



Homeless Commission

ACTION CALENDAR

November 18, 2014

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Homeless Commission
 Submitted by: Carole Marasovic, Chairperson, Homeless Commission
 Subject: Centralize Services for Homeless Transition Age Youth

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution directing the City Manager to issue a Request For Proposals (RFP) for a centralized transition-age youth center, proposals to be submitted with other applications for funding for homeless services during the December 2014 funding cycle. The RFP should state that substantial consideration should be given to applicants qualified to provide services to transition-age youth who provide evidence of measurable outcomes.

SUMMARY

In response to Council's referral to the Homeless Commission in which Council requested that the Homeless Commission identify needed services for transition-age youth, the Homeless Commission recommends that Council direct the City Manager to consolidate funding for agencies that serve transition-age youth, exempting transitional housing agencies, and issue a Request for Proposals for the purposes of establishing a multi-purpose centralized transition-age youth center with comprehensive services as described in this report. Proposals for the transition-age youth center would be considered with other funding proposals submitted as part of the next community agency RFP in December, 2014.

FISCAL IMPACTS of RECOMMENDATION

The Homeless Commission is requesting that current funding for agencies serving transition-age youth be consolidated, exempting transitional housing, so that a centralized youth center providing existing, and additional services, can be established.

A centralized transition age youth center would be more cost-effective for the City of Berkeley and would increase the quality of services provided to transition age youth. It would also provide an alternative to current homeless encampments which do not benefit or provide opportunities for transition-age youth while causing friction with local merchants who believe that their businesses are impacted by the youth camped out in commercial areas.

The Homeless Commission's position is that the City of Berkeley could utilize existing funds in the amount currently designated for transition-age youth services so that no additional cost is incurred to the City of Berkeley. Salaried positions that the Homeless Commission identified as necessary were that of a highly skilled mental health counselor with experience in working with transition-age youth and a highly skilled job developer, creative and resourceful, in developing jobs for transition-age youth.

The Commission believed that volunteers could be easily recruited to perform functions on several levels. Volunteers could engage the transition-age youth in recreational activities and assist in supervising transition-age youth at the center. On a professional level, both medical and legal services - services that already exist elsewhere - could be provided on a weekly basis on-site by volunteers.

The financial impacts will not be significant if the concept of a centralized transition-age youth center is developed through restructuring of current allocations of monies. It would be at Council's discretion whether Council believes additional monies should be allocated for this purpose.

CURRENT SITUATION and ITS EFFECTS

The Homeless Commission's recommendations have been made in response to Council's referral in June, 2013 to the Homeless Commission to "develop a suggested proposal for City Council's consideration to address possible services for homeless youth".

At the time of its referral, Council recognized that many of the needs of homeless transition-age youth in Berkeley were going unmet while concurrently, many businesses were complaining about the encampments of transition-age youth camping out near their businesses. The Commission responded to Council's referral by creating a subcommittee to develop recommendations to address gaps in services for homeless transition-age youth. Commissioners Becker, Gresher and Marasovic, the subcommittee members, met and devised the attachment to this report which was later approved by the Commission on September 10, 2014. [*Ayes: Becker, Gresher, Marasovic, Peterson. Noes: Bastone, Della-Piana, Sempari. Abstain: None. Absent: None.*]

Looking at the streets of Berkeley, one would think that the transition-age youth population is the dominant homeless population. Statistically, they are far from the largest homeless population in Berkeley. Yet, they are highly visible with their unmet needs apparent to all that encounter them.

Clearly, something is amiss. Whatever the City of Berkeley is doing now in transition-age youth services has substantial gaps despite the monies allocated. Even were these transition-age youth to be housed, it is unclear whether they would be able to make the leap from homelessness to housing successfully and maintain stable housing.

The centralized transition-age youth center would provide an intermediate step between the streets and housing placement, offering comprehensive services in one location. Those services would include shelter; a drop-in center; recreational activities including outings; on-site storage; multiple computers available; employment and educational development; motivational and mental health counseling; one to two meals per day; a legal clinic which would provide legal assistance including credit and reentry/clean slate practices; medical services and a Homeward Bound program.

The Commission believes that this centralized youth center would be the most effective means of service delivery to address the current difficulties. Some of the services offered would be on-site storage, the availability of computers, meals or recreational activities such as outings to athletic events, concerts, museums or other activities would serve as attractors for the TAY population to come to the youth center. While present for the reasons that attracted them to the center, the Commission believed that a significant number of the TAY would become engaged in motivational counseling. Mental health counseling to address the traumas of the TAY is critical since so many of the TAY population come from highly traumatized backgrounds and are reluctant to seek traditional counseling where chronically homeless older adults seek treatment.

