

County of San Luis Obispo

**CITIZENS' HOMELESS
ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION**

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2023





COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO
CITIZENS' HOMELESS ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION

November 9, 2023

Board of Supervisors
c/o Hon. Bruce Gibson, Chair
1055 Monterrey Street
San Luis Obispo, 93408

Re: *CHAC Annual Report*

Honorable Board Members,

Pursuant to section 3.d. of the Bylaws of the Citizens' Homeless Accountability Commission, please find attached annual report summarizing its findings and recommendations.

Thank you for your focus and work on this very important issue.

Respectfully,

DRAFT

Gregory Francisco Gillett, JD, EdD
Chair

Sam Blakeslee, PhD, Vice Chair

Members

René Bravo, MD
Justin Davis, MD
Christine Thornburgh, CPA
Helene Finger, PE F.ASCE
Jim Salio
Chuck Davidson, CDME
Michael Draze
Christine Robertson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary: 5-Year Plan to Address Homelessness in San Luis Obispo County

The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors has crafted a 5-year plan to tackle the issue of homelessness, necessitating a coordinated effort between multiple stakeholders, including County, Cities, Non-Profits, and Public Safety.

To maintain transparency and ensure accountability consistent with the goals of this Plan, the Citizens' Homeless Accountability Commission (CHAC) was formed to provide a citizen-centric perspective on the Plan's progress toward its goals.

Key Findings:

1. Notable progress has been made on logistical fronts, such as staffing and data collection.
2. For some Lines of Effort (LOE) the Plan's goals are insufficiently specific or detailed to allow meaningful assessment of whether sufficient progress is being made.
3. Communication between the County, the public, and CHAC needs improvement. The County's infrequent reporting hampers transparency and accountability.
4. While data from non-governmental service providers has been mostly commendable, discerning the County's contribution remains challenging.

LINES OF EFFORT (LOE) General Recommendations.

The County should:

1. LOE1: Enhance efforts to meet the 3-year goal of 300 new interim supportive housing beds.
2. LOE2: Provide a yearly report on new homeless individuals, focusing on prevention and diversion efforts.
3. LOE3: Strengthen data management through HMIS and offer quarterly public updates.
4. LOE4: Provide public updates on grant funding bi-annually.
5. LOE5: Improve coordination between the County, cities, and NGOs so that the housing and services activities are undertaken with a regional multi-jurisdictional approach rather than a siloed approach.
6. LOE6: Launch a user-friendly website to disseminate information and resources related to homelessness.

In summation, while efforts are being made, the County's communication and clarity on progress and strategy need improvement. The county has made good progress during this first year of the 5-year Plan, notwithstanding some notable problems in the arenas of public communication and cross-jurisdictional coordination. Unless the 5-year Plan is further updated to include more specific annual goals and the outcomes that go along with those goals, the Plan could ultimately fail due to a lack of accountability. CHAC remains committed to meeting the Plan's objectives and offers these findings for further review and action.

GENERAL COMMENTS FROM CHAC

The Board of Supervisors has developed a 5-year plan (Plan) to address homelessness in San Luis Obispo in County (County). This Plan will require extensive amounts of communication and coordination between the County, Cities, Non-Profits, Public Safety and Healthcare institutions, Housing developers, and various State and Federal Agencies. (Bylaws, 2.a.)

The purpose of the Commission is to assist the County by improving accountability, specifically by providing a citizen-centric perspective regarding progress that is being achieved toward meeting the goals of the Plan. (Bylaws, 2.c.) The mission of the Citizens' Homeless Accountability Commission (CHAC) is to ensure transparency and accountability in the County's progress toward the goals outlined in the Plan.

It is the CHAC's opinion that good progress is being made. Most of the progress has been made on logistical and foundational fronts, including, but not limited to, staffing, reorganization, and data collection. Notwithstanding those achievements, the overall progress has been slower than necessary and is at risk of falling behind schedule.

