

Information Paper  
Sobering Center

**Background:**

1. Law enforcement, parks and public facilities staff respond to complaints and concerns associated with the behaviors and activities of homeless in our communities. Local law enforcement report as many as 20 cases a day of persons too intoxicated to be safe to themselves or others if left on the street. Officers are not able to directly place these individuals in addiction recovery programs. Without a facility dedicated to sobering, individuals are either: (a) admitted to area emergency rooms (via ambulance at their expense, if they volunteer) for sobering purposes, or, (b) if a crime has been committed, to the already over-crowded jail facility, at a cost to the facility and at an opportunity cost to the community.
2. Salem Hospital reports processing as many as 300 cases of public intoxication through their emergency room for sobering purposes every month. Persons admitted to the hospital for alcohol intoxication generally stay for up to four hours or more, twice the length of time of a typical emergency room patient. In other Oregon communities, sobering facilities are a viable strategy to reduce public cost, crime, over utilization of high cost emergency resources, the impact on limited police resources, space used within the jail, and officer time lost due to processing non-criminal offenders.
3. In Salem, the City, Marion County, and Salem Health have come together to develop a framework for a sobering facility. The need for a local sobering facility was initially identified as part of the Mid-Willamette Homeless Initiative Taskforce. The proposal recognizes the growing cost to our communities of chronically homeless who exhibit signs of substance abuse. The model is based on the experience of the Grants Pass Sobering Center, which opened in April 2016, and relies on partnerships with existing area health and mental health service providers, local law enforcement, and local government.

**Facts and Findings:**

1. The purpose of a sobering facility is to provide a safe, clean, and supervised environment for acutely intoxicated individuals to become sober and eligible for further treatment and other services. The facility is not a medical facility or a mental health facility. In Salem, the framework would result in eight to ten beds for alcohol-only sobering and offices for discharge planning with individuals. The facility would be operated 24 hours a day, by a non-profit addiction treatment provider. Ideally, the facility would be housed in a building of 4,000 to 5,000 square feet in proximity to hospital and other treatment providers in order to ease connections to other services such as a detoxification, out-patient, or residential recovery facility.
2. Initial estimates suggest the cost of operating the sobering facility on an annual basis could be as much as \$600,000 to \$700,000 to be funded by operating grants and contributions from Marion County, the City of Salem, and Salem Health. As more details regarding specific roles, the site, and funding become available, staff will return to Council for consideration of budget, operational, lease, and grant agreements.