

# Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE August 20, 2021

TO Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

SUBJECT **Office of Homeless Solutions – Dallas R.E.A.L. Time Rapid Rehousing Initiative**

This memorandum is being provided to share the collective feedback received by staff during the Office of Homeless Solutions (OHS) community and unsheltered listening sessions conducted between August 3<sup>rd</sup> and August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021. During the sessions, OHS presented an overview of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) HUD Home funds allocated to the City for use in housing and homelessness to communities via City Council District-led listening sessions and a dedicated unsheltered listening session at The Bridge. A total of 135 Dallas City residents were in attendance, across 6 sessions, with 100 unsheltered residents in attendance at The Bridge, totaling 235 residents.

The presentation highlighted:

- The state of homelessness in Dallas
- An overview of the ARPA HUD Home Funding
- Eligible funding uses
- Shelter services in Dallas by City Council District
- A summary of provider feedback

Below is a summary of the Q&A session with questions and feedback relating to the following:

**Question: What will be done about the encampments in our area?**

Answer: Through the Dallas R.E.A.L. Time Rapid Rehousing (DRTRR) Initiative, we will be able to provide a sustainable solution through the offering of real pathways to housing to people in encampments. The result is encampments closures as we house unsheltered individuals, reducing the number of encampments overall as we progress.

- **Question: How can OHS help reduce panhandling? How many of those people are homeless?**

Answer: We know that some of those panhandlers are homeless but do not have an accurate count on the percentage. We expect that the DRTRR will have the effect of reducing the number of homeless individuals who are panhandling but the larger issue will be addressed through a cross-departmental effort being briefed to Council in September through the Government Performance and Finance Management Committee.

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- **Question: There is a need for mental health and substance abuse services/programs for persons experiencing homelessness. How is that being addressed?**

Answer: More funding for this is proposed under the ARPA funds, through the Office of Community Care, for mental health services available to the general population and OHS will use the DRTRR to link unsheltered residents to more, existing supportive services, through their case workers.

- **Question: How will programs and services be desegregated across the city, so they are not concentrated in one area?**

Answer: There are a range of services available across the City of Dallas, with more being developed in partnership with specific Councilmembers in their districts. The DRTRR Initiative will offer units across the Continuum of Care because offering a wide range of choices is key to ensuring that the Initiative's housing mechanism is equitable. The choice of unit will then rest with the program participant and what best fits their specific needs.

- **Question: How can I provide immediate assistance to homeless neighbors outside of calling 911?**

Answer: There is a difference between having residents be a walking referral source and helping point unsheltered residents towards services. We are working on making all of those resources more visible on our website so they are quickly accessible when someone asks for help so you can direct them to the nearest resource to address their specific need(s).

- **Question: How will placement of homeless individuals in our area affect property values and schools?**

Answer: There are many programs across the City that house homeless people and countless children of those in emergency shelters who attend area schools. If you have not already seen a negative result due to this, it is not expected that you will in the future. We need to remember that our unsheltered residents are just like us but without a home. Their being rehoused is not a reason to expect negative ramifications.

- **Question: What will happen with those homeless individuals who are unwilling to accept services?**

Answer: The reasons that people refuse services are myriad, but it often has to do with needing a sense of control around perceived choices, when so many things are outside of their control. This can result in refusal of assistance or housing. This is where it is key to keep showing up, checking in, and offering those services/housing. It may take months or years until the necessary trust is built but ultimately, most will accept assistance. For those who continue to refuse, ultimately, we end up against the laws that do not allow camping without a permit in the City of Dallas.

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- **Question: What is the status of 2017 bond funds?**  
Answer: We still have \$7.7 million available that is currently earmarked for a homeless project in the southern sector.
- **Question: How is racial equity incorporated into addressing homelessness?**  
Answer: As we said earlier, choice in where a participant lives is key. The DRTRR Initiative will offer units across the entire Continuum of Care so that people can live close to their natural support systems. The CoC Coordinated Access System (CAS) through which unsheltered residents access the Initiative has a working group that also takes racial equity into consideration in terms of how the system identifies and matches residents with housing.
- **Question: Why was there a funding reduction for homelessness in OHS general fund budget?**  
Answer: The budget had a slight reduction in General Funds (GF) but had an increase in funding through our Federal and State grants. The GF also gives us another Street Outreach worker, more funding for site cleaning, and another contract specialist to ensure that contract compliance goals for the ARPA funding and other contractual obligations has adequate oversight and appropriate checks and balances at the OHS departmental level.
- **Question: What about mobility/transportation for homeless needing access to jobs and services?**  
Answer: We are working on bolstering an existing program that will continue existing work around this issue.
- **Question: What about zoning issues – allowances for creating more housing, types of housing?**  
Answer: This does not go through OHS, but we are in talks around more affordable units through the available Bond funds and in coordination with the City's Housing Department.
- **Question: Will the ending of the moratorium on homeless encampment closures see a return to encampments being swept?**  
Answer: It is not our policy to sweep encampments under the CDC guidelines and the DRTRR Initiative provides a way for us to humanely resolve encampments.
- **Question: What is the process for reporting encampments, IE. different pathways for addressing the encampment (code vs. OHS, private vs. public property)?**  
Answer: All encampments should be reported through 311. This allows us to track the request types, locations, and rates of resolution. From there, encampments go to OHS and once the site is confirmed, if it's public, OHS will

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address it and if it's private, it goes to Code, who works with the property owner to bring it into compliance, while OHS continues to offer resources any area unsheltered residents.

- **Question: How does the State camping law interact with the Dallas camping law?**

Answer: The State law is made to take precedence over the local camping law if it is the stronger of the two. Dallas already has a ban on camping without an approved permit, so the State law would only take over if there were a sanctioned encampment, which would then put Dallas at risk of losing State funds under the State law.

The following general feedback was also shared during the sessions:

- The presentation/approach was thorough and comprehensive with good information
- There was discussion around the Point In Time (PIT) count data concerning the history of growth of the homeless population and projection for continued growth unless something is done
- There was feedback around the need for more affordable housing and addressing of NIMBYism. OHS cited the ongoing and upcoming projects through the City's Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Department.

Overall, the sessions were well received and provided an opportunity for staff to respond directly to concerns relating to the City's current homeless programs and services. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me or Christine Crossley, Director of Office of Homeless Solutions.



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