

Homelessness in the Portland Region

Some straightforward solutions
to a complex problem

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every city in the United States has homeless individuals and families. Coastal cities, especially on the West Coast, have numbers of homeless that have hit crisis levels. In addition to the personal toll homelessness takes on the individuals and their families, the spread of unsheltered homeless populations and homeless camps imposes enormous social costs in the form of public health, public safety, and livability for the community at-large.

After decades of attempts to address homelessness—and unknown, but large, amounts of money spent—the crisis seems to have worsened in many places, especially in Portland, Oregon. Since the mid-1980s the region has launched long-range plans to “end” homelessness. All of the plans failed to reach their goals, for many reasons: insufficient funding, political headwinds, legal barriers, and the seeming intractability of solving the problem.

In 2020, the region's voters approved two new income taxes to provide “supportive housing services” to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. The taxes are anticipated to bring in approximately \$250 million a year. During the campaign, proponents claimed, “We know what works, it's just a matter of scale.” They were gaslighting themselves and gaslighting voters.

To be blunt, we don't know what works, and there appear to be no economies of scale. For more than two decades, the “Housing First” approach has been heralded as the best solution. The approach focuses first on providing housing to individuals and families, then addressing issues that led participants to homelessness and are keeping them from being housed. These “wrap around” services are expensive and require individuals to have the ability and will to fully use them.

While the approach has improved outcomes regarding the transmission of HIV and the survival of those with HIV/AIDS and has had some success in reducing alcohol abuse, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine concluded that there is no substantial published evidence to demonstrate improved health outcomes or reduced health care costs. Moreover, there is no evidence that Housing First approaches have had any effect on reducing overall homelessness or the number of unsheltered homeless.

For the community at large, the unsheltered population is the biggest concern. These are the people seen sleeping on the streets, in parks, in tents, in cars, or in abandoned

buildings. This population is most quickly associated with filth left in doorways, needles scattered in parks, car prowls, and property theft. While a majority of Portland area voters have compassion for the homeless, they also want an end to overnight camping. They want to feel safe walking down the street or in their parks. They want their city's businesses to flourish.

Many cities are bound by the Ninth Circuit Court's decision in *Martin v. City of Boise*. This ruling prohibits city anti-camping ordinances from being enforced if there is no shelter space available. In addition, the City of Portland is bound by a settlement agreement requiring 24-hour notice before homeless camps can be cleared. The delays associated with the notice requirement means once a camp is reported, it can take the city a week or more to clear a camp.

One way to enforce a camping ban, while complying with *Martin*, is to develop a database of vacant and available shelter space. If the database indicated space is available, broad laws that prohibit public camping may be enforced. As simple as this may seem, neither the City of Portland nor the State of Oregon has such a system.

After the *Martin* decision, Modesto, California implemented a straightforward inventory/vacancy system. Each day, county staff contact emergency homeless shelter providers in the county to track the availability of shelter beds. The document is then distributed to outreach workers and law enforcement officers. Police officers are then able to offer people who are camping illegally a more stable place to stay. It is stunning that after all the time and resources the Portland region commits to homeless services, something as simple as an inventory database has not been implemented.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Portland has increased temporary emergency shelter beds to allow shelters to practice socially distancing. Among other locations, beds filled the Oregon Convention Center, three community centers, a recently abandoned Greyhound bus station, and vacant outdoor land. Cascade Policy Institute proposes the city should continue to pursue making permanent some of these low-cost emergency shelters and camping sites.

In October 2020, Bybee Lakes Hope Center opened its doors as a supportive transitional housing facility for the homeless at the site of the never-opened Wapato Jail in Portland. Along the way, the project faced opposition from local politicians who claim solving homelessness is their main priority. They argued housing people in a former jail

was undignified, saying it amounted to merely “warehousing” the homeless. They claimed local zoning laws—which they control—didn’t allow for housing. But, the owner and operator of Bybee Lakes overcame these objections and now the site provides a template for repurposing surplus public land and buildings into facilities to serve the homeless.

