



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: County Administrative Office

(831) 454-2100

Subject: Homeless Services, Focus Strategies, and COVID-19 Shelter and Care Report

Meeting Date: August 4, 2020

Recommended

Actions

- 1) Accept and file report on COVID-19 public health emergency shelter and care response, and update on Focus Strategies action planning, and direct the Human Services Department to return with an updated report no later than November 17, 2020;
- 2) Consider and approve Santa Cruz County Homeless System Planning Six-Month Work Plan and direct staff to coordinate with local municipalities and community partners for further consideration and implementation; and
- 3) Adopt resolution authorizing receipt of Emergency Solutions Grant-CV (ESG-CV) grant in an amount not to exceed \$1,967,600 and authorizing staff to execute the Standard Agreement and any subsequent amendments or modifications thereto, and take any necessary ESG-CV program or ESG-CV grant award related actions.

Executive Summary

Per Board direction in June, 2020, the report provided today includes an update on shelter and care aspects of the COVID-19 public health emergency response, presentation of the Santa Cruz County Homeless System Planning Six-Month Work Plan, and an update on the process to develop the three-year Strategic Action Plan. Additionally, the packet includes a State-required resolution authorizing the Homeless Services Coordination Office (HSCO) to apply for the Emergency Solutions Grant - CV (ESG-CV).

Background

The Board received updates in March, May, and June 2020 regarding the Focus Strategies technical assistance engagement, and the Board directed staff to return in August with an update on the work plan and strategic action plan. In late Spring, the Board also requested a report back on demobilization and transition planning for the COVID-19 Sheltering programs. The Focus Strategies project, led by HSCO, was initiated in April 2019 in partnership with the Human Services Department (HSD), the Health Services Agency (HSA) and the Planning Department (Planning). Due to the

COVID-19 pandemic, the magnitude of the homeless emergency response required, and the associated impacts on the continuity of County operations, the Focus Strategies project timeline and approach to the final phase of work, Action Planning, has been revised. A new deliverable, the six-month work plan, has been added to leverage and integrate the rapid-cycle learning and homeless system improvements that have occurred through the ongoing COVID-19 shelter and care operations. In June, the Board directed staff to bring the six-month work plan before the Board for consideration and provide a process update on the re-start of the action plan.

COVID-19 Shelter and Care

The County has been faced with an unprecedented public health event related to COVID-19 and the associated economic impacts. On March 4, 2020, the County's Health Officer declared a local health emergency based on an imminent and proximate threat to public health from the introduction of COVID-19 coronavirus in the United States and in neighboring Santa Clara County. The Board of Supervisors, on March 10, declared a State of Emergency in Santa Cruz County due to the spread of COVID-19. Governor Newsom, on March 18, issued an Executive Order granting local flexibility to respond to COVID-19 by waiving State legal and regulatory provisions to the extent that they restrict the ability of local jurisdictions to use funds from grant programs such as the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) or, Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP), or other State emergency homelessness funds to prepare for and address the COVID-19 impact on the homeless population.

The countywide homeless response to the COVID-19 emergency is being managed through the County's Incident Command Structure (ICS). Members of the DOC include a cross-departmental group of County staff from the Homeless Services Coordination Office (HSCO), HSD and HSA, and staff from the City of Watsonville and Santa Cruz. Divisions of the Shelter and Care DOC include Stabilizing Existing Shelter (Existing Shelter), Expanded Shelter in Place programs (Expanded Shelters), Transition Age Youth Sheltering in Place (TAY-SIP), Isolation/Quarantine/Vulnerable Populations Shelter (I/Q/V hotels), and Homeless Outreach Services and Support (HOSS). Each of these Divisions rapidly implemented a wide range of emergency activities.

The Shelter and Care DOC has supported existing shelter operations to implement shelter in place for shelter guests and expanded the number of SIP programs, at locations such as Veterans Memorial Buildings and in recreational vehicle trailers, for vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. Currently, 3 congregate care shelters are in operation, in addition to the 16 previously existing shelters. Several alternate facilities have been established to ensure proper isolation, quarantine, and SIP options for those either affected by COVID-19 or highly vulnerable. There are currently 4 motels (3 in North County and 1 in South County) serving people experiencing homelessness.