BACKGROUND

Faced with the pressing issues of the homeless in Berkeley, \$100,000 was directed by the City earlier this year, through Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds, with the possibility of a second year of the same funding, to Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS) to provide homeless outreach.

Even more recently, Alameda County received a grant from the state for \$3 million for homeless outreach to persons with serious mental illness. The County is contracting with a community agency and some of those resources will be directed towards the homeless TAY population in Berkeley with a serious mental illness.

In addition, the City Health, Housing, and Community Services Department, collaborating with consultants and stakeholders, formulated an innovative proposal to redirect some of the monies currently directed to homeless providers into a centralized housing system, as of this time named the Housing Crisis Resolution Center.

To expect that the TAY population will, in large numbers, easily transition from life on the streets into housing is unrealistic. An intermediate step is necessary in order to provide the TAY population supports so that they are responsive to housing and job and educational development. TAY who need mental health counseling but are resistant to such are far more likely to engage in mental health counseling in a supportive transition-age youth environment.

A transition-age youth center takes all the existing services, adding more with restructuring, and places them in one location so that there can be focus. The

Commission recommended that measurable outcomes be proven in order to insure that the monies allocated are insured to provide the most effective services delivery.

Not only is the TAY centralized center necessary so that homeless monies granted result in genuine positive outcomes but also the TAY proposal for a one-stop, multi-purpose centralized youth center is consistent with the City Health, Housing, and Community Service Department's proposal for coordinated housing entry. Both initiatives address streamlining and efficiency with the intended result of more effective services delivery for the homeless population.

Currently, the encampments in the commercial areas, particularly around Telegraph and Shattuck, are not benefitting transition-age youth. Tolerance of the encampments does not help youth to secure housing, education, mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment or job training. Many local merchants believe that it harms their businesses, deters pedestrian traffic and creates a contentious environment. Rather than enabling a non-productive life-style, the City of Berkeley can proactively utilize already existing homeless outreach to engage and redirect transitional-age youth, away from commercial sidewalks, to the transitional-age youth center or alternatively, outdoor locations such as parks to congregate.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are no identifiable environmental effects or opportunities associated with the subject of this report.

RATIONALE for RECOMMENDATION

The City Health, Housing and Community Services Department has previously stated that proposals regarding homeless TAY "should be undertaken in the context of the coordinated assessment and intake re-design process and in consideration of the funding needs in the homeless services delivery system". The Homeless Commission agrees.

For this reason in response to the Council referral, the Commission believes that its proposal for a centralized transition-age youth center should evolve hand-in-hand with other Department plans for coordinated entry and assessment that is more streamlined, cost-effective, and efficient for the betterment of the homeless population. The means to do so is for the Health, Housing and Community Services Department to invite funding proposals for a centralized transition-age youth center to be submitted in response to the December 2014 RFP along with other proposals.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

The Commission considered recommending that services for TAY continue to be funded without initiating consolidation into a central site.

CITY MANAGER

See the City Manager companion report.

CONTACT PERSON

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ATTACHMENTS

1: Resolution

2: Homeless Commission Subcommittee's Recommendations to the Full Commission
for Services for Transition Age Youth

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

RECOMMENDATION OF CENTRALIZED TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH SERVICES

WHEREAS, in June, 2013, City Council made a referral to the Homeless Commission to develop recommendations for services for the needs of transition-age homeless youth; and

WHEREAS, the Homeless Commission established a subcommittee to address gaps in services for transition-age youth and that subcommittee came up with a proposal approved by the Homeless Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Homeless Commission recommended consolidation of funding of services for transition-age youth so as to establish a centralized transition-age youth center with comprehensive services in order to cure services gaps; and

WHEREAS, the Homeless Commission approved that the proposal would require that the City Department of Health, Housing, and Community Services issue a RFP inviting proposals to be submitted in concert with the RFP funding cycle of December 2014.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the Council directs the City Manager to invite requests for funding proposals for a centralized transition-age youth center, proposals to be considered in the December 2014 RFP funding cycle.

City of Berkeley Homeless Commission
Recommendations from the Subcommittee on Services for Transition Age Youth
(Adopted by the Homeless Commission on September 10, 2014.)

