



Homelessness in Fairfax County: *Charting a New Course*

Board of Supervisors Housing Committee

November 22, 2022

Today's Presentation

- **Operational Assessment**

- Retrospective on community partnership accomplishments
- Public investments in homelessness assistance
- Areas of opportunity for improvement

- **Expanding Solutions**

- New or under-utilized options for services
- Zoning requirements and allowances
- Locations for permanent supportive housing

- **Toward a New Long-Term Strategy**

- Governance
- Inclusive community engagement

Operational Assessment

Speakers: *Thomas Barnett, Deputy Director, Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, Dept. of Housing and Community Development*

A review of homeless system accomplishments, public investment in homeless assistance, and a summary of areas of opportunity for the Fairfax County homeless services system's improvement.

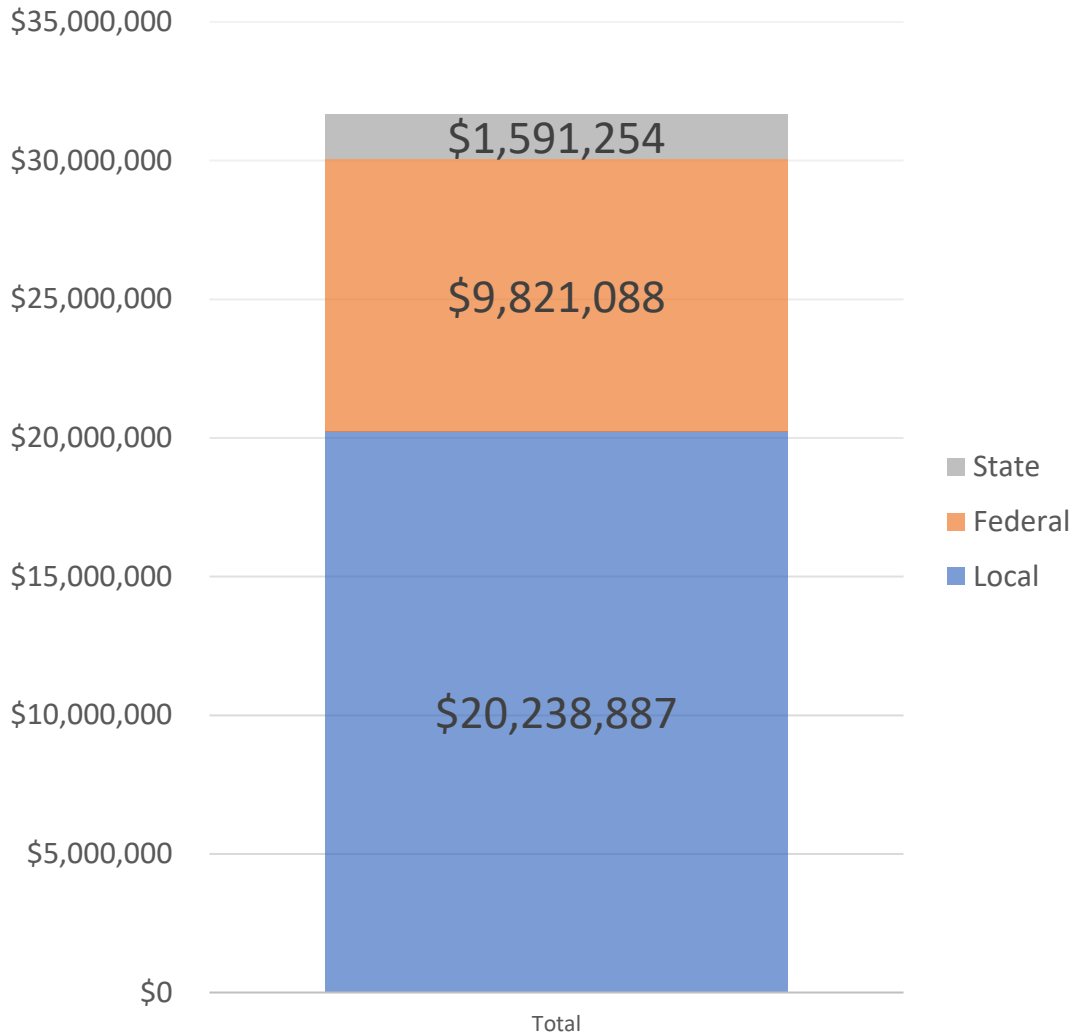
Retrospective on Accomplishments

Over the past 10 years, the Fairfax County community partnership has:

