



Agenda Item 7

June 1, 2020

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council  
FROM: Department of Housing  
SUBJECT: **RESULTS OF THE 2020 HOMELESS COUNT AND THE STATE OF HOMELESSNESS IN PASADENA**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

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

**BACKGROUND:**

The 2020 Pasadena Homeless Count was conducted from January 21 to January 22, 2020. The Homeless Count measures the prevalence of homelessness in the City on a single night within the last ten days of January, as determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by collecting information on people who are living in unsheltered locations and temporary shelter. The Homeless Count provides a "snapshot in time" that quantifies the size of the population experiencing homelessness at a given point during the year, which fluctuates on a daily basis over the course of the calendar year. While the Count does not calculate the total number of all people who experience homelessness over the course of the year, the results are particularly useful for tracking trends over time and learning about the demographic makeup of the homeless population. The results presented herein are only one source of data among many that helps the City understand the magnitude and characteristics of people experiencing homelessness in Pasadena.

The "unsheltered" Count consists of a robust canvassing of the entire geography of the City. Community volunteers and professional outreach teams survey people sleeping outdoors, on the street, in parks and vehicles, and other areas not meant for human habitation. The "sheltered" Count uses client-level data entered into the database used by homeless service providers to collect information on people who are staying in temporary shelter locations, including congregate emergency shelters, transitional housing, and hotels or motels. People who are living doubled-up with family or friends or who are couch surfing are not included in the Count, as the HUD considers these individuals to be at-risk of homelessness and not literally homeless.

HUD requires that Continuums of Care (CoCs) across the nation conduct a Point-in-Time Count of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness biennially; however, Pasadena has elected to conduct and report the findings of the Count on an annual

basis. Results from the Homeless Count are used by federal, state, and local funding agencies to allocate resources to the City.

## RESULTS OF THE COUNT:

- **Homelessness in Pasadena remains largely unchanged.** On the night of the 2020 Homeless Count, there were a total of 527 people experiencing homelessness in Pasadena, which remains relatively unchanged from 2019 (n=542). Although there was little movement in the Count numbers this year (-3%), Pasadena's numbers in the context of the County and State's two-digit increases is of noteworthy success. While the exact number of people experiencing homelessness fluctuates on a daily basis, generally Pasadena's numbers are holding stable following a steady downward trend since 2011.
- **Pasadena's investments are yielding steady progress.** The City's comprehensive response to homelessness has yielded steady and encouraging progress for close to ten years. Although we continue to battle complex upstream factors that are largely outside of the City's control, an increasing number of people are successfully getting connected to the services they need and more people continue to permanently exit homelessness, retaining their permanent housing with meaningful support.
- **More people are staying in emergency shelter.** The number of people staying in emergency shelter has gradually increased and is up 5% compared to 2019 while the number of people who are living in unsheltered locations has decreased by approximately 8%, which is promising movement. This shift comes on the heels of a significant infusion of one-time emergency funding to the City from the State that has increased shelter capacity through the provision of hotel and motel voucher resources. As such, more people are able to sleep inside and take refuge from the streets while moving forward on their path to permanent housing.
- **People with higher needs remain the most visible.** People who are unsheltered with evident unmet service needs are the most visible reminder of homelessness in the community. Despite the overall decline of homelessness in Pasadena, the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness has increased in the past two years and accounts for more than half (52%) of the total homeless population, and their higher needs make them more visible in public spaces. By HUD's definition, people who are chronically homeless have a disabling condition and have experienced homelessness for more than one year.
- **More than half of our homeless neighbors were long-term residents of Pasadena before their housing loss.** Fifty-four percent of the people surveyed in the unsheltered count were Pasadena residents before they became homeless. On average, our unsheltered neighbors lived in Pasadena for 21 years prior to losing their housing.
- **Pasadena's senior population experiencing homelessness continues to rise.** A growing share of people experiencing homelessness in Pasadena are older adults

and seniors. There was a 27% increase in the number of people who were 62 years of age or older compared to 2019, comprising approximately 14% of the total population. Likewise, older adults aged 55 and up make up 30% of Pasadena's homeless population and 40% of the chronically homeless population compared to other age groups.

- **Black people continue to be overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness.** Data from the Count highlight the persistent racial inequities that feed into the homeless services system. Thirty-one percent (31%) of people experiencing homelessness identified as Black or African American, despite this group representing only 10% of Pasadena's general population according to the American Community Survey (ACS) Census Bureau data. Black people are also slightly more likely to experience chronic homelessness in comparison to their White and other minority counterparts.