At the May 19, 2020 Board of Supervisors Meeting, staff was requested to begin to develop the demobilization and transition plan for the COVID-19 emergency sheltering operations and provide an update during summer budget hearings. An ad hoc team from the Shelter and Care DOC and EOC began to meet in June to assess the relative sustainability of each of the sheltering sites given their operational status, location, and importance in terms of COVID 19 objectives around containment of the virus. The group met four times. Concurrently, the finance section of the Shelter and Care DOC began to refine the original COVID-19 sheltering cost model for operations based actual expenditures to provide a financial basis for planning the demobilization of the sheltering operations. With the passage of the State Budget and the inclusion of Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) funding for counties, the working assumption was that

the County would continue to operate as many of the Expanded and I/Q/V sheltering programs that could be funded through December 2020 and potentially through 1st quarter of 2021 given the increase in cases anticipated to occur in the fall and winter.

Strategic Action Plan Development and Six-month Work Plan Implementation

In June 2020, staff provided a progress report to the Board on the final phase of the Focus Strategies engagement, developing a Strategic Action Plan for improving the homeless response system in Santa Cruz County. The plan pre-Coronavirus was to hold community-wide convenings to launch the planning process while Focus Strategies concurrently collected and refined predictive modeling data to inform program and system improvement strategies for inclusion in the strategic action plan. Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a significant portion of the action planning process was delayed and has been re-envisioned in the context of COVID-19 restrictions.

An adapted timetable and approach was approved by the Board in June, which included “rebooting” a modified 3-Year Strategic Action Planning process in July 2020, integrated some new plan objectives, including drawing on lessons learned from the COVID-19 emergency response system and developing “rapid cycle” six month implementation plans that will allow community leadership to focus on specific near-term actions to reduce homelessness and improve the underlying response system in the face of fluid economic conditions and changing resources. The first Santa Cruz County Homeless System Planning Six-Month Work Plan to improve the community’s response to homelessness, provided as an attachment to this memo, will guide work activities through December 2020.

Emergency Solutions Grant - Coronavirus

On June 1, 2020 the California State Housing and Community Development (HCD) agency released a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) including \$983,800 allocated to CA-508, the Watsonville/Santa Cruz City & County Continuum of Care (CoC), known locally as the Homeless Action Partnership (HAP). The NOFA is attached. HSCO serves as the Collaborative Applicant for the CoC and is the Administrator for ESG funds. The County, on behalf of the COC, has applied for the ESG-CV funds for a Care Coordination pilot program including case management and housing navigation, and a flexible diversion/housing fund. This resolution is on the Board’s agenda today as the State requires an authorizing resolution (attached) which staff recommends that the Board adopt. The amount shown on the resolution is, by recommendation of the State, double the actual award amount.

Analysis

COVID-19 Shelter and Care

Stabilization and Expansion of Operations

In June, the Shelter and Care DOC began planning for an imminent phased demobilization of the expanded and I/Q/V shelters, but based on the recent surge in cases, transition planning has shifted from demobilization of sites to continuation of current operations and possible expansion. Given the significant resource demand of operating the COVID-19 sheltering programs on county staffing, the team is exploring the feasibility of transferring some operations to community partners if there is sufficient interest and expertise. Two additional motels (1 in North and 1 South - approximately 120 rooms) will be brought online through short term leases, to be used solely for additional isolation and quarantine capacity. These rooms will serve people

experiencing homelessness and people who live in crowded living situations to isolate/quarantine safely and mitigate the spread of COVID to other household members. One of the hotels became available as a result of the County's partnering with Grower Shipper Association of Central California (GSA). The GSA has been working to support agricultural workers with isolation and quarantine options in Monterey County. GSA was developing a similar program here and worked with the County to assume the GSA's negotiating position with the hotel and allowed the County to complete the agreement as part of the COVID-19 response. In addition, leases for the existing hotels have been extended through April with options to terminate with 30 - day notice, as needed. Additionally, expanded congregate SIP shelters using an indoor tent-based model, services for transitioned age youth (TAY) using a trailer-based model, and other shelter operations and wraparound supports and staffing are anticipated to continue through at least December 2020, and likely through Spring of 2021. The Shelter and Care DOC will be working with each location and appropriate jurisdictions about the feasibility of continuing operations.