However, for the Plan to ultimately succeed, all LOEs must be implemented successfully and simultaneously. This Report provides very positive grades on some LOEs but failing grades on some. Due to the complex and interrelated nature of the homelessness challenge a single-point failure for one of the LOE can lead to the inability to achieve the overall goals of the Plan

One main concern is the insufficient communication between the County and the public which may have led to increased NIMBYism that could have been avoided. Another was the weak systems for producing multi-jurisdictional cooperation between the County and the Cities.

Throughout the Plan, there are references to requirements for regular data analysis and reporting, including bi-monthly reports on performance measures. Plan implementation, public engagement, and CHAC review would benefit from more proactive and timely sharing of relevant data. CHAC's role is not to become homelessness experts but rather to ensure the County is progressing according to the Plan. The value of CHAC's report is strongly related to the adequacy of information available to CHAC to perform its mission.

Another concern is the need for more clarity on the specific strategies being implemented to achieve the Plan's goals. Without more straightforward metrics that relate the vast array of conditions to specific targeted deliverables, it will be challenging to know if the Plan is on track for success.

Much of the data comes from non-governmental service providers with a financial interest in positive reporting. It should be noted, however, that CHAC has verified reports from service providers and concludes that most are performing extraordinarily well within the limits placed on them. Although, it is difficult for CHAC to analyze the County's contribution to the service providers' success.

Finally, we recommend a focus on public health. Homelessness has often been addressed primarily by those in the social service field. As we move forward, we should consider a realignment of focus toward the Public Health domain. It is increasingly recognized that Homelessness is truly more of a public health crisis facing society. Responses could better align with the tactics and remedies often seen in the public health arena. Governor Newsom and the California Department of Public Health are focusing on a radical reorganization of the MediCal program, Cal AIM, which addresses specific critical needs in Homelessness and the social determinants that cause it. This will provide many services, programs, and resources addressing root causes. This must be considered as a key future factor in future needs assessments.

Thank you,

CHAC Commissioners

LINE OF EFFORT 1 (LOE1)

Create affordable and appropriately designed housing opportunities and shelter options for underserved populations.

FOCUS

Increase the number of interim and permanent housing opportunities for prioritized beneficiary groups experiencing homelessness, to clear the backlog of households without appropriate housing options due to specific housing barriers and increase the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the homeless system of care.

YEAR 1 GOALS

- Find locations and start building non-traditional interim supportive housing with the goal of creating 300 units within 3 years.
- Develop better data on how many people need what type of housing and supports, and where they need it, so that we can develop clear, data-informed, housing targets for specific populations.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

There are three key benchmarks of the Plan at risk of noncompletion:

1. Establishing 300 interim housing units created within 3 years.
2. Building 500 permanent supportive housing units within 5 years.
3. Building 1,667 affordable housing units within 5 years.



As of the cut-off date for receiving input to this report, only 26 interim housing units had become newly available since the establishment of the Homeless Services Division (HSD). There is also a reduction of approximately 80 safe parking spaces. In addition to 26 “newly operational” units another 131 “funded”, “proposed”, and “pre-proposal” units were identified for future completion. It is difficult to assess whether approximately 157 completed and planned/proposed units identified by the end of year one is a sufficient pace to achieve a total of 300 by the end of year three.

Pre-Existing Interim Housing Solutions

- 40 Prado Congregate Shelter – 124 beds in San Luis Obispo
- 40 Prado Safe Parking – 7 parking spaces in San Luis Obispo
- ECHO Paso Robles – 50 beds in Paso Robles

- ECHO Atascadero – 60 beds in Atascadero
- Oklahoma Parking Village – 60 spaces in San Luis Obispo (*Closure late 2023*)
- Railroad Safe Parking Site – 20 spaces in San Luis Obispo (*Closed ~ August 2023*)

Pre-Existing Seasonal Interim Housing Solutions

- 5CHC Warming Shelter – Approx. 15 beds at rotating south county locations
Activation available from November through April
- CAPSLO Warming Shelter – Approx. 20 beds in San Luis Obispo
Activation available year-round
- ECHO Emergency Winter Shelter – Approx. 23 beds in Atascadero
Activation available from November through March

Newly Operational Interim Housing Solutions (since August 9, 2022)

- Cabins for Change – 20 units in Grover Beach (95% completed)
- SunStreet Recuperative Care Program – 6 beds in San Luis Obispo