## **PROGRESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY FOR HOMELESS SUBPOPULATIONS:**

*The Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* identifies four homeless subpopulations who have been prioritized by federal partners due to their distinct barriers and needs. A status update and summary of Pasadena's policy recommendations for each subgroup are as follows:

- **Homeless Veterans.** Veterans comprise approximately 7% of the total homeless population (n=38), which is relatively stable compared to previous years. Meaningful change will depend on strengthening partnerships with Veterans Affairs (VA) programs and HUD to ensure adequate staffing is available and maximum utilization of Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) housing assistance vouchers, regardless of barriers such as military discharge status.
- **Chronically Homeless.** Slightly more than half of the City's homeless population is experiencing chronic homelessness (n=275). Single adults are more likely to be chronically homeless compared to families with children (58% v. 8%) and older adults aged 55 and up are more likely to be chronically homeless compared to other age groups. Reducing chronic homelessness requires targeted funding commitments, federal, state, and local political will and ongoing cross-sector coordination across mainstream systems.
- **Homeless Families with Children.** This is the second consecutive year where zero families were experiencing unsheltered homelessness at the time of the Count, which underscores the success of the family system in rapidly connecting families to shelter resources. There were 24 families with children experiencing homelessness in Pasadena who were staying in emergency shelter, representing 5% of the total homeless population which mirrors results from 2019. Strategies to further reduce family homelessness should continue to focus on rapid rehousing and employment support and increased investments in early interventions such as targeted homelessness prevention assistance.

- **Homeless Unaccompanied and Parenting Youth (18-24).** Unaccompanied and parenting youth comprise approximately 4% of Pasadena's homeless population (n=22), which is slightly lower than previous years. Prevention and early interventions should focus on conducting in-reach to individuals exiting youth systems, including foster care and juvenile justice. Strategies should also focus on connecting youth to education and employment opportunities to promote long-term stability, which is why the City has invested in youth-specific rapid rehousing resources.

The 2020 Homeless Count full report will be available for public viewing on the Pasadena Partnership to End Homelessness website at [www.pasadenapartnership.org/homeless-count-reports](http://www.pasadenapartnership.org/homeless-count-reports) at the conclusion of the City Council meeting.

## **RESPONDING TO HOMELESSNESS IN PASADENA:**

The City is pursuing specific measures to address the findings outlined in this report and remains committed to investing in proven long-term solutions and strategic initiatives that are grounded in evidence-based best practices.

Pasadena continues to carry out our long-standing commitment to innovatively use our resources to expand and promote the production of permanent supportive housing (PSH). The City Council has succeeded in approving land and \$5 million for Heritage Square South, a mixed-use development which will consist of 69 units of permanent supportive housing for seniors exiting chronic homelessness, and has committed \$1 million in funding to The Salvation Army Hope Center project that will comprise 65 units of permanent supportive housing for people exiting chronic homelessness.

The City has increased funding for early interventions such as homelessness prevention assistance to further reduce the number of individuals and families who fall into homelessness for the first time. These programs help support people who are at-risk of homelessness by providing temporary financial assistance and short-term case management to resolve housing crises and instability. State and local resources continue to be prioritized for rapid rehousing assistance to shorten the length of time lower acuity individuals and families experience homelessness and to help them regain self-sufficiency through temporary housing assistance and case management services. The City is also utilizing State funding to support housing navigation and location programming that provides housing search and placement assistance to people who have a housing voucher to improve access to permanent housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness.

Motel vouchers have proven to be a valuable resource as they increase bed availability rapidly and offer flexibility with short to medium-term stays to best serve each client's unique and varying needs. As such, the City has dedicated a subset of State funding to continue providing motel vouchers as an alternative to shared shelter settings for people who have higher barriers to engagement or for whom a traditional shelter would not be a good fit. Furthermore, the City is funding a service liaison for the Police Department's

HOPE Team who will conduct outreach and respond to calls for service with the HOPE team on a full-time basis to support day-to-day outreach efforts, provide linkages to community resources that will get people connected to the services that they need, and provide follow up services to individuals who would benefit from additional support until they are connected to housing navigation and case management. This lower barrier model of service provision involves meeting people where they are at rather than strictly relying on the traditional approach of site-based services that may be inaccessible for marginalized populations that have prolonged experiences of homelessness.

Finally, the City has prioritized housing retention efforts by hiring a full-time Housing Retention Specialist to assist rental assistance program participants within the Department of Housing who previously experienced homelessness to maintain the terms of their lease and remain in compliance with rental assistance program requirements in order to maintain their housing and rental subsidy. Housing retention support is a critical component to ensuring people do not return to homelessness once they have exited.