Toward that end, Cascade Policy Institute urges Metro, the regional government, to convert into emergency housing the now-shuttered Portland Expo Center. The Expo Center is a 330,000-square-foot exposition facility sitting on 53 acres of land. It has easy access to public transit as a light rail line terminates at the front of the Expo Center and provides frequent service to downtown Portland. The facility has significant capital needs and has no identified funding source to meet these needs over time.

At 100 square feet per person, the site’s exhibition space alone could serve 2,000-3,000 individuals. Its 2,500 vehicle parking lot provides ample space for individuals who prefer to camp or sleep in vehicles. Converting the Expo Center could bring immediate relief to thousands of homeless individuals and families while providing a much better return on investment than current plans to remodel the site for future low-attendance expositions. In addition, the massive increase in shelter capacity from converting the Expo Center would provide local jurisdictions the opportunity to reduce overnight camping and to clear camps, while remaining in compliance with the Ninth Circuit’s *Martin v. Boise* ruling.

None of Cascade’s proposals “solve” or “end” homelessness. Instead, they take some big steps toward a coherent framework for addressing homelessness: reach out to those who want help, be firm with those who don’t, and create an environment where residents feel safe and businesses can flourish.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, puts the homeless population into three broad categories: unsheltered, those in emergency shelter, and those in transitional housing.

Unsheltered are the homeless seen sleeping on the streets, in parks, in tents, in cars, or in abandoned buildings. Often, it is the unsheltered population that is noticeable to the community. They see the tents, the camps, and the people sleeping in doorways or under bridges. They may have had their bicycles stolen, had their cars broken into, or been accosted on the sidewalk. Businesses have had to deal with shoplifting and vandalism and have had to clean waste and needles from their doorways. For many, the public face of homelessness is seen as a failure of the government to provide basic public safety and public health services. It’s

seen as a breakdown in social norms that value private property and public welfare. Under this view, government policy should focus on restoring community livability and safety by moving the homeless off the streets.

Many also understand homelessness as a deeply personal crisis for those experiencing it. This comes from an assumption that no one wants to be homeless. Everyone who loses housing has his or her own unique circumstances: job loss, mental illness, physical disability, substance abuse, domestic violence, rising rent, or eviction. This face of homelessness is seen as a failure by the government to provide adequate housing and support services for those most vulnerable. It’s seen as a breakdown in the social safety net. It’s seen as an indictment of a free market economy that seeks to extract the highest value out of real estate investments at the expense of providing affordable housing. Under this view, government policy should focus on helping the homeless obtain affordable housing as well as any services they need to find housing and stay housed.

Too often these views are presented as either-or. Someone who advocates for prohibiting overnight camping and cleaning up camps will be accused of seeking to infringe on one’s civil rights. Someone who advocates for more spending on affordable permanent supportive housing will be accused of handing out “freebies” to people who have no interest in supporting themselves.

This paper argues homelessness is too complex to put in an either-or framework. Homelessness is a deeply personal crisis, but a large and growing homeless population imposes substantial financial and quality-of-life costs on the community at large. Similarly, the unsheltered population must get off the streets. But it must be understood that while many unsheltered would like nothing more than to be housed, there are also many who have little interest in their own, or their community’s, well-being. Paraphrasing former Portland Mayor Bud Clark, policies should reach out to those who want help, be firm with those who don’t, and create an environment where residents feel safe and businesses can flourish.

This report attempts to provide a concise, but comprehensive, review of the history and current state of homelessness in Portland, a summary of the academic research on the effectiveness of programs and policies, legal challenges facing cities in addressing overnight camping, and existing efforts to increase emergency and transitional housing in Portland. The conclusion offers potential ways to address the number of unsheltered homeless in the city.

A SHORT HISTORY OF POST-WAR HOMELESSNESS IN PORTLAND

As with most American cities, Portland has always had homeless residents. The economic boom after World War II

resulted in a drop in homelessness. One organization goes so far as to say that “homelessness went away” from the 1940s until the 1980s.¹ That's not true.

