CoC Strategic Planning Committee
January 21, 2026

Fairfax County, Virginia
Office to Prevent and End Homelessness
and
Oryx Solutions

Agenda

1. Process Overview and Inisghts (5 minutes)

2. Results Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Committee Discussion of Selected Results (25 minutes)

4. Phase 1 results informing Phase 2 (5 minutes)

What does a safe space where all voices are valued look and feel like?

Notes from Kick-off Meeting Re: Shared Agreements

- Speak from your own experience

- Every participant's perspective is valuable

- If you tend to speak often, make space for others

- Assume positive intent but attend to unintended impacts of your words

- Stay present and remain engaged to the best of your ability

Process Overview and Insights

Listening Sessions

- Access
  - Language
    - Spanish for People with lived experience / expertise and Community Members
  - Location
    - Shelters, Public Libraries, Community Centers
    - Virtual

- Participation by Audience

	Number of Listening Sessions Offered	Average number of participants per group
People with lived experience / expertise (PLEE)	8	14
Staff	6	1 or 2
Community Members	7	2

Survey

- Access
  - Plain language
  - Spanish / Arabic
    - No one accessed the survey through the translations

- Participation by Audience
  - People with lived experience/expertise (PLEE) – 1
    - Promoted via flyers and emails
  - Staff – 63
    - All collected at staff meetings
  - Community Members – 192
    - Engage Fairfax, Listservs
    - Community Engagement (NAACP, Fairfax Police)
    - Paid Promotion (Fairfax County Times, Falls Church News-Press, Central Fairfax Chamber Bulletin Board)

Insights

- Align most effective strategy with each audience
  - PLEE – Listening Sessions
  - Staff – Survey completed at staff meetings
  - Community – Survey – promoted through Engage Fairfax, Listservs, Community Groups, Paid promotion at Falls Church News Press and potentially FFXNow.

- Spanish and Arabic access options were not utilized
  - Consider partners engaged (deeper or broader engagement)
  - Determine whether Google Translate is sufficient for surveys

Results Presentation

Headlines

1. It is possible to prevent and end homelessness, but we need more resources and innovative approaches to accomplish it.

2. The staff and people with lived experience / expertise of homelessness (PLEE) have different perspectives on the role of case management causing friction and dissatisfaction between these groups.

3. With limited resources, respondents would prioritize Fairfax / Falls Church residents, families and people with significant mental health challenges first.

4. In addition to housing vouchers / rental assistance, investing in prevention (paying for past rent or utilities and landlord mediation) are the most critical services.
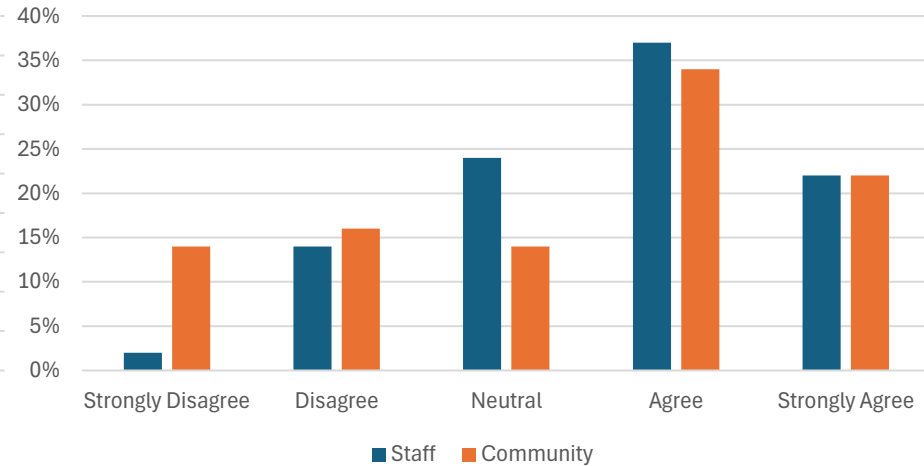
Context