Funded Interim Housing Solutions

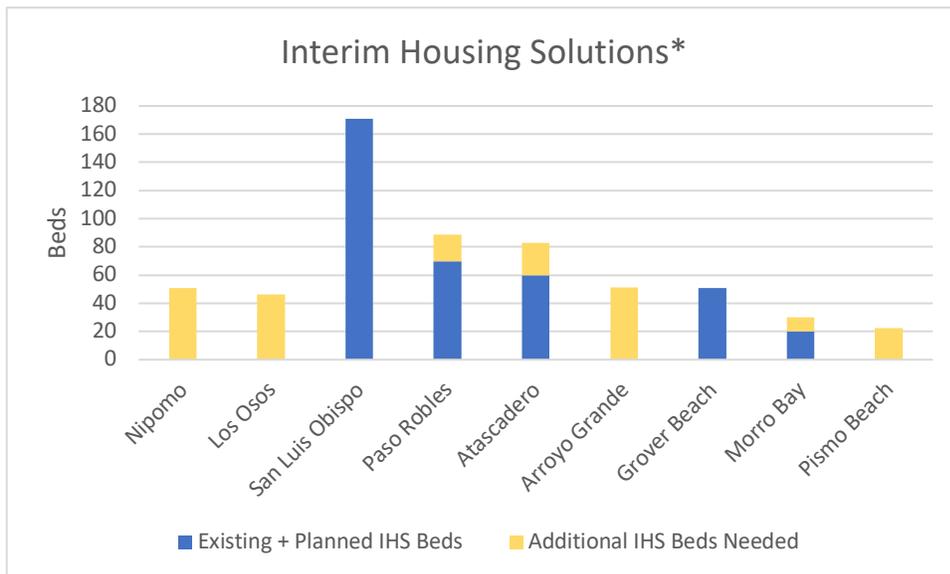
- Welcome Home Village – 34 beds in San Luis Obispo

Proposed Interim Housing Solutions

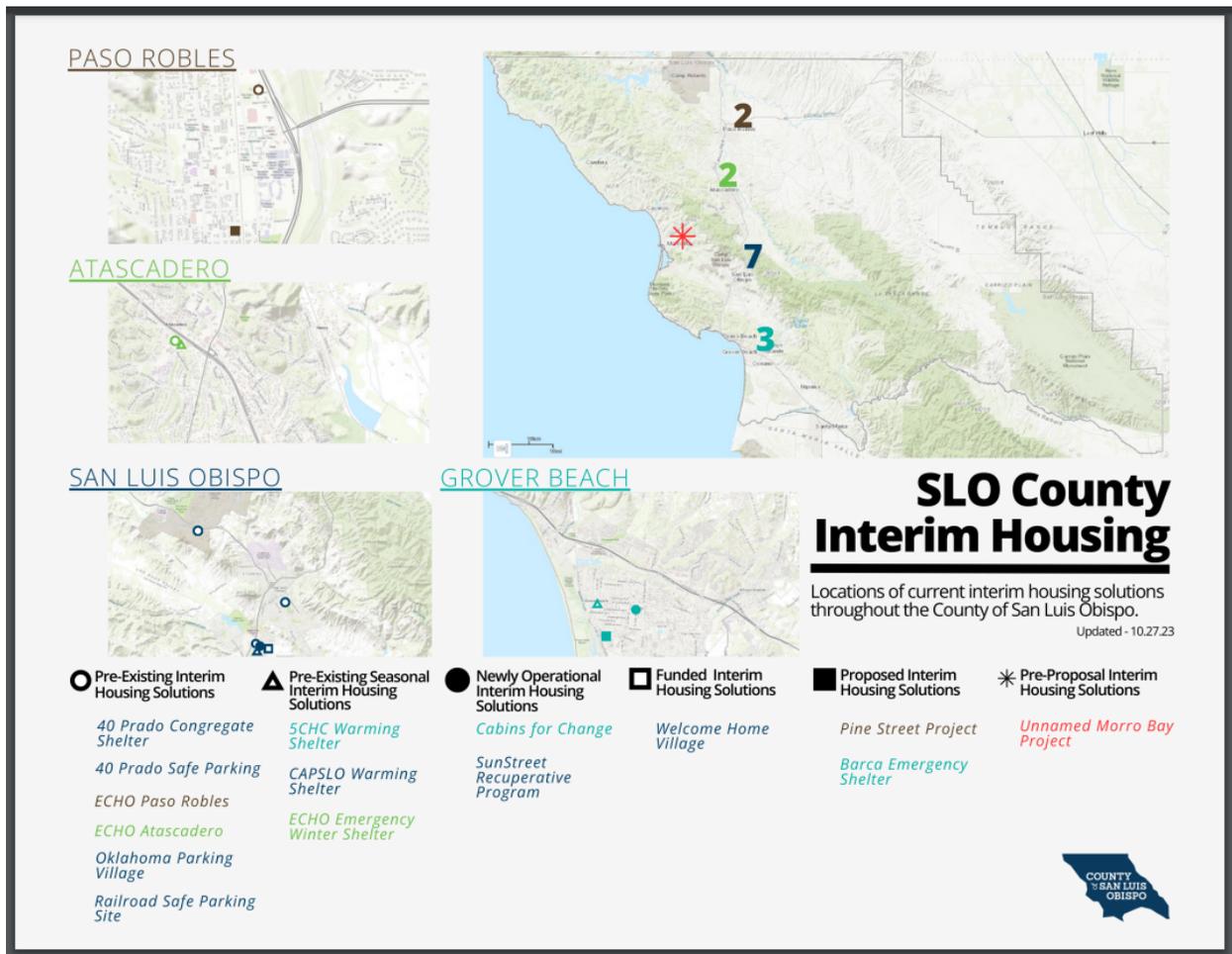
- Pine Street Project – 20 beds in Paso Robles
- Barca Emergency Shelter – 31 beds in Grover Beach