For example, in the 1940s, a group of University of Portland students started a fraternity called the Blanchet Club to serve food to the homeless. The club opened its House of Hospitality to serve the homeless and others in need in 1952. Within another ten years, they opened a residential facility in Carlton, Oregon, to house men rebuilding their lives from drug and alcohol addiction, job loss, and other obstacles.² An estimated 2,000-3,000 men were homeless in Multnomah County in 1968.³

The 1970s and 1980s “deinstitutionalization” policies moved many severely mentally ill individuals out of the state institutions and closed many of those institutions.⁴ Carl Abbott, professor emeritus of urban studies at Portland State University, concludes these policies changed the makeup of the city's transient population:⁵

That's when I think skid row turned into a homeless district. Previously, it had been a bunch of poor guys, economically marginalized, but still participating in the labor force and served by vice institutions ... It eventually evolved into a district where you have a concentration of homeless folks.

By 1986, crime and homelessness was a crisis in Portland. Under pressure from downtown businesses to address these issues, Mayor Bud Clark developed a “12-Point Plan for the Homeless,” which was endorsed by the city council and the Multnomah County Commission. The plan attracted national attention and can be summarized with three goals:⁶

1. Reach out to those who want help;
2. Be firm with those who don't; and
3. Create an environment in which residents can feel safe and businesses can flourish.

One of the 12 points was called “Person Down” in which Central City Concern's CHIERS service would pick up anyone incapacitated by alcohol, drugs, illness, or injury and take them to detox or medical assistance.⁸ Another point was involuntary commitment of chronic CHIERS clients. This would require a change to the state's involuntary commitment law, which has a very high threshold. To be involuntarily committed, one must be an imminent danger to themselves or others or be unable to care for their basic needs. Efforts to change the law failed under Mayor Clark and have failed in recent legislative sessions.

Clark left office at the end of 1992, and the incoming mayor, Vera Katz, did not have the same interest in addressing homelessness as her predecessor. Over her 12 years as mayor, efforts to implement the 12-Point Plan dissipated as she focused on several failed attempts to enact a “sit-lie” ordinance which would have prohibited sitting or lying on

Figure 1: Mayor Bud Clark's 12-Point Plan⁷

1. Comprehensive Planning
One group with representation from local government and private sector agencies should be designated to initiate proposals to deal effectively and efficiently with the problem of homelessness. This group should also be charged with evaluating proposals on which local government will be requested to act.
2. Housing
Provide the opportunity for safe and decent housing for everyone in need.
3. "Person Down"
Anyone 'down' (on the streets) should be quickly assessed and taken to appropriate care.
4. Alcohol and Drug Treatment System
Provide a system of treatment for chemically dependent people that is timely, effective, and appropriate.
5. Involuntary Commitment
Society has a right to compel chronic users of substance abuse detoxification services to obtain ongoing treatment.
6. Street Sanitation
Provide safe and appropriate public toilet facilities in the downtown area and eliminate dumpsters from sidewalks.
7. Jobs
Encourage public and private initiatives to hire homeless people, providing training and transitional employment when necessary.
8. Case Management
People who need help should be located and assisted in accessing programs that provide helping services and case management.
9. Point of Access to Services
Provide suitable locations and facilities for access to basic services in areas where public policies support such locations and facilities. Where possible, locate such facilities in conjunction with low-income housing. Stabilize a rational service delivery system and minimize space cost.
10. Street Safety
Provide an environment in the Central City where people feel safe to interact with others who differ in lifestyle, age, race, socio-economic class, and appearance.
11. Chronic Mental Illness Treatment
Provide adequate treatment services for chronically mentally ill individuals in an environment that is the least restrictive and most likely to protect the individual and others from harm.
12. Public Participation
Development of policies and programs to serve the homeless shall be presented to policy makers for decision only through an orderly process.

the sidewalk or in other public spaces.⁹ At the time, sit-lie ordinances were seen as a way to reduce conflicts between downtown foot traffic and panhandlers, street musicians, and the homeless.

In September 2000, a Multnomah County Circuit Court judge ruled Portland's 19-year-old anti-camping ordinance was unconstitutional because it criminalized homelessness.¹⁰ Later that year, a group of transients in Portland established a tent city near downtown, later dubbed "Dignity Village."¹¹ More than a year of city efforts to remove the campers generated widespread media coverage and public attention. In the fall of 2001, the city and residents of Dignity Village agreed to move the camp from downtown to a city-owned composting facility near Portland International Airport. Today, Dignity Village houses approximately 60 adults in semi-permanent structures.¹² The community is a 501(c)(3) membership-based non-profit organization, and is governed by bylaws and a board of directors with an elected chairman and other corporate officers.¹³ With no sit-lie ordinance, illegal camps may also follow Dignity Village's example.