## **STATE OF HOMELESSNESS IN PASADENA:**

### **People are moving into and sustaining homes of their own**

In 2019, 291 people (166 households) who were homeless in Pasadena were permanently housed through programs operated in Pasadena or other parts of the County. Existing supportive housing projects in Pasadena that largely serve people who formerly experienced chronic homelessness demonstrate a 93% housing retention success rate, meaning that households remained stably housed for at least one year. This success rate holds true even among residents who have significant disabling conditions, such as mental illnesses or substance use disorders.

While the factors that contribute to homelessness are complex and multifaceted, the solution is straightforward. The best way to help our neighbors off the street is to support their transition indoors by providing housing as a building block for recovery, healing, and stabilization. City-funded housing programs have been successful in ending homelessness for hundreds of people over the years and continue to be a proven means of successfully reintegrating highly vulnerable individuals and families into the community by addressing their basic needs for housing and providing ongoing support as needed. We know what it takes to permanently end homelessness for our neighbors without homes, including those who are the most vulnerable with high barriers. Pasadena must continue to lead the way and serve as a model for other cities to invest in and support creative opportunities to increase the supply of permanent housing.

### **Increased investments in homeless services and housing**

The City's Department of Housing currently invests over \$7 million in federal, state and local funding to support a diverse group of programs and interventions for people experiencing homelessness within the City's jurisdiction. Recent one-time state funding included in this budget provides the flexibility needed to support innovative programming within the homeless services spectrum; however, these dollars cannot be

used effectively for permanent supportive housing programs, our most needed resource. This infusion of funding will eventually run out and does not provide the long-term resources needed to continue providing subsidized housing assistance and ongoing supportive services. Nonetheless, real progress is slowly being seen as a result of the City's expanded investments in prevention and diversion, direct services, street outreach, and stable housing. With the passing of Measure H, the City has been able to scale up our homelessness prevention assistance, emergency shelter capacity using motel vouchers, and rapid rehousing resources. Therefore, it is encouraging to see that the number of people staying in emergency shelter has grown slightly and the number of people living in unsheltered locations has fallen. However, while our community has invested more heavily than ever in the homelessness response system, it continues to bear the challenges and failures of other existing systems, chief among them being the region's ongoing affordable housing crisis perpetuated by fixed incomes and stagnant wages that are not keeping pace with rising housing costs.

### **Bottlenecks within the homeless system**

The primary challenge the homeless services sector continues to face is that the need for housing and services continues to exceed the resources available. Our system is currently bottlenecked at two critical points: Access to housing resources that will permanently end people's homelessness and providing low barrier, comprehensive services and ongoing support to people most in need. Presently, participants may experience long wait times to access the services they need and even longer waits for a permanent housing resource to become available because the supply is scarce and vacancy rates are low compared to the need.

### **Systemic drivers into homelessness**

In order to affect increased and lasting change, serious efforts must be made to confront and mitigate the systemic underlying root causes that are pushing people into homelessness faster than they can be moved out. Pasadena's progress should be interpreted within the broader context of systemic factors that impede the ability of people experiencing homelessness to successfully exit to permanent housing, such as rising rents coupled with low wages, the lack of relative expansion in the government "safety net" and the inability of social service programs to keep pace with increasing demand, economic pressures, structural and institutional racism, and lack of supports and services for people exiting institutions like hospitals, foster care and jails. These upstream factors should continue to be uplifted and acknowledged as key contributors to the crisis that continues to unfold. Homelessness is undeniably a symptom of a greater system-wide problem and should not be solely attributed to personal failures or poor life choices.

### **Anticipated Challenges**

The adverse consequences associated with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has the potential to push many more people into homelessness after the outbreak has subsided. In the midst of an unprecedented economic crisis, there could potentially be a significant surge in the number of people who fall into homelessness; which would further strain the resources that are unable to meet the existing demands within the homeless services system. Low-wage workers who can least afford to miss a paycheck are particularly at-risk for financial implications and loss of income that could

lead to homelessness following COVID-19. Steep financial hurdles may confront tenants in the form of back rent payments once eviction moratorium protections expire, and many people may not have jobs to return to once the pandemic slows. Given these potential challenges, the City will be programming emergency federal funding to significantly bolster homelessness prevention efforts for low-income households in an effort to mitigate expected inflows into homelessness. The City will also be prioritizing people aged 65 and up and those with at-risk chronic health conditions for permanent housing and may also explore the feasibility of increased investments to rapid rehousing programs to quickly rehouse lower acuity individuals and families with temporary assistance. COVID-19 has activated a sense of urgency among federal and state policy makers to protect and provide homes to people who are at-risk of, or are currently experiencing, homelessness through a rapid, collaborative response that should be maintained long after the pandemic ends.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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