Pre-Proposal Interim Housing Solutions

- Unnamed Morro Bay Project – 10 to 20 beds in Morro Bay



*Interim housing solutions distributed by community population



Page 13 of the Plan states, “Complete a quarterly analysis of existing projects to determine the utilization and need for interim housing based on geography, climate, and population and outcomes of various models. Align and expand shelter resources based on analysis.” Some communities have made substantial progress in providing interim supportive housing, while others have not. Efforts for additional interim housing solutions should be focused on supporting communities that are not making needed progress.

No new units have been established in San Luis Obispo County for permanent supportive housing in FY2022/2023. To date, Paso Homekey has The Pismo Terrace project (50 units) is nearing completion, and the recently awarded Welcome Home Village project includes 46 beds. However, the County is substantially off-pace to meet the 500-unit goal of the Plan.

All Year-1 projects in the Plan are in progress, with substantial funding committed through the HSD. However, if projects receive additional funds from other County departments, the HSD does not have the project information. Thus, there is no coordination as to funding or oversight.

FINDINGS

Progress on LOE1 occurred but it was difficult to assess whether the Plan is on track due to a lack of specific year one or year two goals. To achieve the goal of 300 units by year three it is likely that a larger number will need to be planned because such projects entail risk of failure due to funding, permitting, or NIMBY issues. As to developing better data to assess need, there is no evidence of progress toward this goal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the County work closely with each of the cities to identify quantifiable goals for each of the coming four years that describe, by geographic region and category of housing unit, specific annual goals so that progress can be measured against the Plan's goals and the community's overall regional needs.
2. It is recommended that the County create a publicly accessible project tracking system that gives a percentage of completion and identifies the barriers to timely completion of projects with specificity. The system should proactively provide notice to the public of progress, delay and completion to any person who opts in for reports.
3. It is further recommended that the County prepare and deliver a report to CHAC at every scheduled commission meeting detailing, with specificity, the ongoing progress of LOE1.

LINE OF EFFORT 2 (LOE2)

Focus efforts on barriers to housing stability for those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, including expanding prevention/diversion, supportive services, and housing navigation efforts.

FOCUS

Strengthen supportive services across subpopulations to effectively assist people who are experiencing homelessness in obtaining and maintaining housing.

