

Homelessness – A Regional Crisis

What is Olympia Doing to Address Homelessness?

Homelessness is the most significant and urgent public concern facing our community. The 2018 Point in Time Census counted 835 homeless individuals in the county, marking a 56% increase from 2017. Although homelessness is most visible within the urban hub of downtown Olympia, this issue affects all of Thurston County.

In July 2018, the Olympia City Council declared a state of public health emergency related to homelessness. Doing so enables the City to respond to the needs in the community more quickly.

Homelessness is a complex problem, and a truly effective response will take regional partnerships and the proactive involvement of a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

The City of Olympia is committed to treating unsheltered people with respect, dignity and compassion and to minimizing harm and trauma as we assist them. We are working to provide safe and legal shelter options, while we manage City property for its intended use and balance the needs of the unsheltered with the impacts on the community.

The City cannot fix homelessness. And finding lasting solutions in our community will be a long-term process. However, the City is addressing immediate needs related to homelessness and working on longer-term strategies. Some of the steps we've taken include:

Mitigation Sites

- Plum Street Tiny House Village
- City & Faith Community Pilot Partnership
- 24/7 Shelters & Secure Storage
- Homeless Response Plan
- Expanding Housing Opportunities
- Continuum of Housing Interventions

City and Faith Community Partnership

The City and Faith Community Pilot Partnership enables faith communities and non-profits to establish and manage tiny house and transitional shelter facilities on their property to temporarily house homeless individuals. View the ordinance...

In 2019, the pilot program provides for three sites:

- Two small sites with 1-6 houses each
- One medium size site with 10-20 houses, and communal facilities

The City will provide funding and staff support for three local faith organizations to set up and manage the tiny house/shelter facilities on their property. To support this, the City Council has committed \$100,000 to fund sanitation support like portable toilets, hand wash stations, water and sewer service, trash removal and a contract with a non-profit service provider to help manage all three sites.

Faith community partners will host the facilities on their property and supply the tiny houses. They may also contribute to group facilities for homeless individuals on public land managed by the City.

City-Faith Working Group

This effort is led by a working group comprised of faith community representatives, City staff and individuals with expertise in establishing tiny house communities. This group has recently formed and is in the process of identifying sites and designing a program for the City to contract with a non-profit organization to provide services at these facilities.

FAITH Task Force

- Peter Cook - The United Churches of Olympia
- Kai Abrahamsom-Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
- Ed McClanahan-Evergreen Christian Community
- Brad Morrill-South Sound Foursquare Church
- Terry Murray-Unity Church
- Nancy Nelson-Westminster Presbyterian Church

City Staff

- Keith Stahley, Community Planning & Development Director
- Colin DeForrest, Homeless Response Coordinator

Tiny House Expert

- John Brown, Special Projects Manager, Low Income Housing Institute

Next Steps

Once sites have been identified, the host organizations will apply for a permit and, with City support, hold an informational meeting about the proposal for the surrounding neighborhood.

INFORMATION ON OLYMPIA'S HOMELESSNESS ISSUES AND RESPONSES

- City of Olympia Website
<http://olympiawa.gov/community/homelessness.aspx>
- The Olympian, Sunday, January 13, 2019 article on Conestoga Huts at Eugene OR faith communities
<https://www.theolympian.com/news/local/article224243620.html>
- Little Hollywood blog: Update on Olympia Homelessness Issues
<http://janineslittlehollywood.blogspot.com/2018/12/update-on-olympia-homelessness-issues.html>