- Reduced homelessness:
 - 22% fewer people experiencing homelessness
 - 20% less chronic homelessness
 - 33% fewer families with children
 - 47% fewer veterans
 - 68% fewer unsheltered individuals
- Increased housing resources:
 - 57% more competitive HUD Continuum of Care funding
 - 70% more permanent supportive housing

But the challenge remains in Fairfax and the nation, so it is time for a fresh look

Investments in Homeless Assistance (FY22)



- Total government, non-pandemic funding = **\$31,651,229**
- Total number of people served by the community partnership = **6,048 people**
- Including **721 families with children**
- Supports projects, such as:
 - Homeless Healthcare Program
 - Street outreach
 - Domestic violence shelters
 - Permanent supportive housing

Areas of Opportunity

- **Internal Audit Office conducted assessments:**
 - Operational performance of homeless system and providers
 - Cost and benefit analysis of hotel usage
- **System Performance Improvements Needed:**
 - Increasing the successful placement in, or retention of, permanent housing
 - Reducing the length of time persons remain homeless
 - Increasing employment and income growth for homeless persons
- **Constraints:**
 - Housing for extremely low-income households
 - Nonprofit staffing capacity
 - Increased demand for services

New/Under-Utilized Options

Speaker: *Thomas Barnett*
Deputy Director, Office to Prevent and End Homelessness
Department of Housing and Community Development

An analysis of options that are under-utilized or not currently being used to address homelessness in Fairfax County, based on practices in similar communities.

New/Under-Utilized Options

- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Specialized Emergency Shelters
- Shallow Rent Subsidies
- Diversion from Homelessness
- Non-Traditional Housing Types
- Housing Stability Support Program

More Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)

- **Definition:** PSH is non-time-limited, affordable housing in which supportive services are provided to assist residents to live independently. Can be in a dedicated facility or in scattered-site apartments with rental assistance.
- **Benefits:**
 - Effectively houses chronically homeless families and individuals
 - Reduces the number of people experiencing homelessness
- **Challenges:**
 - Costly to subsidize extremely low-income households and provide staff
- **Current Inventory & Pipeline:**
 - 669 units as of January 2022 Housing Inventory Count
 - 88 units at two locations in the development pipeline, more on the way
 - Funding for services is key

More Non-Congregate Emergency Shelter

- **Definitions:**
 - An emergency shelter is a facility where the primary purpose is to provide a temporary shelter for persons experiencing homelessness, and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements
 - Non-congregate shelters are locations where each individual or household has living space that offers some level of privacy, such as hotels, motels, or dormitories.
- **Benefits:** Improves guest privacy, comfort, reduces unsheltered homelessness and the spread of infectious diseases
- **Challenges:** Costly, only temporary housing i.e. cannot reduce overall homelessness

New Population-Specific Emergency Shelter

- **Definition:**

- A shelter that only serves a specific subpopulation experiencing homelessness, such as women, veterans, or transition-age youth.

- **Benefits:**

- Can create increased feeling of safety for guests
- Tailored services can be more effective

- **Challenges:**

- Costly to build or lease
- The larger population experiencing homelessness is restricted
- Only temporary housing i.e. cannot reduce overall homelessness

Facilitate More Non-Traditional Housing Types

- **Definition:**

- “Non-traditional” housing, for this discussion, includes micro-units for singles (such as Coan Pond), “tiny houses,” and other options that can be deployed to provide permanent housing for formerly chronically homeless individuals

- **Benefits:**

- Provides opportunities for small-scale new housing for single individuals who previously experienced homelessness
- In some cases, modular or other manufactured housing options may be able to be delivered more quickly than traditional multifamily housing
- Provides a potential opportunity to use smaller parcels of land to deliver additional affordable housing options

- **Challenges:**

- Site selection, cost, the development process and operations will all be critical challenges to successfully deliver and manage these types of units.

Shallow Rental Subsidies

- **Definition:** A small, monthly rental assistance payment that provides long-term stability to program participants to help them achieve housing stability, and prevent first-time homelessness or a return to homelessness
- **Benefits:**
 - Prevents the loss of housing and homelessness
 - Ideal for households with fixed incomes
 - Low administrative burden
 - Can serve larger number of households than traditional subsidies
- **Challenges:**
 - Targeting households most at risk of homelessness is difficult
 - Can be difficult to implement in a high-cost rental market

Diversion from Homelessness

- **Definition:** Helping people who are imminently about to become, or recently became, homeless by helping them immediately identify alternate, safe housing arrangements and connecting them to services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing.
- **Benefits:**
 - Costs less than emergency shelter
 - Increases shelter capacity by reserving for those without any other options
 - Reduces trauma of homelessness
- **Challenges:**
 - Flexible direct financial assistance funding is needed
 - Not all households can be diverted