YEAR 1 GOAL

Prevention & Diversion; services sufficient to support new interim housing.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

There is no evidence provided by the County of the County’s efforts to create housing stability for those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness other than increasing the number of staff and aligning the County’s mission.



According to the Update on the Countywide Plan to Address Homelessness, 2022-2027, May 2, 2023, (“Update”), as of the date of this report, only one of the five first-year objectives was completed. Specifically, ERF-2 funding submissions were made. It is unclear as to the status of the Bridge Housing Grant, BH Strategic Plan Contract, implementation of the new HER, or expansion of Peer Support Services.

Regarding the County’s push to implement housing-focused case management and services across the region (LOE2 A), the County of San Luis Obispo Homeless Services Division (“Division”) submitted a budget augmentation request of \$1 million which will primarily be used to improve service provider recruitment and retention, as seen on page 315 of the County of San Luis Obispo FY 2023-24 Recommended Budget.

Regarding the Plan’s commitment to support program staff in delivering effective services (LOE2 B), no information was provided by the County to support progress in this area.

Regarding the Plan’s goal to structure services based on population need and geographical coverage (LOE2 C), no information was provided by the County to support progress in this area.

Concerning the Plan's goal to prevent homelessness through expanded diversion efforts (also known as housing problem-solving or family reunification) and homeless prevention capacity (LOE2 D), The Homeless Services Oversight Council (HSOC) recently awarded 5Cities Homeless Coalition (5CHC) \$492,313 for prevention and diversion efforts countywide. The 5CHC's Housing Program will be using these funds to provide direct monetary assistance to those at risk of losing their homes through eviction due to financial hardship. In their application for these funds, the 5CHC projected that it would prevent 179 people from entering homelessness with the requested funds. An additional \$500,000 of County General Fund Support was approved in the County of San Luis Obispo FY 2023-24 Recommended Budget for specific allocation to prevention and diversion efforts. It has been stated that the Division will continue to pursue funding opportunities that service providers may utilize to divert people to other housing loss prevention solutions and effectively reduce the number of people falling into homelessness in San Luis Obispo County.

Regarding the Plan's goal to implement culturally, linguistically, affirmative, and responsive programs and services to serve all individuals throughout the County in all regions (LOE2 E), no information was provided by the County to support progress in this area.

Regarding the Plan's goal to expand mental health and substance abuse disorder services (LOE2 F), no information was provided by the County to support progress in this area. Notably, as of June 30, 2023, the County of San Luis Obispo Behavioral Health Department had 27.5 FTEs vacancies, with 12.5 of those being Behavioral Health Clinician vacancies.

Regarding the Plan's goal to support efforts of first responders to address high system utilizers (LOE2 G), no information was provided by the County to support progress in this area. The County touts the County Health's already established Justice Services Division (2020) to support ongoing support of this goal. However, there is no evidence provided of the implementation of new programming.

Regarding the Plan's goal to structure services based on the medical needs of the aging population (LOE2 H), no information was provided by the County to support progress in this area.

Regarding the Plan's goal to expand services and housing targeted to transitional-age youth (age 16-25) (LOE2 I), no information was provided by the County to support progress in this area.

FINDINGS

Overall, documented progress toward the goal set forth in LOE2 was minimal. This line of effort is the most amorphous and least quantitative of all the Plan elements which heightens the risk of unaccountability. Allocating significant resources to "service provider recruitment and retention" must be quantitatively related to the actual benefit provided to those the Plan is seeking to prevent from falling into homelessness. Otherwise, these expenditures could become a funding blackhole that devotes resources for staff without knowing if the benefits are commensurate with the costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the County take immediate steps to create metrics in which to track the progress of LOE2. Specifically, the County should Develop more detailed metrics that would allow a more direct assessment of the actual realized benefits to those needing these services relative to the funds expended for increased staff recruitment and retention.
2. It is recommended that the County report the metrics noted above to CHAC no later than February 1, 2024 and report on the progress to CHAC at each commission meeting.
3. It is recommended that the County provide a report summarizing the population that became newly homeless in the county during the last year. This report should include identification of expanded prevention/diversion efforts that could have helped prevent their homelessness in the county.