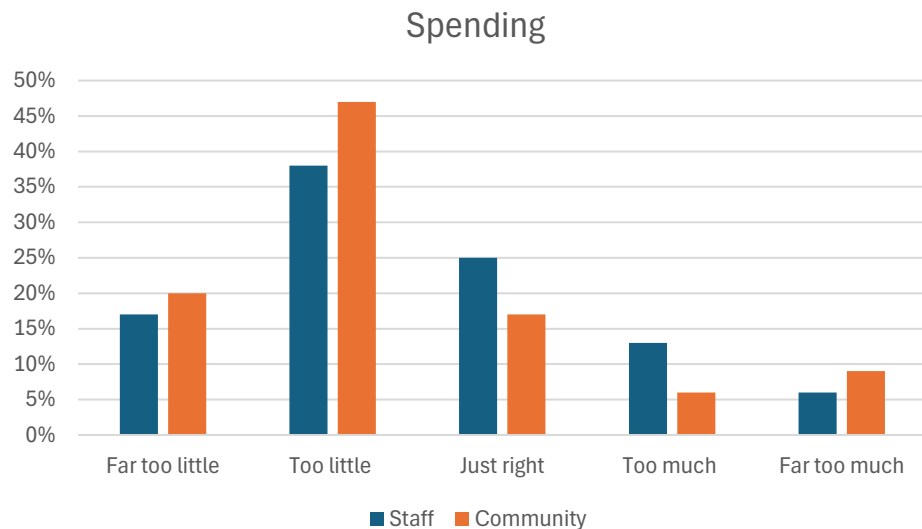# Is it possible to ... homelessness?
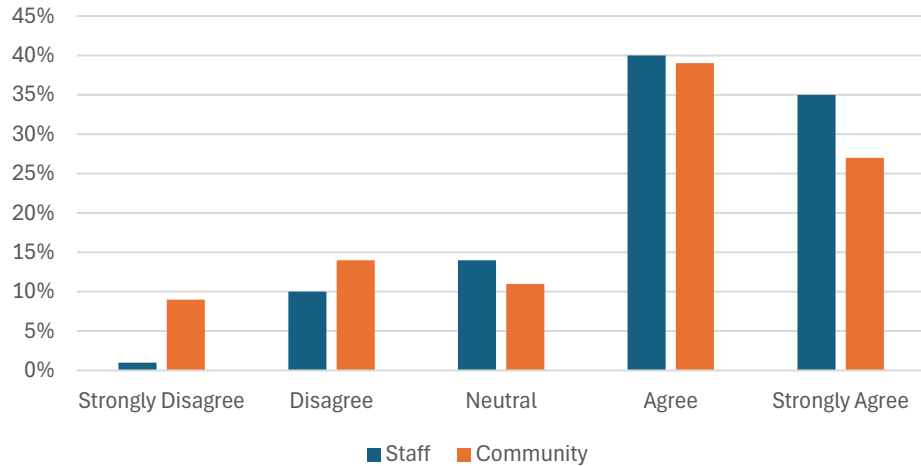
Community Spending to Address Homelessness

Spending

"I'm concerned that a significant portion of our taxes is being overspent on homelessness."

"We could spend more to add services for those who are homeless for less than a year, even if that means building a new shelter."

"Budgets have been cut recently and that limits the length or amount of assistance we can provide."

Community members thinking outside the box

- "We need rental matching services for our elders and other options that other localities are providing (like a tent area in that Pheonix recently set up. It is reported to be safer than shelters)."

- "If we invested in harm reduction services, a permanently open homeless shelter with career service programs and mental health services (perhaps even discussing a UBI program), we could help people experiencing homelessness escape that situation permanently."

- "Tiny houses or SROs with case management, as well as affordable rents an absolute must."

- "Policies that could change this include raising the minimum wage, using cash incentives to encourage homeowners to rent out basements and spare rooms, having social workers in libraries, community centers and home depot parking lots."

