

**City of Alameda
Transitional Housing Project
Service and Housing Model Planning Committee Report**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its 2020-2021 priority, the Alameda City Council tasked the Community Development Department (CDD) to develop a long-range plan to address homelessness in Alameda. This includes exploring the establishment of a transitional housing option to move individuals out of encampments and the streets while working on a permanent housing solution. As an advisory body to the City Council working closely with CDD, the Social Service Human Relations Board (SSHRB) provides oversight on the project.



This report presents the transitional housing plan developed by the Service and Housing Model Planning Committee (Planning Committee), a subcommittee created by the Collaboration Advancing Resources, Efforts, and Supports for Alameda's Homeless (CARES) to assist in this effort. The report identifies the project's stakeholders, strategies to engage with stakeholders, service models and housing options, cost estimates, and space and infrastructure needs. This is the first step of a multi-tiered planning process.

Through the vetting process conducted by the Service and Housing Model Planning Committee, the following recommendations advance the development of a cabin community in Alameda to support its residents experiencing homelessness:

1. Build a total of 15 do-it-yourself cabins for adult individuals (12 resident cabins and 3 staff/administration cabins).
2. Keep the FEMA trailers at the current location and use them as bridge housing for families while providers work on getting them into a rapid rehousing program.
3. Find a flat, paved location for the cabin community.
4. Hire a Public Relations/Communications agency to develop Alameda's homelessness messaging campaign.
5. Engage with the stakeholders identified in this report.
6. Build a program that incorporates the services identified in this report.
7. Develop strategies to address the land use, legal, and financing needs of the project identified on the Planning Process Tiers.

BACKGROUND

On July 25, 2020, City Council held a planning workshop that identified developing a Strategic Plan for addressing homelessness in Alameda as one of its Fiscal Year 2020-2021 priorities. Council tasked the CDD to lead this effort. At its October 6, 2020 meeting, CDD staff presented Council with an update on the programs and initiatives serving Alameda's unhoused residents. Staff subsequently received Council's directive to proceed with developing the Homelessness Strategic Plan (HSP), which includes the development of a transitional housing option to move individuals out of encampments and street living while working on a longer-term housing solution. The Transitional Housing Program (THP) may be implemented ahead of and separate from the HSP. At its October 22, 2020 meeting, SSHRB, an advisory body to the City Council, approved staff's recommendation to provide executive oversight for both projects.

METHODS

On October 29, 2020, City department leadership, City Manager, Assistant City Manager, and CDD staff met to discuss the THP and develop a plan for how to move forward with the project. At this meeting, CDD staff was tasked to vet possible temporary housing options and determine service models that may be replicated in Alameda. To assist in this effort, staff sought the support of CARES, a multisector and multidisciplinary team that advises and develops strategies, to address homelessness in the City.

CARES formed the Planning Committee, comprised of members representing the Alameda Food Bank, Alameda Point Collaborative, Building Futures, City of Alameda Community Development Department, City of Alameda Public Works Department, Operation Dignity, and St. Vincent de Paul/St. Barnabas, to explore temporary/transitional housing options that may be considered for Alameda. SSHRB appointed two of its members to serve on the Planning Committee.

The Planning Committee met for four weeks starting on November 14, 2020. To guide the process and clarify its role, the Planning Committee developed the following "Planning Process Tiers."



The committee’s work is centered on the first tier, Service & Housing Model, and is responsible for developing a plan by mid-December 2020 that identifies the project stakeholders, strategies to engage with stakeholders, service models and housing options, cost estimates, and space and infrastructure needs. The plan will be presented to the City leadership team for their review and to carry forward the remainder of the Planning Process Tiers. To keep SSHRB apprised on the progress on the THP project, staff presented an update to SSHRB at its December 3, 2020 special meeting.

RESULTS

The Planning Committee identified the impact of homelessness on the community to clearly articulate the issues and concerns that give the project its sense of urgency. Developing strategies to engage with stakeholders that are affected by the problem who might have a vested interest in the project is also important. The Planning Committee established the core principles that will guide the THP and explored the service model and housing options that may be possible for Alameda. Summaries of the Planning Committee’s discussions and recommendations are below:

Problems and Issues Identified

- Alameda’s unhoused require support and resources, including mental health services.

- Homelessness is costly. Providing services on the street is not ideal and only partially effective. Supportive services provide relief but do not reduce homelessness.
- Encampments are growing and the pandemic may result in increased homelessness.
- The presence of homeless in Alameda’s business districts is impacting the local economy.
- The visuals of homelessness are problematic for residents and businesses.
- There are myths and misinformation about the homeless. Messaging is important.