The outdoor encampment on City property adjacent to San Lorenzo Park, known as the benchlands, was permitted under City of Santa Cruz Executive Order and is being transitioned to a full-service operation like the other SIP programs. The encampment will be managed in accordance with Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidance on encampments. The Shelter and Care DOC is providing outreach and some basic services to encampment residents. The benchlands SIP program will remain in place until the end of October, at which time the space must be cleared and clients relocated for safety from winter weather.

By agreement, the Shelter and Care DOC has prepared space and staged equipment for additional emergency shelter at the County Fairgrounds and is working with HSA to prepare operational plans for rapid stand-up and staffing of the site, should the space need to be utilized.

Introduction of Behavioral Health and Case Management Services

Behavioral Health outreach services, delivered by HSA, are being delivered at Existing and Expanded shelter sites. BH Mental Health Client Specialists (MHCS) are currently visiting four shelters that have had the highest incidence of behavioral health incidents: Santa Cruz Veterans Hall, Watsonville Veterans Hall, The Salvation Army South County Navigation Center and The Salvation Army Armory. Two MCHS visit each site once a week, with the two Santa Cruz sites (Veterans Hall and Armory) receiving visits twice a week. Services are bilingual and guests have the option of accessing counseling, information and referrals to Behavioral Health and Medical services. There are no qualifying criteria to receive services; they are available to all shelter guests at each of the identified sites. This outreach began on May 22, 2020 and since that date the occurrence of incidents has decreased.

The Shelter and Care DOC is in the process of hiring 2 MHCS and one Senior MHCS to provide targeted mental health case management for shelter residents at the I/Q/V and Expanded congregate shelter sites. Some of the shelter residents would benefit by having a case manager to help them manage their mental health challenges, help mitigate episodes, and connect them to available services. The staff will rotate to all four of the I/Q/V sites and the three Expanded congregate shelter sites.

In addition to behavioral health support for shelter guests, the Shelter and Care DOC has also provided Mental Health First Aid training to all shelter staff, including SIP, Expanded and IQV staff. Following the training, BH staff conducted a Q&A on the bi-weekly COVID-19 Shelter Workgroup. As an accompanying document, the Shelter &

Care DOC provided a one-page crisis assessment for shelter providers to triage emergencies and respond appropriately. BH has also provided a call line for shelter staff to access Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm, should they need support addressing a behavioral health incident in their shelter.

A Case Management and Housing Navigation Program is in development and will be piloted at three sites before being expanded. The three pilot sites are: Veterans Hall Watsonville, Veterans Hall Santa Cruz and one of the IQV shelter sites. The goal of the Program is to increase exits to shelter while providing a model for standardizing case management and housing navigation across the shelter system. As the Case Management and Housing Navigation Model are being developed, information and referral services will be provided to the Veterans Halls by Downtown Streets Team (Veterans Hall Santa Cruz) and The Salvation Army (Veterans Hall Watsonville) starting in August. The goal of these services is to connect shelter guests to resources that will aid them in accessing housing will lead to guests increasingly exiting the shelter program directly into housing.

Ongoing Challenges

Staffing a sustained emergency shelter operation of this scale presents a challenge, one that is made more difficult as permanent staff return to their regular duties, the economy begins to recover, and residents return to work. To date, the operation is staffed using a combination of disaster service workers, community partner staff, extra help employees, and a small number of volunteers. As the response moves into its fifth month of operations, plans to transition to a more sustainable model are under development. In addition to piloting a case management model designed to increase shelter guest exits directly into housing, staff is exploring the possibility of contracting out operations of some shelters through an RFP process.

Three-year Strategic Action Plan Development

A recalibration of the Three-year Strategic Action Plan has begun and is taking into account the local impacts of COVID-19 on homelessness, including changes to the community's current response to homelessness, changes in the economy and housing market as well as changes in the planning process. In this phase of plan development, the Project Advisory Group is drafting a mission, vision, principles, goals and strategies. Focus Strategies is creating a PowerPoint presentation which will be a contextual presentation that stakeholders can review to get oriented to all the work that has led up to the Strategic Action Plan. Focus Strategies will provide materials on all of the findings to date, together with the presentation, on a webpage that will go live and be announced broadly in mid-August. The project team will concurrently be developing a plan for virtual input sessions to be held in the latter part of August. The website, "office hours" held by Focus Strategies, and the input sessions will be used together to inform the drafting of the Three-year Strategic Action Plan.