Mixed Support for Rapid Re-housing

"They were trying to put me in a RRH apartment when I make $2000 and rent is $2400. The math ain't mathing." ~ Client

"OPEH heavily interferes with housing process such as RRH (Rapid Rehousing). Too much pressure on individuals with disabilities because of OPEH requirements." ~ Staff

"We need more shelters and more rapid rehousing and affordable housing." ~ Staff

"However, if they've been on the dole for longer than, say six months (which is more than enough time to get their life together -- unless there are mental issues involved), they be removed and the next candidate should be given their slot." ~ Community

Prioritization of Sub-populations

Wide Support

- Children / Youth

- Individuals with significant mental health challenges

- Individuals with disabilities / Disabled people

- Elders / Older Adults

Mixed Support

- Individuals with substance use disorders

- Undocumented immigrants

- Returning citizens / Formerly incarcerated individuals

Additional PLEE Perspectives

- Housing alone is not enough without mental health, transportation, childcare

- System complexity feels overwhelming, especially when compounded by illness, trauma or caregiving responsibilities

- PLEE consistently asked for "real help" meaning ongoing support not just referrals.

- Homelessness erodes identity and dignity. Stability is defined not just as housing but as "peace," "routine," and "self-sufficiency."

Recommendations

Prioritize Fairfax Residents

We should help residents first
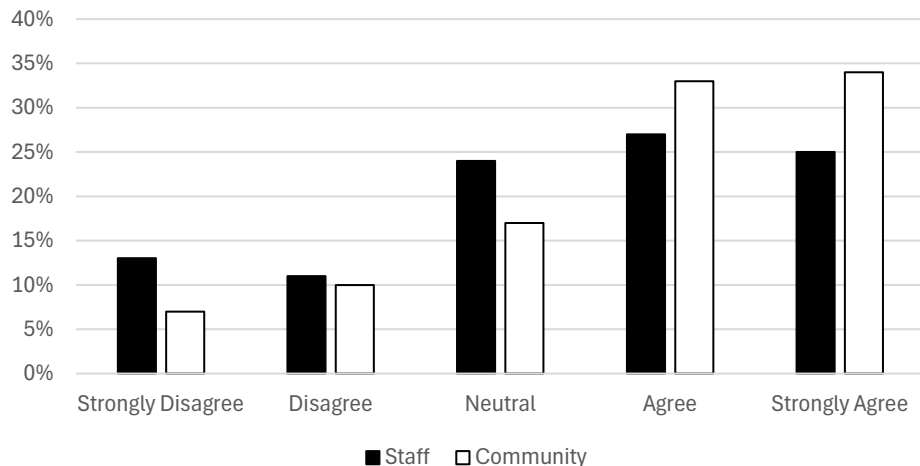
"It may be challenging to determine whether or not someone is a resident of our community, especially if they have lost paperwork or identification while experiencing instability."

"I think that when addressing homelessness, we should prioritize supporting families and individuals within our own communities before allocating taxpayer funds elsewhere"

"I disagree to said I will help only people in neighborhood. No matters for me, who is from people for help."

Help Families First

Rank the following groups by who has the greatest need for help		
Staff		Community
2	Families currently experiencing homelessness (first occurrence of homelessness)	1
4	Families currently experiencing homelessness (prior history of homelessness)	2
1	Families facing eviction within 14 days (no history of homelessness)	3
3	Families facing eviction within 14 days (prior history of homelessness)	4
7	Individuals currently experiencing homelessness (first occurrence of homelessness)	5
5	Individuals facing eviction within 14 days (no history of homelessness)	6
8	Individuals currently experiencing homelessness (prior history of homelessness)	7
6	Individuals facing eviction within 14 days (prior history of homelessness)	8

Help Families First – Cont.

"There needs to be more support for tenants seeking affordable housing and emergency rental assistance, particularly those with disabilities and children."