In June, 2013, the Berkeley City Council made a referral to the Homeless Commission "to develop a suggested proposal for City Council's consideration to address possible services for homeless youth". The Homeless Commission submits the following as its proposal.

The City of Berkeley's Department of Health, Housing and Community Services' recent proposal to develop a coordinated point of entry for placing homeless persons in housing was met with enthusiastic unanimous support by the Homeless Commission.

Nevertheless, that proposal addresses exclusively the housing needs of homeless individuals. When Council made its referral to the Homeless Commission, it asked for the Homeless Commission to return to Council with a recommendation for possible services for homeless youth. That referral indicated that Council was interested in exploring services for the transition age youth population beyond housing.

Transition age youth are a small percentage of the homeless population in Berkeley. Yet, they are a very visible part of that population, a population that has raised concerns from various sectors of the community. That visibility requires that needs currently unmet be met.

Consistent with the City of Berkeley's Department of Health, Housing and Community Services' innovative centralized approach to housing entry, the Homeless Commission believes that a similar approach should be taken to centralize transition age youth services, consolidating funding that provide services to transition age youth, exempting agencies that provide transitional housing.

The Homeless Commission believes that a multi-purpose youth center utilizing existing resources, and allocating additional monies if the Council sees so appropriate, is the proper response to fulfill gaps currently unmet as to homeless transition age youth. The Homeless Commission recognizes that available monies are not unlimited and that an efficient approach will need to be utilized to fill the gaps in homeless transition age youth services.

A centralized youth center that provides shelter as many months as is possible in a year; a drop-in center; recreational activities including outings; employment and educational development; mental health and motivational counseling; one to two meals per day, a legal clinic which would include assistance with credit and reentry/ clean slate practices; medical services; on-site storage; and a Homeward Bound program, all consolidated at the same site would be the most effective means of service delivery.

The Homeless Commission believes that all these components are necessary for this highly visible population who require intensive case management. The Commission also

believes that the availability of some of these programs such as on-site storage, visiting legal and medical services from other existing resources, recreational activities including outings, and meals would create attractors to the transition age youth population to utilize the centralized youth agency. While so engaged, they would be more likely to become also engaged in intensive case management, motivational counseling, mental health services, and vocational and educational development.

The Homeless Commission believes that a centralized youth center can be established through the restructuring and utilization of current resources available within some city departments and community-based organizations. In addition, the City of Berkeley is fortunate to be home to a community that actively engages in volunteerism. Utilizing volunteers of all ages as well as facilitating student internships from not only UC Berkeley but other programs in neighboring areas should be explored to confine costs.

As to paid staff, those staff should be highly skilled in motivational counseling and in the needs of transition age youth, many of whom are coming from highly traumatized backgrounds. A highly skilled job developer, resourceful and creative, also skilled in working with transition age youth, is also needed.

In order for this centralized program for a transition age youth to become reality, the Homeless Commission recommends that City Council direct that a RFP be issued that invites applicants to submit applications for a centralized youth program with substantial consideration to those applicants who are qualified in providing services to transition age youth and who will provide evidence of measurable outcomes.

Berkeley has recently expanded its homeless outreach funding. Through a Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) grant of \$100,000., funds have been granted to Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS) to provide additional homeless outreach. In addition, Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services has received a \$3 million grant from the state to provide homeless outreach services. Some of those monies have been identified as to be utilized for transition age youth with serious mental illness in Berkeley.

With the substantial homeless outreach monies that have been allocated, the logical conclusion is that those transition age youth to whom outreach is being made need to be directed somewhere. The most likely probability of success in reaching, and improving the lives of transition age youth, is the centralized multi-purpose center for transition age youth as identified.

The Homeless Commission also wishes to address the issue of transition age youth (both homeless and housed) camping in groups on the sidewalks in some commercial areas, especially Telegraph and downtown. The youth themselves are not benefitting in a productive way by being there – it doesn't help them get housing, education, counseling, AOD treatment or job training. Meanwhile the encampments hurt local merchants, deter pedestrians and engender a contentious environment in places that should be attractive and inviting. Often the youth who congregate on the sidewalks are

unfairly blamed for these negative consequences. We believe that the responsibility lies squarely with the City of Berkeley government, not with the youth. By its ongoing neglect the City continues to enable this problem. We recommend that the City reinforce sidewalk regulations in a way that would prevent the encampments. Along with more robust regulation, positive engagement and outreach should direct youth towards alternative outdoor places to congregate (parks, public plazas, etc.). At the same time other services can be offered.