LINE OF EFFORT 3 (LOE3)

Improve and expand data management efforts through HMIS and coordinated entry systems to strengthen data-driven operational guidance and strategic oversight.

FOCUS

Improve homeless system data quality and reporting, increase data sharing, and analyze and share data to drive improvements in homeless system performance.

YEAR 1 GOAL

Create single HMIS database, data analysis and reporting to the community.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Year-1 goal was to create a single HMIS database, data analysis & reporting to the community with specific objectives to:

A. Create a coordinated entry system that is open and accessible to all partner agencies to make **referrals** into the coordinated entry system and access data.

B. Expand access and usage of data in service coordination and decision-making.

The HMIS project team, with participation from all partner agencies, has made steady progress throughout the year on creating a data management system that will support coordinated entry needs and allow for future expansion. In June, a proposal for software and a separate proposal for services were selected, with the contracts approved by the County in August 2023. As the contracts are administered, software and services should include appropriate HMIS data access and integration for participating agencies. Additionally, criteria listed in the Plan under LOE3, section B will be considered for inclusion (when relevant) as policies and software are developed.

GRADE

A

FINDINGS

This timing is slower than described in the Plan. However, it is acknowledged that efforts in Year 1 required more background work than the Plan recognized. Overall, CHAC is pleased with progress in this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. It is recommended that the County explore ways to streamline the implementation of HMIS to initiate use before the stated goal date.
5. It is recommended that the County provide quarterly public updates on the status of the project to implement a new HMIS, including the migration of existing homeless services and participant data from existing systems and processes, by December 31, 2024.

LINE OF EFFORT 4 (LOE4)

Identify and streamline funding and resources.

FOCUS

Increase funding and resources through new federal, state and private grant opportunities, restructure County funding to support this strategy, and align all funding available to address homelessness with community needs and priorities.

YEAR 1 GOALS

- Earmark the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Program Rounds 2 and 3 funding and selected American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) monies toward efforts to improve data processes, improve the coordinated entry system, bolster homeless prevention efforts, and build multiple non-congregate shelter operations throughout the region to accommodate 100-150 individuals.
- Quantify shortfalls in affordable special needs housing and service capacities and link existing and potential funding strategies to close these gaps in the next 4 years.
- Launch effort to streamline uncoordinated homelessness funding and efforts, including coordination with key external partners such as CenCal Health.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In year one, the County established the new Homeless Services Division (HSD). Previously disjointed between the Department of Social Services and the Planning Dept, the team of 23 employees are now unified in mission, including 9 new employees. The County's year one's goals for LOE4 and respective status are summarized below.

GRADE

A

Earmark monies toward efforts to improve data processes, improve the coordinated entry system, bolster homeless prevention efforts, and build multiple non-congregate shelter operations throughout the region to accommodate 100-150 individuals.

The County subsidized the implementation plan of an entirely new and unified Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) /Coordinated Entry system through \$1.02M in Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Round 3 funding, roughly \$2M in County General Fund Support (GFS) and \$400K in CenCal's Housing and Homelessness Incentive Program (HHIP) funding.

Homeless prevention efforts were bolstered by allocating \$492K HHAP Round 2 funding and \$500K of General Fund Support (GFS).

Funds have been secured to build 110 beds for two programs alone -- Welcome Home Village and Barca Street. The County received a \$13.4M Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF-2) grant for an 80-bed complex (Welcome Home Village) consisting of 46 permanent supportive housing beds, and 34 interim shelter beds on S. Higuera Street to be managed by Good Samaritan Shelter. Further funding of \$600K from Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG-CV) has been allocated to the Barca Street project for 30 interim shelter beds managed by 5 Cities Homeless Coalition (5CHC). Both projects will be fully operational by summer of 2024.

Pending is an \$8M ERF-2 application for a 20 interim shelter bed project in Paso Robles. A 15-bed interim shelter bed in Morro Bay is also being explored. Also pending is an award for the county's \$1.6 M HHIP-2 application to be announced in September 2023.

Quantify shortfalls in affordable special needs housing and service capacities and link existing and potential funding strategies to close these gaps in the next 4 years.