"My suggested priority for assisting the homeless:
1. Family units with children, whether county residents or not.
2. Those with mental health, physical disability and substance abuse issues, with priority to county residents.
3. All other county residents."
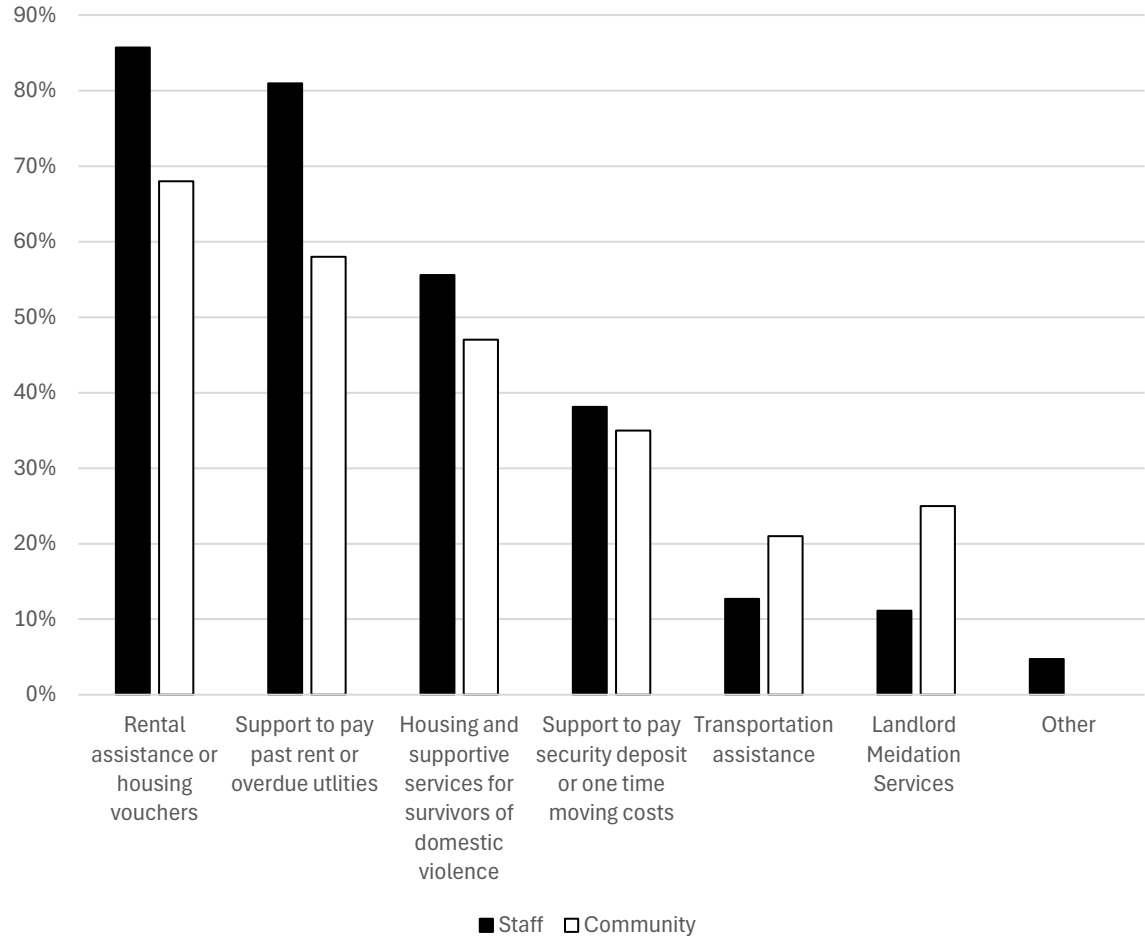
"More income subsidies to help families pay rent"

"DEPENDS IF THEY ARE CHILDREN. ALL CHILDREN MUST BE PRIORITY"

OPEH Resource Allocation Recommendations

PLEE Prioritization for OPEH Resources
1. Rental assistance or housing vouchers (long-term)
2. Support to pay past rent or overdue utilities
3. Landlord Mediation Services

Most Effective Interventions

Supportive Service Prioritization

Community Members Prioritization of Supportive Services	PLEE Prioritization and Comments
Job support (Help completing an online application, tuition assistance for job certification or credentialing programs, identifying job openings and sharing them with clients, etc.)	**Medium** - Discussed in five listening sessions, highlighted importance of doing more than identifying job openings, prioritized tuition assistance for job certification or credentialing programs, requested support to access gig economy, need for permanent address / reliable mail
Mental health (Virtual and in-person mental health and psychiatry services, therapy for children and adults experiencing homelessness, etc.)	**High** - Discussed in all listening sessions, access to health and behavioral health services a top priority, inconsistent knowledge within the participants of what services are available
Income support (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], Veteran benefits, Disability Benefits, etc. and assistance gathering and submitting paperwork for renewal of these benefits, Financial literacy and coaching, etc.)	**Medium** - Discussed in five listening sessions, support applying for benefits a high priority, inconsistent understanding of what support is available, financial literacy and coaching not a priority
Food support (Assistance applying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP/food stamps], Warm congregate meals, food distribution to unsheltered individuals, food pantries, etc.)	Not called out as a specific theme in PLEE groups

Supportive Service Prioritization – Cont.

