

City of Alameda Homelessness Strategic Plan: Emerging Goals & Strategies

Introduction

The City of Alameda is developing a five-year Homelessness Strategic Plan to shorten the period an individual or household remains homeless, reduce first-time and chronic homelessness, and decrease returns to homelessness. This memorandum will highlight preliminary goals, strategies, and action steps that have emerged during the first two months of an eight-month strategic planning process.

The process to date has consisted of a review of current initiatives undertaken to address homelessness and the launch of a community engagement process to secure input from local residents, businesses, and experts. The outline below represents emerging strategies and will continue to be revised throughout the coming months based on ongoing community, provider, and government feedback, which will help evaluate the feasibility, cost, efficiency, and impact of proposed interventions and priorities.

At the time of the writing of this report, community input has included a convening of local residents, focus groups with direct service providers and business leaders, numerous key stakeholder interviews, and a citywide online survey still to be synthesized. The process is being led by Homebase, a non-profit technical assistance provider dedicated to building community capacity to prevent and end homelessness. It is also being guided by a newly convened Steering Committee of local experts and a core City of Alameda project management team.

In the near future, focus groups will be held with individuals with lived experience of homelessness and housing instability. In addition, there will be new engagements with City staff and the community-at-large. The Strategic Plan will also align with Alameda County and Continuum of Care efforts, outlined in reports such as Alameda County's "Plan to End Homelessness" and "Centering Racial Equity in Homeless System Design," and with local planning efforts, including the current General Plan update.

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of preliminary goals, strategies and action steps that have emerged to date, with the goal of gathering feedback and direction for future iterations. The final Strategic Plan may not include all of the developing strategies and action steps below, and it may include others not yet identified here that may come up from our continued engagement with stakeholders. However, it will represent a synthesis of community and expert input, and be supported by data-driven research and best practices.

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Many of the emerging goals and interventions seek to enhance, expand, and coordinate what the City of Alameda already does well. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that many gaps in services and housing still persist, and that a comprehensive plan, with measurable objectives, is critical for securing housing for all Alamedans.

Emerging Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Mobilize the Citywide Response to Homelessness

Strategy 1.1: Educate and engage the community on the regional crisis of homelessness.

Action Steps:

- Design an education campaign for Alameda residents, employees and businesses to ensure the community is informed about the level of local needs and the work the City is doing to meet those needs. The campaign would highlight City programs and services, data-driven best practices, and objective and anecdotal signals of success.
- Create resident- and business-focused initiatives to match local employers with individuals facing housing instability to offer employment, training, scholarship, and mentorship opportunities.

Strategy 1.2: Strengthen the Homeless Response System Infrastructure

Action Steps:

- Consider pooling reliable funding streams to secure an experienced local backbone agency to coordinate local housing and support services, and report on objective system performance measures.
- Ensure local programs can access and fully participate in the county-led Coordinated Entry System and HMIS in order to enable local coordination and oversight. The HMIS and Coordinated Entry System track households in need of housing and services. Full participation by local programs will enable the City to better track and monitor efficacy and progress in supporting its unhoused population and meeting Strategic Plan goals. In addition, it will provide a better understanding of the demographics of unhoused residents, which should allow service providers to address needs more appropriately.

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- Strengthen the housing navigation¹ process with a local “by-name” list of all known households in need of housing and services in the City to supplement HMIS data. This will enable the City to monitor activity and progress at a more nuanced level and incorporate more in-depth and qualitative information about individuals in need of assistance.
- Develop a Geographic Information System (GIS) map of locations frequented by the unhoused community in order to target services more effectively.
- Expand monthly provider meetings to bring together executive leadership, middle management, and direct service teams to share resources and improve coordination.
- Enhance the Homeless Hotline to provide 24-7 support to unhoused residents, including conducting Coordinated Entry screening, intake, assessment, and enrollment in HMIS, as well as providing emergency services referrals.
- Prioritize general fund dollars towards activities that serve as a source of match for new and existing county, federal, and state funding.

Strategy 1.3: Ensure ongoing supportive services funding

Action Steps:

- Prioritize funding to ensure temporary and permanent housing providers have adequate supportive services staffing to meet the needs of their target populations.
- Invest in case management, physical and behavioral health, and substance use services that follow a participant once housed.
- Continue assessing the need for voucher, rental subsidy, and other housing supports to prevent re-entry to homelessness.