Housing Stability Support Program

- **Concept:**

- Case management and housing location services to assist households in the community facing eviction, before they become homelessness
- Provide flexible financial assistance for applications, moving, security deposits

- **Benefits:**

- Reduces demand on emergency shelter and homelessness
- Prevents unnecessary trauma of families and individuals losing housing

- **Challenges:**

- Funding required for staffing and flexible financial assistance
- Not all evictions can be stopped without long-term support

Recommended Options

- **Multiple options can be pursued but they are interdependent, and must be coordinated for long-term success:**
 - Only housing ends homelessness
 - But shelter and street outreach saves lives
 - Innovative approaches are possible
- **Develop and align resources to:**
 - Increase the availability of affordable and supportive housing
 - Ensure access to emergency services for people in housing crisis
- **Prevent homelessness whenever possible**
- **When it happens, make homelessness rare and brief**

Solutions In Progress

- **Pilot Project to Help Increase Housing Stability**
 - \$5 million over 3 years from Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority
 - Intense support for recently homeless program participants in voucher programs
- **Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Vouchers**
 - 30 recently awarded, which provides permanent supportive housing for veterans
 - Will help Fairfax County end veteran homelessness in 2023
- **Built for Zero**
 - Privately-funded diversion pilot to reduce inflow into homelessness
 - Reductions in veteran homelessness
- **Heat Emergency Response Stakeholder Workgroup**
 - Government, nonprofit, and community member participation
 - Identified ways to keep unsheltered individuals safer from extreme heat

Zoning Considerations

Speakers: *Thomas Barnett, Deputy Director, Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, Dept. of Housing and Community Development*

A review of current zoning requirements and proposed considerations that would allow private entities to operate emergency shelters in vacant and underutilized commercial and industrial buildings offering shelter and transitional services.

Zoning Considerations

- **Congregate Living Facility** - A facility that provides housing and general care on a permanent or temporary basis, including the provision of on-site supportive services, such as special care and treatment, in a supervised setting with on-site counselors or other staff. This use includes facilities providing in-patient alcohol and addiction treatment and services and facilities for the care of more than eight persons with disabilities. This term does not include a group household unit, group residential facility, assisted living facility, specialized instruction center, or any facility providing services or treatment to nonresidents of the facility. **(CURRENT)**
- **Emergency Shelter** - Any facility where the primary purpose is to provide a temporary shelter for persons experiencing homelessness, and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements. **(NEW)**
- **Permanent Supportive Housing** - Housing in which housing assistance (e.g., long-term leasing or rental assistance) and supportive services are provided to assist residents. **(NEW)**

Zoning Considerations

- Propose new use – **“Alternative Use of Commercial Buildings for Emergency Shelter or Supportive Housing”**
- Special exception use would permit repurposing of a commercial building in a Commercial, Industrial, or in some Planned Districts with approval by the Board
- Commercial building includes buildings designed or used for office, hotel, retail, institutional, or industrial purposes.
- Proposed as SE use in all C Districts, I-2 through I-5 Districts and in PRC, PTC and PDC Districts
- Standards:
 - Be near bus service, mass transit, or mixed-use area or near community services
 - Provide on-site services, including 24 hours a day for emergency shelters
 - For supportive housing, incomes averaging below 60% of area median income

Toward a New Long-Term Strategy

Speaker: *Thomas Fleetwood, Director*
Department of Housing and Community Development

An outline of the next steps in developing a community plan to address homelessness in Fairfax County.

Recommendations

- **New Continuum of Care (CoC) Governing Board:**
 - Move current CoC Committee from under the Affordable Housing Advisory Council to be independent body
 - Add members, including appointees of the Board of Supervisors and people with lived experience of homelessness
- **Transparency:** Consistent information reporting by new CoC Governing Board to the Board of Supervisors and the community
- **New Community Plan:**
 - Work with Department of Neighborhood and Community Services on inclusive community engagement, especially among people experiencing homelessness, to conduct needs assessment
 - Hire consultant to support new CoC Governing Board to set strategic priorities
 - Report to be delivered to Board of Supervisors in time to inform the FY25 budget

Other Important Next Steps

- **Need to Address Staffing Issues at Homeless Shelters**
 - Nonprofit staffing vacancies remains major barrier to success
 - Like Fairfax County and other employers, more competitive salaries and financial incentives will be needed to attract and retain qualified staff
 - After working with the Department of Management and Budget, recommend one-time ARPA allocation for FY 2023
 - Will work to identify recurring baseline funding needs
- **New Request for Proposals for Homeless Services**
 - Estimated 2023 for most County-contracted homeless services



Questions?

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