

5-Year Strategic System Improvement Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in the City of Detroit

Project Update to Partners and Stakeholders

January 5, 2024

Purpose of this Message

The City of Detroit Housing and Revitalization Department (HRD), the Homeless Action Network of Detroit (HAND), and the Detroit Continuum of Care (CoC) have come together to establish shared goals, priorities, and actions to prevent and end homelessness in Detroit and strongly recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The City has engaged Barbara Poppe and Associates (BPA) and its team of consultants, including two Community Consultants with lived expertise of homelessness in Detroit, to provide expert guidance and support for the development of a Strategic System Improvement Plan.

This message is intended to keep all partners and stakeholders, including people experiencing homelessness in Detroit, up to date on the status of efforts, particular areas of focus, and next steps.

Please see the [July 2023 Update](#) and the [October 2023 Update](#) for information regarding earlier elements of this planning project. Please also see the [Interim Findings Report](#), released in October 2023, for detailed information regarding the first stages of this planning process and community priorities identified.

BPA Consulting Team

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Planning Activity Spotlight

November 2023 Community Planning Sessions

To support the community to identify solutions for critical community priorities, Barbara Poppe & Associates facilitated 11 Community Planning Sessions during November 2023.

These sessions were developed and implemented by Planning Teams of people with lived experience of homelessness in Detroit and people working in Detroit's homelessness response system. Each Session focused on different topics and solutions for strengthening and reimagining shelter, for improving rehousing and housing supply in Detroit, or for reducing unsheltered homelessness.

An average of about 78 people participated in each Community Planning Session, and an average of 24% of participants indicated they had lived experience of homelessness.

During these sessions, community members discussed hundreds of potential strategies for improving the homelessness response system in Detroit.

Materials and presentations used during the Sessions, and meeting summaries that include all of the ideas for potential strategies identified during Sessions, have been made publicly available at the [Strategic Plan Meeting Minutes webpage](#) (scroll down to see the information from these November Sessions.)

Prioritization of Potential Solutions

The potential solutions identified during Community Planning Sessions formed the basis for survey activities performed the last week of November 2023 to identify the community's priorities among the potential solutions. The surveys were distributed to everyone who participated or had been invited to participate in the Sessions. The surveys asked people to offer their thoughts regarding:



- What are the most important activities?
- What should be started during 2024?
- What would success look like or how should we measure success?
- What community partners and resources should be engaged?

Survey responses were analyzed by the BPA Consulting Team, including considering responses from people with lived experiences of homelessness separately and in comparison to responses from other participants. The ideas prioritized through these processes and were discussed with the Strategic Plan Oversight Commission (SPOC) at their [December 13, 2023 meeting](#) and they will continue to be reviewed, assessed for feasibility and against community capacity, and refined. The SPOC is charged with prioritizing among the potential solutions and determining the content that will be included within the final Plan.

Strengthening and Reimagining Shelter Survey Responses

82 people responded to the survey regarding strengthening and reimagining shelter, including at least 15 people with lived experiences of homelessness. **Potential activities receiving the highest prioritization by people with lived experience included:**

- **Monitor and enforce that all shelters promote safety, dignity, and autonomy.** This could include shelter practices and policies being aligned with non-punitive approaches, using Housing First, minimizing shelter rules, eliminating moral policing, etc. Ensure staff keep shelter residents' information confidential. Ensure multi-lingual supports are available in all shelters. Ensure after hours entry. Offer flexible options for meals to accommodate all cultural, dietary, and work-related needs, including self-preparation. Ensure harm reduction features are in place, e.g., sharps containers and requiring shelter to provide Narcan.
- **Create and fund a standardized internal housing program within all emergency shelters** to provide support and resources to help support persons to exit from shelter to permanent housing destinations.
- **Pursue a shelter culture shift that promotes the dignity and worth of all persons accessing emergency support**, prioritizes compassion and empathy, holistically embodies the principles of housing first, addresses staffing pay imbalances, and combats the scarcity mindset that can be a barrier to change.
- **Conduct a system wide study of current wages/benefits and develop a strategy to increase wages/benefits to be more equitable.** The study could compare wage trends between frontline, management, and executive staff. This would reduce staff turnover, reduce staff vacancies, and improve resident experiences and outcomes. Create wage standards that providers must follow to ensure shelter staff (especially those on the front line) are adequately compensated and receive financial benefits like raises and benefits. Ensure all staff have access to insurance, paid time off, holidays, and easily accessible, affordable, anonymous mental health and other supports. Redefine hiring and compensation standards so that those with academic credentials are not disproportionately valued over lived experience of homelessness.