Goal 2: Increase Access to Homeless Emergency Response Services

¹ Housing navigation refers to the process by which unhoused individuals and families are connected to housing and services.

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Strategy 2.1: Develop flexible resources for diversion, prevention, and housing retention

Action Steps:

- Expand the availability of ongoing flexible funds to support at-risk individuals and families through one-time and short-term grants to solve acute crises and emergencies that increase risk of becoming homeless.
- Expand one-time local, county, state, or federal financial assistance grants to support payment of rental arrears for individuals or families facing eviction, especially in light of COVID-19.
- Strengthen partnership with the Alameda Unified School District's McKinney Vento Program to ensure early identification of families facing housing instability.
- Develop a program to meet the needs of senior residents aging in place to promote wellbeing and housing stability.

Strategy 2.2: Provide low-barrier, housing-focused² temporary housing

Action Steps:

- Establish 24-7, year-round, temporary housing, such as housing navigation or community cabins, for unsheltered individuals or families until they are offered a safe permanent housing option.
- Assess the need for ongoing non-congregate shelter facilities, in consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic, that are adequately funded.
- Require existing temporary housing providers to adhere to Housing First³ principles and other evidence-based approaches to receive continued funding from the City.
- Enact an Emergency Ordinance to facilitate the rapid implementation of temporary shelter and other housing policies that prevent and end homelessness.

² "Housing-focused" is a case management strategy aligned with the Housing First approach that serves to focus client service plans on barriers that directly impact whether a household can obtain or maintain their housing.

³ "Housing First" is an approach to homeless assistance that views providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness as the foundation for life improvement and does not require that they address all of their issues, such as behavioral health or addiction, prior to accessing housing. Once housed, clients voluntarily participate in person-centered services and supports to help facilitate recovery and self-sufficiency. More information: *What Housing First Really Means*, National Alliance to End Homelessness, <https://endhomelessness.org/what-housing-first-really-means/>

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Strategy 2.3: Expand outreach and supportive services to unsheltered households

Action Steps:

- Train and coordinate providers in using the local “by name” list and GIS map to target services at those who are unsheltered.
- Assess the cost and impact to develop a local “Ambassador” program, which would provide local outreach to unhoused residents, hospitality and safety services for the community, maintenance and cleaning of public spaces, and employment opportunities for those with lived experience of homelessness.
- Define and publicize the roles and procedures of private and public entities who are responsible for outreaching to, and engaging with, the unsheltered community.
- Coordinate existing and new hygiene and shower service providers to achieve a daily frequency.

Goal 3: Secure a Housing Future for All Alamedans

Strategy 3.1: Assess and utilize available public and private land for housing

Action Steps:

- Conduct a scan of unused, underutilized, and available properties that would be appropriate for rehabilitation or development for permanent housing purposes.
- Identify the most suitable sites for rehabilitation or development efforts and initiate planning.
- Secure housing sites to be owned by the City of Alameda in order to obtain and maintain affordable housing for all Alamedans.

Strategy 3.2: Protect and expand affordable housing through local policy

Action Steps:

- In a manner consistent with the City’s anti-displacement study, which is being conducted to ensure local preferences comply with housing laws, implement a policy giving households who live or work in the City priority for placement in new housing developments.
- Introduce a policy that prioritizes households who were displaced from the City due to redevelopment efforts for placement into new housing developments.
- Evaluate inclusionary housing program requirements and exceptions to ensure they result in an increase in housing available for rent.

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- As part of the Housing Element update, explore opportunities to streamline city approvals for housing for the formerly homeless, and locations providing homeless services.
- Incorporate specific policy direction in the General Plan to support and prioritize the reduction of homelessness in Alameda.
- As part of the Housing Element update, evaluate the Zoning Code to ensure that it allows, by-right, for a wide variety of resources, services, and housing for the homeless.

Strategy 3.3: Coordinate short- and long-term housing solutions with the County and neighboring cities

Action Steps:

- Identify cost-sharing opportunities for partnership with the county, or other cities within the county, to secure sites for housing.
- Work with the County and/or neighboring cities to create a landlord incentivization program to secure recently vacated units and units coming to market for households experiencing homelessness.
- Require existing and new permanent housing providers to adhere to evidenced-based best practices, including Housing First, to receive ongoing funding from the City.