Stakeholders and Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

Table 1.

STAKEHOLDERS	ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACI • AUSD • Businesses • Caltrans • City departments/ services • County • Faith-based groups • Nonprofit organizations and other agencies serving the homeless • Residents – both unhoused and housed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire a PR firm now to work on the messaging and communication strategy before the project gets going. • Get information out early and often about the vision for the program. • Provide ongoing communication on the progress of the project. Share successes. • Hire a facilitator to allow space for people to talk but not overrun the meetings (e.g. SEEDS Communications). • Be as transparent as possible – meet with neighbors and be consistent with the messaging. • Conduct focus groups with stakeholders. Be honest about what can and cannot be done. Do not overpromise. • Be clear that having transitional housing does not mean homelessness will go away. • Get buy-in from the public by inviting the community to be a part of the set-up process. • Mutually develop a “Good Neighbor Agreement” with stakeholders. • Have a cabin and community safety plan. • Ask stakeholders what they can do/willing to do towards addressing homelessness.

Program Core Principles

- Deliver a program that is committed to inclusivity and racial equity.

- Provide pathways for Alameda’s unhoused to end their homelessness and prepare them for success with the goal of community living.
- Support the health and psychosocial needs of individuals through a comprehensive wrap-around service delivery.
- Implement a program that is informed and guided by evidence, best practice, and data.
- Bring out the best in residents by helping them realize their potential and cultivating a sense of community at the THP site.
- Develop a program that will improve the quality of life for everyone on the island.

Services and Housing Options

Table 2.

MUST HAVE	NICE TO HAVE & OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to legal services • Activities created by clients • Best practices and evidence-based programs e.g., Housing First, Trauma Informed Care, Motivational Interviewing, etc. • Benefits enrollment assistance • Case work/case management • Diverse staff reflective of client population • Flexible account to assist with emergency needs • Good Neighbor Agreement • Housing navigation services • Information and referral to services, including physical and behavioral health programs not provided onsite • Computer & internet access/Wifi connection • Job counseling & job search support • Laundry services • Location that makes it part of the neighborhood (avoid fishbowl effect) • Location accessible to public transportation or provide bus passes • Mailing address • Meals (partner with Food Bank, churches, volunteers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiered system prioritizing clients based on risk and use FEMA trailers for families as a temporary bridge to rapid rehousing • Job opportunities with low barriers to employment (e.g. Caltrans program hiring residents, on-the-job training at the THP and local businesses) • Limit enrollment to Alameda homeless residents or establish a stipulation that only a certain percentage can be taken from outside of Alameda • Establish adequate and ongoing funding for the program • Work with the Housing Authority to relax guidelines to obtaining permanent housing (e.g. criminal background check) • Landlord of multi-unit apartments to designate at least 1 unit for homeless • Support with move-in costs

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health services (leverage existing providers, such as Lifelong) • Metrics and data that demonstrate the success of the program • Privacy – ability to lock own cabin • Safe parking for residents (need cars to look for jobs/get to jobs) • Showers • Staff trained in de-escalation, mental health first aid, safety training • Security and safety • Storage • Substance use counseling and support • Support for elderly residents • Tenant and community protocols and agreement | |
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DISCUSSION

In addition to the efforts of the Planning Committee, the Alameda team met with the City of Oakland staff who graciously shared their experiences implementing community cabins. Insights from this meeting include:

- Locate the community based on geographic need.
- Communication with the neighbors should emphasize the alleviation of encampments, opportunity for the unhoused to live in a safe location, possible development of ordinance/buffer zones preventing encampments, and respite for people on the street.
- Keep the cabin community clean and safe for the residents and the neighborhood.
- Have running water available onsite.
- Take advantage of funding from the federal Housing and Urban Development Emergency Solutions Grants program if the structure is permanent.
- Pilot the program before committing to full implementation.
- Site must be on paved asphalt.
- Ratio of 1 FTE per 20 clients for housing navigation.
- Select roommates per cabin carefully; allow couples to be in the same cabin.



- Hold regular community meetings.
- Provide a neighborhood feel to the cabin community.
- Develop a “Code of Conduct” agreement so good conduct can be agreed to and practiced for neighbors and businesses.
- Reserve a couple of single occupancy units for mental health, COVID, and vulnerable seniors.
- Budget for flex funds, shallow subsidies.
- Adopt a “come as you are” approach – provide stable housing first, then work on client intervention.
- Conduct a pre-survey with consumers.
- Establish a time limit (6 months) with flexibility to extend on a case by case basis.

