHS staff, there are large differences in data quality across providers, leading to overall data quality inconsistencies.
* The Committee specifically encourages those involved in the comprehensive planning process to “look at HMIS data with a critical eye,” given variability in data quality.
* As the data collection tool for Coordinated Entry, it’s important to note that not every service provider has access to or uses HMIS; we need to broaden use of HMIS across system or recognize there are other access points to homeless services.

The Ad Hoc Committee suggested the Comprehensive Plan include the following data considerations:

* Focus on racial/ethnic demographics, geographic distribution, gender identity, program success in permanency, etc.
* Use data to highlight various pathways and their inflow/outflow rates.
* Add qualitative data to tell stories not found/explained in quantitative data.
* Consider indicators (why people become homeless) to understand need and to focus on prevention efforts.

Funding, Coordination, Meeting Support, Staffing

The Ad Hoc Committee emphasized the need to staff and fund this work adequately to ensure success. PCHS staff proposed the following composition of a core team to lead the work described in this action plan:

* Facilitator (contract hire)
* Project Manager (contract or temporary hire; may be same as facilitator)
* Data Analyst (limited duration staff)
* Marketing/Communication support (use current staff; backfill as needed)
* Community Engagement support (contract hire; may be done by facilitator)
* Policy expertise (use current staff; backfill as needed)
* Administrative support (use current staff; backfill as needed)

The Ad Hoc Committee was generally supportive of this approach, noting the importance of building a core team that is diverse and representative of the homeless population served.

They also underscored the importance of community engagement, further suggesting a formal campaign.

The facilitator chosen should have strong communication skills and some background in homeless services.

Administrative support should include building and maintaining a strong online presence for this work.

**Recommendations to Pierce County Council**

1. Accept Action Plan, authorize continued work and expansion of Ad Hoc Committee.
2. Identify and approve funds for identified resources:
   1. Approve 3 limited duration FTEs
      1. Project Manager
      2. Data Analyst
      3. Backfill to county staff
   2. Approve budget ($250K):
      1. FTEs (3) $100K
      2. Facilitator/Comm Engagement contract $100K
      3. Marketing/meetings $ 50K
3. Clarify budget parameters for shelter plan, including budget review and funding approval

**Resources**

(need to add in hot links)

Council Resolution

County 5-year plan

CoC 5-year plan

Building Changes (two reports referenced)

Point in Time Count data (2010-2020?)

Other stuff?