

HOMELESS ASSESSMENT & SOLUTIONS PROJECT

12.5.17

Deschutes County residents are experiencing a crisis: too many of us live outside or in unstable inside residences, and many of us who have permanent inside living situations (particularly large land owners) shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden that necessarily results from a large population of people who live outside (of course not nearly as big a burden as experienced by those who live outside).

What can we do about our homeless crisis? Fortunately, we're already doing much. Our community is graced to have many individuals and organizations that work tirelessly to alleviate the hardship faced by those experiencing homelessness, and to offer assistance to help people avoid losing their housing in the first place.¹ Together these organizations have helped thousands of people to cope with their housing struggles.

But what about the private sector? Deschutes County has historically been defined by the willingness of our business community to step up and engage in the development and implementation of big solutions to big problems. Now is the time for the business community to engage with governments, non-profits, and the residents of Deschutes County to develop a compassionate, evidence-based, and effective plan that will be implemented and produce results.

How do we get there from here? By following these five steps.

1. Identify the problem we are trying to solve.

We can't fix a problem if we don't fully understand it. We need reliable answers to many questions, including:

- How many people experience homelessness on an annual basis?
 - When people experience homelessness, how many days are they homeless?
- What are the demographics of our neighbors who are homeless?
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Single? Families?
 - Employed? Unemployed?
 - Mental health diagnosis?
 - Substance use disorder?
- Where do people who are homeless live?
 - How many outside?
 - If outside, where in the county do they camp?
 - If inside, where? In motels? With friends?
- What percentage of people in Deschutes County who experience homelessness moved here while experiencing homelessness vs. lost their housing after living in Deschutes County?

¹ Just a few of these worthy organizations and groups include: The Homeless Leadership Council, NeighborImpact, The Bethlehem Inn, Shepherd's House, Housing Works, Pfeifer and Associates, Deschutes County, City of Redmond, City of Bend, City of La Pine, City of Sisters, Pacific Crest Affordable Housing, Thrive, Deschutes United Way, Mosaic Medical, La Pine Community Health Center, Sagewood Sanctuary, Housing for All, and many others.

2. Identify how our current situation compares to historic and future realities.

How does our housing crisis now compare to 15 years ago? And if we continue with the status quo, what will the situation look like 15 years from now? The answers to the questions above will tell the story about what our housing crisis looks like now. But this is only part of the story. We need to know how our current reality compares to our historic situation and we need to know what the future holds if we continue with the status quo.

3. Map the people and organizations that are working to address our housing challenges and their scope of work.

We should not reinvent the wheel. By mapping who is doing what we can identify service gaps to be filled while at the same time avoid duplicating efforts.

4. Research and document the successes and failures of other communities.

Deschutes County, like all counties, is unique. We know that a cookie cutter plan from a distant land cannot successfully be dropped into our community. We need to develop a plan that is designed by us and is the right fit for us. But such a plan can be informed by lessons learned from other communities, keeping in mind of course that Deschutes County's vast land mass, large forest lands, and cold/snowy weather seasons, must be taken into account when assessing the viability of programs implemented elsewhere.

5. Develop a report that contains the findings from the four above steps with recommendations for what should be done (that is not already being done) to make Deschutes County the model community in the world for alleviating the burden of homelessness.

The recommendations will be made collaboratively by a steering group comprised of public members, non-profit leaders, the private sector, and government. Upon the issuance of the report the members of the steering group will then solicit partners to implement the recommendations.

Brass Tacks

Members of Deschutes County's business community have generously committed to underwrite the above process. These leaders understand that our government and non-profit sectors are often able to access funding streams to implement programs, but do not have ready access to money for research and development. An infusion of private sector research and development money to fund the above project will enable our community to develop solutions that are state of the art and right for us.

Here's the plan and cost:

Research/Analysis:

1. Collect existing data on scope of current problem, historic problem, and future problem.
 2. What are the causes of homelessness for Deschutes County residents?
 3. Collect, analyze, and summarize evidence based, best practices from across the county and world.
- **Total Research/Analysis cost: 20 hours/\$2,000**

Facilitation/Report:

4. Recruit a diverse group of leaders and getting them to a shared level of understanding of the issue.
 - a. Phone calls/meetings with key stakeholders to identify necessary participants. 6 hours
 - b. Outreach to potential participants. 4 hours
 - c. Set up first meeting. 2 hours
 5. Vet solutions, informed by information from other communities and what we're currently doing in Deschutes County.
 - a. Three meetings. Total staff time: 15 hours
 6. Design implementation strategy (with a consideration of funding and regulatory issues).
 - a. Write final consensus report: 8 hours.
- **Total Facilitation/Report cost: 35 hours/\$4,000 + expenses**

TOTAL PROJECT COST: \$6,000 (plus expenses)

Caveat:

Before undertaking this project there should be a meeting with the steering committee for the recently formed Housing for All consortium. Housing for All proposes to do similar work to what is described in this project but the details are still to be fleshed out. The purpose of a meeting would be to discuss whether Housing for All is positioned to, and interested in, producing the deliverables described in this proposal. No one wants two newly formed groups to each be working on identical projects. At the same time, we should not assume another group will do in the future what one group is prepared to do now. Let's get together and figure it out.