**PIERCE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS AD HOC COMMITTEE**

**PRIORITIZATION SUBCOMMITTEE:**

**PRIORITIES FOR THE COUNTY’s COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**September 27, 2021; v3**

Pierce County’s Plan to End Homelessness, to be “comprehensive”, will provide the full continuum of services that such a plan will require. This means it will have the many elements necessary to address the different aspects of the need, including the following:[[1]](#footnote-1)

● **Coordination** among all levels of government and providers in Pierce County to coordinate among the different elements of the plan, to better ensure programs reflect effective practices, and to collect data for program adjustment, evaluation, and accountability.

● **Prevention services** that accurately identify households that, without intervention, will become homeless and that offer them effective services or resources to keep them housed;

● **Outreach teams** to actively engage with homeless persons, especially those who are chronically unsheltered and who are resistant to services. The teams must have the following services to offer;

● **Drop-in and service centers** to offer daytime respite space, storage facilities, and introduction to services and the building of relationships with outreach workers;

● **Safe shelter options** ranging from those with less structure and fewer services (*e.g*, safe parking spots, authorized camping spots, overnight shelter, congregate shelters) to shelter with more structure and more services (*E.g*, tiny house villages, shelters offering private rooms, shelters that do not require people to wait until evening to enter or to leave in the morning, with robust services, especially services to help a transition to housing).

● **Housing programs** to provide permanent housing or to help people find permanent housing, (*E.g*., Rapid Re-Housing, rental assistance, permanent supportive housing).

The immediate implementation of the plan will likely require more time and more resources than what will be available. This means that Pierce County will need to prioritize its efforts. To do this, the County should use the following principles. Some of them may clash. The County should seek a reasonable balance.

1. **Shelter Unsheltered people first**

The County should first serve unsheltered people, for three reasons. These reasons correspond with the three main public impulses that the County needs to enlist to support the plan:

* 1. **Concern for Persons Living on the Street, in Cars, or in Parks or Woods:**

Living outside is dangerous to persons who must do it. It impairs their health. It limits their prospects. It is degrading. The County’s efforts should prioritize serving them. This priority would value the lives at stake. It would recognize the health and public health risks of unaddressed and unsheltered homelessness.

* 1. **Street Homelessness is Expensive and Damaging to Other Civic Systems and Values**

Street homelessness makes other civic systems more expensive. *E.g.* police, courts and jails, mental health services, hospital emergency room care, inpatient hospital care. Solving street homelessness will save money in these other systems.

Street homelessness also shows most clearly the inequitable disparities present among the population experiencing homelessness: disproportionate representation among the street population of BIPOC, disabled seniors, and LGBTQ youth. In this way, solving street homelessness will advance the County’s equity goals. .

Solving street homelessness will also allow the County to address the inequitable geographic distribution that burdens some communities more than others.

* 1. **Solving Street Homelessness Will Elicit Support from a Public That Wants its Public Spaces Back for Public Use**

Street homelessness is a serious imposition on the public use and enjoyment of important public spaces, such as sidewalks, parks, and store fronts. Restoring the public use of these spaces will help elicit the public support this plan will require. For the same reason, the plan should do this quickly to give the effort an “early win”.

1. **ESTABLISH THE COUNTY’s NECESSORY COORDINATION ROLE**

An effective “comprehensive” plan requires coordination among its parts, providers, and funders. This coordination will provide the six features necessary for an effective county-wide response to homelessness: “effective leadership, a shared vision, a plan, a governing structure, application of data, and a structure for ongoing effectiveness.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The County is best situated to do this. Establishing this coordination should be a priority.

Coordination is important to ensure at least the following:

* 1. **Cost Effective Performance and Accountability**

The County should imbed into the funding and implementation of each element an expectation and enforcement of best practices, accountability, and cost effectiveness. The County will need the necessary expertise for this.

* 1. **Data**

The plan will require the periodic collection, analysis, and publication of robust data, including:

● the extent and nature of the County’s homelessness. *E.g,* how many persons, location, family composition, race, gender, age, service needs, and the goals of the persons experiencing homelessness;

● data showing how to judge a person’s risk of homelessness;

● the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of each part of the plan;

● the relative cost effectiveness of each part of the plan

* 1. **Coordination Among Plan Elements and Partners**

The Comprehensive Plan needs coordination among its elements and partners of at least two types, especially for prioritization purposes.

● *Coordination of Investment and Operation Among Elements of the Plan*:

The plan will need coordination among its necessary elements. These elements constitute a related continuum*.* Each part relies on the other parts. For example, sheltering persons living on the street require outreach workers to elicit their interest in receiving services and then to direct them to shelter and services. For outreach workers to do that, they need a ready supply of appropriate services and shelter to offer. Without this coordination an unavailable part of the continuum will become a log jam for other parts.

To avoid this logjam the County should coordinate its investment in each part of the continuum, so the related parts grow together in related paces.

● Consultation and *Coordination Among the Partners*

The plan will need adequate consultation and coordination among the many partners whose cheerful cooperation will be necessary, *E.g*,

- persons experiencing homelessness;

- the cities and towns of Pierce County;

- police and emergency services;

- private and nonprofit service providers;

- private, nonprofit and public housing organizations;

- business community;

- faith organizations;

- advocacy and grass roots groups;

- volunteers;

- public support.

* 1. **Shared Vision, Accountability, and Transparency**

The plan will need adequate agreement among the partners of the following elements of the plan:

● a vision for the plan;

● standards of performance and accountability.

The County can marshal this measure of cooperation with a close attention to transparency and communication, especially communication with the public.

1. **FlexibiliTY**

The County’s priorities should remain flexible for at least two reasons. **First**, the extent or nature of the county’s homelessness willchange. The present COVID pandemic is an example. It required significant changes in operations to control the contagion. The County’s response will need the ability to adapt. **Second**, luck or contingency will determine what is or is not possible to do. For example, parts of the plan will require the purchase or use of land, hotels or housing. Real estate opportunities are hard to predict. The County should be ready to grab them when they arise even if doing so might be out of priority order.

1. *See* Gibbs, Bainbridge, Rosenblatt and Mammo, *How Ten Global Cities Take on Homelessness: Innovations That Work, page 22 – 23 (University of California Press 2021)* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Id.* at 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)