A strategic team has been established whose sole focus is to develop a coordinated Countywide approach for increased affordable housing and supplemental services where needed. This local team of experts consists of Joe Dzvonic (former HSD manager), Ken Triguero (People's Self-Help Housing), Scott Collings (HASLO), and Dave Cooke (Paso Robles Housing Authority). The team will connect the most urgent needs with ever-changing opportunities for funding. As of July 27, 2023, they have met in person three times, meeting every 2-3 weeks for 90 minutes going forward. Once detailed objectives are developed, the team will involve additional key players across the County (e.g., Planning, Housing Trust Fund, and SLOCOG).

Quantification of shortfalls will also be aided through data provided by the new HMIS once established.

Launch effort to streamline uncoordinated homelessness funding and efforts, including coordination with key external partners.

The HSD is working closely with Public Health and Behavioral Health to coordinate efforts in grant writing and program execution for funding sources such as CenCal's Enhanced Care Management (ECM) Program, HHIP, and Bridge Housing Program Grant for Behavioral Health.

To assist with funding efforts, the HSD employed four dedicated grant program managers. The Department now has up to eleven employees capable of assisting in the grant proposal process.

To streamline the funding evaluation process and facilitate more informed and coordinated decision-making, the first of a series of service funding conferences is planned for late 2023/early 2024. The conference brings together all service providers and affordable housing developers. The HSD will present all funds available for the different programs, while the service providers and housing developers reciprocate by sharing their mid-term strategies and how available funding coordinates with their planning.

FINDINGS

Progress on LOE4 the first year has been encouraging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the County provide bi-annual public updates on grant funding received and applied for throughout the county to support strategies to prevent/reduce homelessness, including developing additional affordable housing.

LINE OF EFFORT 5 (LOE5)

Strengthen Regional Collaboration

FOCUS

Create a regional, coordinated response to homelessness to minimize duplication of effort and improve system effectiveness to reduce homelessness.

YEAR 1 GOALS

Homeless Action Committee created, meets regularly; Citizens Oversight body formed; quarterly discussion sessions begin for those with lived experience.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Homeless Action Committee and CHAC have been created.

The Homeless Action Committee is informally comprised of the County's Chief Administrative Officer and the head of the County's Homeless Division, along with city managers and key city staff. The Committee has been meeting regularly during year one with a focus on establishing good lines of communication and a better understanding of the Plan.

Most, but not all, cities provided feedback and responses to specific CHAC inquiries, therefore, this summary does not grade each individual city in year one. The cities of San Luis Obispo, Paso Robles, and Grover Beach were particularly responsive to requests for information. All three of those cities have created their own specific plans and allocated staff to address homelessness in their jurisdictions. We did not receive feedback from some cities but hope to for the year two report so that a more complete assessment can detail the efforts of all seven cities relative to the Plan's goals.

Those cities that have responded have made explicit statements stating that homelessness is a top priority issue. Cities attempt to address homelessness by increasing affordable housing through policies articulated in their Housing Elements. Many cities also reflect that priority in their annual budgets.

In summary, most cities are keenly aware of the homeless problem and have formally identified it as a city priority. The cities are to be commended for their efforts.

GRADE

C

Unfortunately, it is still very challenging to achieve a truly regional approach, which would entail the sharing of resources, coordination of planning and operational activities, and a higher centralized leadership.

Additionally, although City Housing Elements all include reference to affordable housing policies, there has not been as much progress in developing policies that would fast-track the type of housing accommodations that are needed for the homeless population.

Finally, CHAC has received little evidence of quarterly discussion sessions for those with lived experience during most of the course of the year. However, we have learned that such sessions were just beginning to commence near the end of the reporting period.

