

Agenda Report

April 20, 2020

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Department of Housing
SUBJECT: **PASADENA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

RECOMMENDATION:

The following report is for information only; no City Council action is required.

BACKGROUND:

Basic recommendations to slow the spread of the novel 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) derived from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and local public health entities include social distancing, handwashing, and staying home when sick. While these sound measures should be practiced by everyone, they are difficult or nearly impossible to practice for our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness. While there is still much to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other features of the virus, the outbreak represents a significant health risk for people experiencing homelessness because they may not be provided protection from the environment, have quick access to hygiene and sanitation facilities, or connection to healthcare services. Therefore, the City of Pasadena, along with our homeless service provider partners, have taken the following steps to assist those who are unhoused or at-risk of homelessness due to COVID-19.

CURRENT MEASURES:

- **Homelessness Prevention.** In March 2020, the City adopted an eviction moratorium to prevent evictions during the emergency order for nonpayment of rent by tenants experiencing financial impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. After the local emergency order is lifted and the moratorium is terminated, residents will have six months to pay back rent. There are an estimated 34,000 renter households in Pasadena.
- **Social Distancing.** People who are experiencing homelessness are far more likely to be living with chronic health conditions, which is one of the most significant risk factors for severe illness with COVID-19. To effectuate social distancing for this population, the City is currently prioritizing and providing alternative emergency housing using motel rooms for highly vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness, including seniors (aged 65+) and people of all ages who have

underlying health conditions that place them at higher risk for severe illness as identified by the CDC to prevent them from contracting COVID-19. To date, approximately 75 people who are homeless in Pasadena have been moved into motels. According to data from the 2019 Homeless Count, there were 321 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and an estimated 160 people over 55 years of age (sheltered and unsheltered). Additionally, the City has worked in collaboration with Union Station Homeless Services to reduce the number of people in the adult emergency shelter to allow for improved social distancing in a congregate environment. As of now, the adult shelter population has been reduced from 76 to 35 residents since the start of the COVID-19 crisis.

- **Hygiene and Sanitation.** In an effort to support ongoing preventative measures, the City has placed public handwashing stations throughout the community in areas that have higher concentrations of people experiencing homelessness to prevent or slow the spread of the virus. To date, seven stations, including two ADA stations, have been set up at Lake Avenue Church, Pasadena Humane Society, Vision Christian Fellowship Church, First United Methodist Church, Friends In Deed, The Salvation Army, and the Hill Avenue Branch Library. Three more ADA stations are currently on order. Local outreach teams have also been provided hygiene kits for distribution containing items that support proper hand hygiene, including alcohol-based hand wipes. CDC guidance and recommendations on COVID-19 protective measures indicate that if soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizers or wipes that contain 60% alcohol are an effective alternative to clean them.

Due to the outbreak, common hygiene facilities are closed to the public. To ensure that our homeless neighbors have the means to remain healthy and maintain personal hygiene during this time of crisis, the City is providing a mobile shower service at the Hill Avenue Branch Library parking lot twice per week including lunch and hygiene kits as a supplement to the City's existing homeless shower program at the Jackie Robinson Center. The mobile units used at Hill Branch Library have 2-4 showers stalls and can provide up to 72 showers per week.

Furthermore, the City has increased janitorial services and associated supplies to limit the spread of the virus to the local emergency shelters and the primary permanent supportive housing facility to reduce the spread of COVID-19. While immediate access to cleaning supplies has been compromised, the City has used its purchasing power to secure critically needed supplies that protect the health and safety of those residing in these facilities.

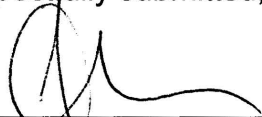
- **Isolation and Quarantine.** The City continues to coordinate with our partners across the County of Los Angeles to place people who are exhibiting symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and are not able to self-isolate or self-quarantine into specially designated motel rooms and trailers provided by the County that include appropriate medical care and transportation. Presently, the County has sites set up in Pomona and Dockweiler Beach with more sites anticipated to follow soon.

ADDITIONAL INITIATIVES


- **Back Rent Assistance.** The eviction moratorium that was adopted in March will protect residential and commercial tenants who are unable to pay rent due to the loss of income as a result of COVID-19. After the lifting of the emergency order, all back rent must be repaid. However, many renters will find it particularly difficult to pay back rent, particularly people with lower incomes. The City is currently engaged in efforts to investigate a back rent assistance program for households with low incomes as well as scale up and expand homelessness prevention services given the anticipated growing need following the local emergency. It's estimated that approximately 49% of Pasadena renter households are considered rent overburdened because more than 30% of their gross income is spent on rent and utilities.
- **Isolation and Quarantine.** Many of the traditional single room occupancy (SRO) apartments throughout Los Angeles County, including in Pasadena, are occupied by people who have formerly experienced homelessness. These SROs are configured with shared living spaces, such as bathrooms and kitchens, which make quarantine and isolation for COVID-19 purposes impractical and nearly impossible. The City is working with the operator of a large SRO to create isolation space within the building for residents in the event quarantine becomes necessary. Although many people who have COVID-19 will not be admitted to a hospital, having the appropriate space to self-isolate/quarantine is essential to reduce potential exposure and limit the spread of the virus.

The City continues to work collaboratively with our local, county, state, and federal partners to support COVID-19 planning and response strategies for our community members experiencing homelessness.

Respectfully submitted,


for WILLIAM K. HUANG
Director of Housing

Reviewed by:


Jennifer O'Reilly-Jones
Homeless Program Coordinator II

Approved by:


STEVE MERMELL
City Manager