Focus Strategies, HSCO and Project Advisory Group will draft the Strategic Action Plan in late August, including measurable objectives. The draft plan will be reviewed with the Project Advisory Group, Board members and other key stakeholders. In September, the draft plan will be posted for an open comment period. In October, final revisions based on the open comment period will be made, the plan will be finalized, and it will be presented to the Board for final approval. The plan provides, in summary:

August - Develop materials for gathering input, begin gathering input, draft strategic plan, and establish performance measures for the system.

September - Review draft plan, hold feedback sessions, open comment period. BOS

presentation of the draft Plan in mid-September.

October - Make revisions based on input from open comment period; final adoption of Three-Year Strategic Action Plan in late October.

Six-Month Homeless Response Work Plan Development and Implementation

The first six-month work plan for the Homeless Response System is provided as attachment for the Board's consideration and approval. Since the last report to the Board in June, the project team has adhered to the implementation timeline and completed the following key tasks:

- Development of the attached Santa Cruz County Homeless System Planning Six-Month Work Plan that identifies goals, objectives, and lead responsibility for all pieces.
- The project team has not yet had the opportunity to formally present the six-month work plan to the local cities but has worked closely with City staff from Watsonville and Santa Cruz and the 2x2 committee to gather their input. Input from the City of Santa Cruz reflects a desire to prioritize the governance and care coordination work, and Watsonville is most interested in prevention and expanding availability of housing resources.

Feedback on the Six-Month Work plan from the Focus Strategies Project Advisory Group as well as members of the Board of Supervisors is to prioritize implementation of an improved system governance structure. Also, the work plan will be updated to reflect SMART objectives and will use the format of the County's Operational Plan.

Focus Strategies continues to provide technical assistance as needed, including support for program and policy development, data analysis and evaluation.

The project team is turning its attention now toward the prioritized goals for this six-month plan, including:

- Goal 1: Stabilize and Strengthen the Shelter System, Building Upon Lessons Learned and Preserving Gains from COVID-19 Response
- Goal 2: Develop and Implement Rehousing Strategy for People in Shelter and Unsheltered (including priority for those vulnerable to COVID-19)
- Goal 3: Expand Availability of Housing Resources Targeted to People Experiencing Homelessness
- Goal 4: Implement Diversion and Targeted Prevention to Reduce Rate at Which People Newly Experience Homelessness
- Goal 5: Continue to Improve Availability and Effectiveness of Solutions-Oriented Outreach and Support Services for People Who Are Unsheltered, Building Upon Lessons Learned and Preserving Gains from COVID-19 Response
- Goal 6: Stand Up New Governance, Planning, Evaluation, and Communications Structure

HSCO and HSD Staff have initiated work with County Counsel to take the governance framework developed by the Focus Strategies Governance work group to develop the proposed homeless commission structure, to define the legal structure for the new commission, and to identify the structural and legal relationship between the new commission structure and the existing CoC governance.

In November, Focus Strategies and the project team will begin evaluation of the Santa Cruz County Homeless System Planning Six-Month Work Plan process and results and will identify updates and changes that may be needed in the *next* six-month work plan based on the ongoing COVID-19 response, the finalized Three Year Strategic Action

Plan, and established performance measures. Additionally, Focus Strategies will facilitate development of the next six-month work plan, aligned with the content of the Three-Year Strategic Action Plan adopted by the Board.

In developing the Six-Month Work Plan, many reviewers noted that it was ambitious and prioritized key gaps and opportunities but was balanced and achievable. Successful implementation of the Six-Month Work Plan may be impacted by COVID-19 and growing cases and associated economic impacts of the pandemic if County staff resources have to be diverted to emergency response.

Strategic Plan Element(s)

1.A (Comprehensive Health and Safety: Health Equity)

1.D (Comprehensive Health and Safety: Community Support)

2.D Attainable Housing: Homelessness - Assessing the performance of the current system to address homelessness and obtaining technical assistance for system planning and improvements directly supports the goal to expand homelessness services to reduce homelessness and increase housing stability.

Submitted by:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Recommended by:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Attachments:

- a Resolution ESG-CV
- b Instructions for ESG-CV Resolution Template
- c Letter of DHCD, dated June 1, 2020
- d ESG-CV FAQs
- e Six-Month Work Plan