Improving Rehousing and Housing Supply Survey Responses

80 people responded to the survey regarding improving rehousing and housing supply, including at least 18 people with lived experiences of homelessness. **Potential activities receiving the highest prioritization by people with lived experience included:**

- **Improve and streamline workflows and processes between MSHDA (Michigan State Housing Development Authority), DHC (Detroit Housing Commission), homelessness service providers, landlords, coordinated entry, and residents** to speed up processing rental payments, ensure units are high quality,

enhance communication to residents and landlords, ease paperwork submission challenges for residents, improve recertification processes, facilitate better data integration between HMIS and the voucher lists, and close services gaps. Identify opportunities to better meet the needs of various groups, such as seniors, English language learners, and youth.

- **Build a multi-disciplinary coalition of housing commissions, housing navigators, developers, landlords, housing inspectors, and others** to engage in collaborative system alignment, information sharing and goal setting.
- **Conduct a system wide study of current staff wages/benefits and develop a strategy to increase wages/benefits to be more equitable.** This would reduce staff turnover, reduce staff vacancies, and improve resident experiences and outcomes.
- **Pre-inspect units prior to being shared with clients.** Engage with independent contractors to carry out inspections to ensure clients do not need to wait for repairs to be made prior to lease-up.
- **Advocate to change how the federal government calculates the Area Median Income** to be based on the City of Detroit (excluding other areas of Wayne County).

To see detailed analyses regarding the survey participants and responses, please see:

- [Strengthening and Reimagining Shelter Survey Analysis](#)
- [Improving Rehousing and Housing Supply Survey Analysis](#)

Reducing Unsheltered Homelessness Priorities

During the Reducing Unsheltered Homelessness Community Planning Session held in November, participants reviewed the results of previous Sessions and grouped system improvement recommendations regarding unsheltered homelessness according to three broad planning objectives:

1. **Creating a system-wide strategy for reducing unsheltered homelessness.** This system-wide strategy would align efforts across all partners, jurisdictions and public systems engaged in the work.
2. **Strengthening the practice of outreach.** Community Planning Session participants understand that providers engaged in street outreach activities need to have access to evidence-based practices and effective resources and tools to support their work.
3. **Connecting housing options to street outreach services.** Persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness require readily available housing options to end their homelessness. These housing options need to be part of the community's rehousing strategy so that outreach providers, police, and other system partners who encounter people in unsheltered living arrangements are able to offer housing as a solution rather than relocation or criminalization.



Next Steps

In early December, the Planning Teams who implemented the Community Planning Sessions and the surveys met to debrief, to review the survey results or planning objectives identified, and to develop recommended Improvement Objectives and Activities, which were discussed with the Strategic Plan Oversight Commission (SPOC) at their [December 13, 2023 meeting](#). **The ideas prioritized through these processes will continue to be reviewed and refined, and the SPOC is charged with determining the final content for the Strategic System Improvement Plan, currently projected to be finalized and adopted in March 2024, for implementation between 2024 and 2028.**

For More Information

- Please see the [Interim Findings Report, released in October 2023](#), for detailed information regarding the first stages of this planning process and community priorities identified.
- Please also see HRD's [Homelessness Strategic Planning Project webpage](#) for a wide range of materials and documents related to this planning project.
- To contact the BPA Consulting Team, please email project manager Kourtney Clark at kourtney@poppeassociates.com.