Focus Group with the Unhoused

Input from the unhoused is important in this process. A focus group with key consumers experiencing homelessness was conducted on December 20, 2020 (see Exhibit 1). Participants identified the services they felt were important to get them back on their feet and into permanent housing, which have been incorporated in the above Service and Housing Option section (Table 2). To contextualize some of the feedback from the unhoused, participants expressed the emotional and psychological heaviness of the experience of being homeless. For instance, a participant called the County and found out about a free laundry service for the unhoused available in Alameda, only to find out it has been discontinued at this location. While the event might seem minor, it was yet another disappointment in an already stressful life.



Stability is a luxury for homeless individuals, and having a secure environment would make a difference in getting back on their feet. The availability of a transitional housing would provide such stability and sense of normalcy. Movie nights, sports watch events, and classes can build community and keep residents engaged are important elements for the community. Residents can find purpose in being part of a community where they can participate in art projects, maintain the grounds/gardening, perform

chores, and work with support staff to secure jobs, housing, and benefits. Focus group participants see an opportunity to build or refresh their resumes by getting credit as paid workers or as volunteers through these efforts. This is an important step in securing employment. Older adult clients are especially concerned with facing age discrimination in the workforce. Once housed, older persons are also challenged with maintaining their housing as they experience physical and cognitive decline. None of the focus

group participants who own a vehicle are willing to give it up. They need transportation to look for a job and to travel to and from work. A secure place to park their cars onsite or close to the site is also needed.

Community Cabins Site Visits

On December 1, 2020, the planning team conducted site visits of the Mandela and Northgate community cabin sites in Oakland managed by Operation Dignity. The size of each cabin is approximately 10x16 ft. and fits two people. The community includes the following services and amenities:

- At least 3 cabins for housing navigator/property manager, counseling room, and coffee/snack station.
- Community space where residents can prepare/microwave meals, watch TV, play board games, and participate in activities.
- Portable toilets.
- Mobile showers provided weekly by Dignity on Wheels.
- Onsite mental health services through Lifelong Medical Care.
- Dog park/space to walk dogs.
- Planters and benches built by the Eagle Scouts.
- 24 hour staff and/or security available onsite.
- Low-voltage electricity in each cabin for charging phones and lighting only.
- Meals 2x a day.
- Wrap around social services and referral.



To initiate the community cabin project, Operation Dignity staff indicated that the following should be taken into consideration:

- Locate a flat, concrete/paved site.
- Provide showers and laundry onsite.
- Create a community that blends-in with the neighborhood e.g., use wood fencing, as opposed to wire fencing with wrapping.
- Involve the community in the project.
- Build the cabins using a do-it-yourself kit

(Seattle model). While pre-fabricated cabins are readily available (cost \$10k-

\$30k), the do-it-yourself cabins are the most cost-effective and could turn the project into a community effort. Neighbors and community volunteers can build the cabins under supervision by a foreperson/contractor.

- Each cabin will be double occupancy with two cabins set aside as ADA single occupancy or for residents with severe mental illness that need a solitary space.
- Portable cabins on wheels will enable the community to be moved to other locations in the City.

Estimates to build 10 do-it-yourself resident cabins for up to 20 people plus 2 ADA single occupancy cabins is approximately \$200,000, which includes one-time facility, equipment, and supply start-up costs. Staff offices of up to 3 cabins (not included in the budget) may also be built for a total of 15 cabins. Ongoing administration and operational budget for the project is approximately \$596,000 per year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Presented below are the recommendations and next steps based on the planning efforts of the Planning Committee, feedback from individuals experiencing homelessness, and information shared by the City of Oakland and Operation Dignity on their cabin community projects.

1. Build a total of 15 do-it-yourself cabins for adult individuals (12 resident cabins and 3 staff/administration cabins).
2. Keep the FEMA trailers at its current location and use them as bridge housing for families while providers work on getting them into a rapid rehousing program.
3. Find a flat, paved location for the cabin community.
4. Hire a Public Relations/Communications agency to develop Alameda's homelessness messaging campaign.
5. Engage with the stakeholders identified on Table 1.
6. Build a program that incorporates the essential services noted on Table 2.
7. Identify strategies that address the rest of the Planning Process Tiers: land use, legal, and financing needs.

EXHIBITS

1. Notes from Focus Group with the Unhoused