



Staff Report

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TO: Mayor and City Council

THROUGH: Steve Powers, City Manager

FROM: Kristin Retherford, Urban Development Director

SUBJECT:

City Council Work Session on the Continuum of Care

Ward(s): All

Councilor(s): All

Neighborhood(s): All

Result Area(s): Welcoming and Livable Community, Strong and Diverse Economy.

ISSUE:

City Council Work Session on the Continuum of Care.

RECOMMENDATION:

Information only.

SUMMARY:

Since 1994, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has been requiring communities to establish a Continuum of Care (CoC) to receive federal funds. The primary purpose of a CoC is to stimulate community-wide coordination of programs for individuals and families who are homeless and to submit a "single, comprehensive application" for federal financial support. CoCs are charged with developing long-term strategic plans and managing ongoing actions and planning efforts to address the needs of homeless individuals and households.

Until 2011, Marion and Polk counties comprised a regional Continuum of Care administered by the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency. In July 2011, members of the Mid-Valley Housing and Services Collaborative, the steering committee for the Salem/Marion/Polk CoC, voted unanimously to join the Rural Oregon Continuum of Care (ROCC), a "balance of state" CoC model, now consisting of twenty-eight counties including Marion, Polk, and Yamhill. The ROCC is administered by Community Action Partners of Oregon and has two designated staff.

The rationale for joining the ROCC included concerns about increasing federal expectations for data collection and reporting, a hope that the Marion-Polk region would become more successful to compete for “bonus” dollars, and assurances from the ROCC that the Marion-Polk region’s projects would be held harmless in the first year and would be supported to be successful in future years. Since 2011, homelessness has become a more prominent community issue, with increasing numbers of visible homeless people and expectations from constituents that cities and counties invest in strategies that “fix the problem.”

To better meet local needs, improve efficiencies, and achieve stronger outcomes, stakeholders in Marion, Polk, and possibly Yamhill counties are exploring the possibility of withdrawing from the ROCC and re-establishing a local CoC.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

The Mid-Willamette Homeless Initiative (MWHI), of which the City of Salem is a member, adopted a Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) in February of 2017. To execute the Strategic Plan, a program coordinator was hired and work plan was put into place in the spring of 2018. One key deliverable of the work plan was to analyze whether or not the region should withdraw from the ROCC and re-establish a Regional CoC Structure for Marion, Polk, and possibly Yamhill counties (Attachment 1).

Oregon has Single County CoC structures, Regional structures, and a Balance of State structure. Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Lane, and Jackson counties all have Single County CoC structures. Deschutes, Jefferson, and Crook counties participate in a Regional CoC. Marion, Polk, and Yamhill counties are members of the Balance of State CoC along with twenty-five other counties.

The Oregon Balance of State ROCC currently has the ninth largest number of homeless individuals in the nation and the tenth highest number of chronically homeless individuals. Chronic homelessness is defined as homeless for a year or more, or homeless three or more times in the prior thirty-six months for at least a year, and must have a disabling condition. However, while the ROCC has such a large number of homeless and chronically homeless individuals, the amount of funding received per homeless individual lags significantly behind Washington, Multnomah, Clackamas, and Lane counties, the Central Oregon Regional CoC, and Vancouver, Washington.

Organizationally, it is more feasible to have meaningful participation in all aspects of the CoC process, including forming local planning groups and setting priorities, when the CoC is a Single County structure or a Regional CoC structure. The Single County and Regional CoC structures also support more efficient assemblage of meaningful data. This is a challenge in a large geographic area that is often non-contiguous. Although there are many programs providing services to homeless individuals, at this time, there is no designated entity doing coordinated planning to address homelessness in the county or the region. A Regional CoC would function in this capacity.

BACKGROUND:

Analysis of the ROCC structure has concluded that a Regional CoC Structure consisting of Marion, Polk, and possibly Yamhill counties offers the potential for improved planning, coordination, and

outcomes for homeless individuals and families. While there is no guarantee that federal funding will increase, and some possibility that funding could decrease in the short-term, there is potential for increased funding over time.

To establish a new Regional CoC Structure, it will be necessary for the governmental jurisdictions to continue contributing to staffing costs and to assist currently-funded programs, if needed, so programs remain whole during the transition. This investment in and transition to a comprehensive systems approach is expected to achieve improved outcomes for homeless individuals and families. However, a systems approach requires cooperation and long-term commitment from the participating governmental jurisdictions.

A Regional CoC Structure will also facilitate better assemblage and use of data to drive service delivery and hold service providers accountable. This data has value in communications with HUD, Oregon Housing and Community Services, the Congressional delegation, state legislators, and other relevant federal and state agencies.

Kristin Retherford
Urban Development Director

Attachments:

1. Continuum of Care Analysis