Community Members Prioritization of Supportive Services	PLEE Prioritization and Comments
Substance use support (Short-term treatment programs, detox, medium-to long-term recovery services [residential and outpatient], etc.)	**High** - Discussed in all listening sessions, access to health and behavioral health services a top priority, inconsistent knowledge within the participants of what services are available
Healthcare (Free health clinics, support to access prescriptions, assistance to apply for health insurance [Medicare or Medicaid] or gather documentation to requalify, etc.)	**High** - Discussed in all listening sessions, transportation to appointments identified as a key challenge
Legal support (Meeting with pro-bono attorneys about work or housing related legal issues including discrimination, retaliation, wrongful termination, harassment etc.)	**High** - Discussed in all listening sessions, Included landlord mediation but also support to address child custody / child support issues, employment discrimination, and other legal issues.

Committee Discussion of Selected Results

Personal Responsibility

About **30**% of staff respondents and **20**% of community members shared comments that we grouped under the theme of "personal responsibility" (see examples at right).

How should these sentiments be incorporated into planning?

Across all PLEE listening sessions, one consistent theme emerged: feeling listened to, respected and treated with dignity by staff matters deeply to people with lived experience.

Is this PLEE feedback connected to the "personal responsibility" comments raised by staff and community members? If so, how?

How should these perspectives collectively inform the goals and priorities of the strategic plan?

There are some people who seem to rather rely on services over working and looking for affordable housing. ~ Staff

Clients do not want to help themselves. Most clients don't want to do the leg work. ~ Staff

For the homeless that are willing to own the actions required to not be homeless should receive the most support. For those who have expectations that actions are owned by the supportive group and not them, need to be counseled and take some ownership. ~ Community

Last, some people prefer to live an alternative lifestyle due to drug usage and their community of similar people. ~ Community

Some community members feel unsafe

22 out of 192 Community Respondents made comments in one or more of the following themes

- Panhandling is a problem for the community

- People experiencing unsheltered homelessness are criminals

- Expressed feeling "unsafe" when seeing unhoused individuals

Questions for Discussion

How do we distinguish between perceived safety and actual safety risk in this feedback and how should each inform planning?

Does this feedback suggest a need to prioritize visibility, communication or coordination?

What tradeoffs might arise if safety perceptions become a top strategic driver?

Prioritization of Individuals with Significant Mental Health Needs

- Broad agreement across people with lived experience (PLEE), staff, and community respondents

- Individuals with serious mental illness or significant mental health needs should be prioritized for services and rental assistance

- Consistently ranked as a top priority—nearly on par with children and youth

Questions for Discussion

What is needed in the system design, partnerships or capacity to meaningfully prioritize individuals with serious mental illness without disadvantaging other vulnerable populations?

How might this priority shape strategic investments in housing types, service models or partnerships?

Phase 1 Results Informing Phase 2

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Goal: To develop a strategic plan that will ...

- Define key evaluation measures for assessing homelessness interventions.

- Identify evidence-based practices that align with Fairfax County's goals of preventing and reducing homelessness.

- Recommend innovative or underutilized approaches that could enhance system effectiveness.

- Outline strategies for maximizing existing CoC resources and improving service coordination.

- Provide a framework for prioritizing future investments and program enhancements.

Phase 2 – Data-Driven Methods

- Scenario modeling and predictive forecasting - Applying machine learning algorithms to model different potential scenarios and forecast their impacts.

- Systems-level analysis of intervention effectiveness - Moving beyond program-level evaluation to understand how different components of the homeless response system interact as a whole, identifying bottlenecks, redundancies, and opportunities for enhanced coordination and resource sharing.

Feedback Loop

- Small group discussions with representative leaders from OPEH staff and the CoC Board and Strategic Planning Committee.

- Listening sessions with persons with lived experience to gather feedback and assess feasibility of recommendations.

- Surveys to invite feedback from staff and community members.