



Staff Report

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Date: 6/10/2019

Item #: 3.2b.

TO: Mayor and City Council

THROUGH: Steve Powers, City Manager

FROM: Kristin Retherford, Urban Development Director

SUBJECT:

Support for Establishing a Continuum of Care for the Mid-Willamette Region

Ward(s): All Wards

Councilor(s): All Councilors

Neighborhood(s): All Neighborhoods

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

ISSUE:

Shall the City Council adopt Resolution No. 2019-17 supporting withdrawal from the Rural Oregon Continuum of Care and establishing a Regional Continuum of Care for the Mid-Willamette Region?

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt Resolution No. 2019-17 supporting withdrawal from the Rural Oregon Continuum of Care and establishing a Regional Continuum of Care for the Mid-Willamette Region.

SUMMARY:

Analysis of the Rural Oregon Continuum of Care (ROCC) structure has concluded that a Regional Continuum of Care (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.

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 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Oregon Housing and Community Services, the Congressional delegation, state legislators, and other relevant federal and state agencies.

To establish a new Regional CoC structure, participating governmental jurisdictions will need to continue contributing to staffing costs and to assist currently-funded programs, if needed, so that existing programs remain whole during the transition from the ROCC. 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.

The adoption of Resolution No. 2019-17 (Attachment 1) will indicate the City of Salem's support for withdrawing from the ROCC and establishing a Regional CoC for the Mid-Willamette Region.

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 a 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 2).

Oregon has Single County CoC structures, Regional structures, and a Balance of State structure (ROCC). 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, also referred to as the ROCC, 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:

Since 1994, HUD has been requiring communities to establish Continuum of Care organizations 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."

In 2016 the Mid-Willamette Homeless Initiative was established to "identify and launch proven strategies to reduce homelessness" in the region. This initiative produced a strategic plan that recommended the region assess participation in the ROCC. The resulting analysis concluded that the region could benefit from creating its own Continuum of Care, with enhanced service coordination, local autonomy, and alignment of goals to more effectively reduce homelessness in the region. The new Continuum of Care would be registered with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2020.

Kristin Retherford
Urban Development Director

Attachments:

1. Resolution No. 2019-17
2. Continuum of Care Analysis