FINDINGS

Progress on LOE5 has been made. There is a willingness by all the parties to work together, though there is no formal way for cities or the county to compel coordinated action. The Homeless Action Committee and HSOC do facilitate communication, but a higher level of coordination will be needed to tackle the challenge with a truly regional approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the County develop a plan for regional efforts to address homelessness that focuses on identification of the amount of interim, supportive, and low-income housing needed in each of the large communities in the County (San Luis Obispo, Paso Robles, Atascadero, Nipomo, Arroyo Grande, Los Osos, Grover Beach, Morro Bay, Pismo Beach, Templeton, Oceano, Cambria, Cayucos, San Miguel, and Avila Beach).
2. It is recommended that quarterly discussions for those with lived experiences of being housing vulnerable be held and findings shared with public and CHAC.
3. It is recommended that the cities and the county begin defining what should be included in "Compacts" (a year two and year three goal) between the County and the cities. These Compacts will need to identify the shared responsibilities and mutual commitments of the parties to work together, per the stated goals of the 5-year Plan. It is necessary for the parties to talk, which they do, but it is not sufficient. The Cities need more influence in how county services are provided for the homeless living in their cities. Similarly in the arena of housing for the homeless, the County needs more influence in how shelter and housing projects are advanced and supported in the cities. These mutual needs should be supported through formally adopted Compacts that provide explicit commitments to specific goals shared by both parties. This recommendation seeks to underscore the fact that it will take considerable time and political will to craft these agreements, and it may take the early involvement of the elected representatives to achieve this goal.

LINE OF EFFORT 6 (LOE6)

Build public engagement through information-sharing and partnership.

FOCUS

Sufficiently define the core homelessness issues and communicate the need to the community for these issues to be addressed. Further, educate and communicate with community members about the strategic plan, outcomes of plan efforts, and specific needs to improve community support for efforts to end and reduce homelessness.

YEAR 1 GOALS

Community education, media plan and “How can I help?” resources.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

As noted throughout this report, “Community education,” a media plan, and resources are either non-existent or inaccessible. One result is that community members throughout the county have expressed substantial concerns that no progress has been made despite advances in several areas of the Plan. Additionally, not meeting the goals outlined in LOE6 has impeded progress on accomplishing components throughout the Plan.

As evidenced in multiple instances during year one, community resistance to new homeless facilities has been significant. The public has become increasingly unwilling to allow such facilities to be located near their homes and businesses. A general skepticism seems to be developing around whether or not building such facilities reduces homelessness or attracts increased numbers of homeless individuals to the community. The failure to see those numbers decline despite, increases in funding and facilities, is making it difficult to achieve community “buy in”.

The County’s current website is cumbersome, not user friendly and requires significant hurdles to make changes/updates. The current “homeless assistance” page is five layers deep into the site from the county home page.



FINDINGS

The challenge of creating “buy-in” by the public for siting new homeless facilities is greater than originally expected, which means that the effort may need a more significantly resourced effort if it is to succeed. Some projects are located within city boundaries which requires a high level of coordination between County and city communications strategies and personnel.

RECOMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the County conduct a review and best practice analysis in consideration of updating the homeless assistance website. Create a website that utilizes the most current standards for ease of use and functionality so that a wide array of users (e.g., volunteers, donors, advocates, service providers, general public, housing vulnerable, unhoused, etc.) with disparate needs and interests can easily find the resources they need to understand and support efforts to prevent/reduce homelessness in the county.
2. It is recommended that the County develop a measurable and verifiable messaging strategy and communication metrics to track engagement and effectiveness of communications and outreach efforts. The messaging strategy should be developed to include all verticals (social media, website, etc.) and pillars (volunteers, donors, advocates, unhoused, etc.). In addition to metrics, the strategy should include quantitative objectives that include timelines for delivery.
3. It is recommended that the County utilize social media platforms to increase outreach efforts. The social media platforms should be independent, nimble, timely, and content-specific to avoid volunteers, donors, advocates, unhoused, etc., from having to sift through unrelated County information.
4. It is recommended that the County develop strategies to proactively educate the broader public about the successes, learnings, and failures of the progress toward meeting the goals of the 5-year Plan. More proactive outreach might help increase confidence in these efforts and build public acceptance of the tasks ahead.
5. It is recommended that multi-jurisdictional communications teams be organized that allow County and city staff to coordinate their outreach to neighborhoods affected by new homelessness projects. Such outreach should occur early in the process and be designed to solicit constructive feedback. This input should help identify areas of concern to the neighborhood, along with potential strategies for mitigating those concerns, BEFORE holding public meetings to present completed plans.