

## Information Item

**Date:** June 15, 2021

**To:** Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, and Members of the City Council

**From:** Ben Rowe, Assistant City Manager  
Marla Y. Newman, Community Development Director

**Subject:**

Information on Community Development Department Engagement of Consultant to Assess the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Continuum of Care (CoC) and Recommend New Plan to End Homelessness

**Strategic Focus Area:** Livable Neighborhoods

**Strategic Objective:** No

**Strategic Plan Action Item:** No

**Key Work Item:** No



In May 2006, the City of Winston-Salem published the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, developing strategies to quickly house and sustain housing for those experiencing homelessness in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County. Prior to the Ten-Year Plan, approximately 1,800 individuals were served annually through the homeless service system. When the Ten-Year Plan ended in 2016, the number of those seeking services decreased to 1,558. For 2020, the most recent full year for which data is available from HUD, 1,632 individuals were served through the homeless service system.

In June 2018, the Winston Salem/Forsyth County Continuum of Care published the Strategic Plan to End Homelessness in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County. This five-year Strategic Plan builds on the Ten-Year Plan and uses analysis of local performance data to undertake three main goals: 1) Continue Progress Towards Ending Chronic Homelessness, by expanding the supply of permanent supportive housing and continuing to prioritize available housing assistance for households experiencing chronic homelessness, 2) Reduce Homelessness for Families, Youth and Non-Chronically Homeless Adults, by implementing shelter diversion and “light-touch” resources and expanding case management, and 3) Improve Performance Throughout the System.

With the onset of COVID-19, the CoC adopted new temporary policies and procedures to safely provide emergency shelter and rapid rehousing services to those experiencing homelessness. Providing services through the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the awareness of how the CoC must develop new approaches for serving those experiencing homelessness in our community. One example is the need to develop more non-congregate housing in the community for those with severe physical and mental disabilities. Non-congregate housing (e.g. hotel, motel, dormitory-style) allows the use of single-room individual living spaces and is preferable to congregate settings such as shelters, which often consist of a large room with beds or cots. Non-congregate shelters accommodate individuals with high barriers to housing stability and are often supported with wrap-around services leading to greater life skills and independent living.

The benefit of non-congregate settings was exemplified during the pandemic with the establishment of the Medically Fragile Shelter. Persons with chronic health conditions experiencing homelessness, some of the community's most vulnerable population, were provided rooms at a local hotel and ongoing supportive services onsite. Not one of the 109 guests contracted COVID during the shelter's operation, and many have secured permanent housing or been reunited with family. The Medically Fragile Shelter ceased operations on May 20, 2021.

The ultimate goal for the CoC is to move persons experiencing homelessness into permanent housing rather than emergency shelter. Today, achieving the goal requires an updated, well-thought multi-year plan. The experience gained during the pandemic provides opportunities to reimagine how the CoC responds during crises and can enhance its service delivery model.

To that end, the Community Development Department will issue a Request for Qualifications and Proposal to engage a consultant to assess the rapidly changing needs of the homeless community, as well as the financial and economic impacts of the global pandemic and how it has affected services provided by the CoC. The selected consultant must have demonstrated experience in program evaluation, strategic planning, and organizational governance for organizations serving persons experiencing homelessness.

The consultant will identify best practices that align with the needs of Winston-Salem/Forsyth County; recommend new operational strategies, governance, and knowledge resources that support more effective service delivery; and suggest a framework for the creation of a multi-year implementation plan. With new and improved strategies to serve persons experiencing homelessness, it is expected that the delivery of supportive services will be stronger, reach more persons unhoused and at risk of homelessness, and result in more persons securing—and remaining in—stable and permanent housing.

CoC planning funds will support the work of the consultant and are an allowable expense under HUD guidelines.