After Katz left office in 2005, Portland and Multnomah County launched an ambitious project they described as a 10-year plan to end homelessness in the region: "This is not a homeless plan; it's a plan to *end* homelessness."¹⁴ At the time, it was estimated that approximately 4,000 persons were experiencing homelessness on any given night.¹⁵ The plan had three strategies:¹⁶

1. Focus on those who were chronically homeless,
2. Make the homeless services system work better by streamlining access, and
3. Concentrate resources on programs with measurable results.

The city and county were confident in their project:¹⁷

By focusing on new strategies, implementing systems change, and creating enough permanent supportive housing for the long term homeless population, we will end chronic homelessness by 2015.

By the middle of the 10-year plan, in 2009, Portland entered into a settlement agreement with several homeless individuals. The *Anderson* Agreement bound the Portland Police Bureau to give illegal campers at least a day's notice before breaking down and cleaning the camp. On the one hand, the agreement recognized homeless individuals had a right to their property and due process. On the other hand, the agreement made it much more difficult to enforce the city's anti-camping ordinances. In addition, the reporting and notification requirements created days-long delays in enforcement, allowing time for camps to expand.

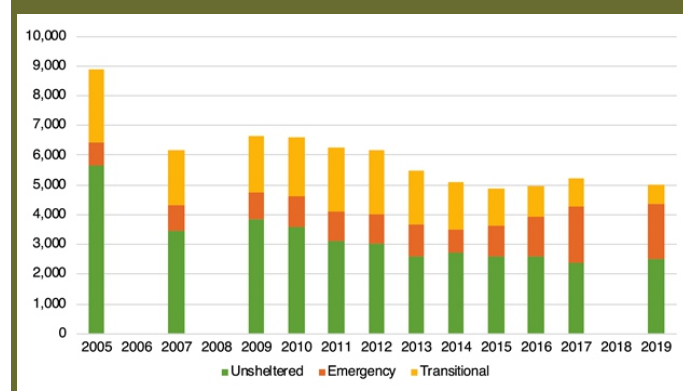
The 10-year plan was generally seen as a failure because it

did not end homelessness as promised. However, over the decade between 2005 and 2015, HUD's Point-in-Time Counts reported the total number of homeless in Multnomah County decreased by 26%, the number of unsheltered homeless decreased by 20%, and the number of chronically homeless individuals decreased by about 40%.

At the beginning of the 10-year plan, Multnomah County had 720 year-round emergency shelter beds. In 2014, there were just 478 in Multnomah County, and another 140 in Washington and Clackamas combined. In contrast, over the same period, the number of emergency beds nationwide increased as the federal government pushed communities to adopt 10-year plans to end chronic homelessness.¹⁸

Observers and experts conclude Portland and Multnomah County's emphasis on a "housing first" program—which provides no-barrier permanent housing for long-term homeless men and women—contributed to the decline in emergency shelter beds, single-room occupancy apartments, and low-cost motel rooms.¹⁹ Housing redevelopment projects before and after the Great Recession replaced low-cost housing with high-end apartments and condominiums, further shrinking the supply of affordable housing.²⁰

Figure 2: Point-in-Time Count of Homeless, Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas Counties



Despite the 10-year plan's modest successes, by its end, there was a widespread perception that Portland homelessness had reached crisis levels. Under pressure from downtown businesses, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales upped efforts to clean up the city center. In pressuring the homeless out of downtown, homeless people were driven out to the residential areas. For many residents, homelessness seemed to be a region-wide problem, not just a central city concern.

In October 2015, Hales declared a citywide housing emergency, approved by city council.²¹ Under the declaration, the city had authority to waive zoning codes, convert city-owned buildings into shelters, and work with the state to waive portions of state building codes so that more buildings could be converted into shelters.²²

Six months after the emergency declaration, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales announced several drastic, and unpopular, policies. One of these was a “safe sleep” policy.²³ For six months, the policy would allow people to sleep on sidewalks and city parks overnight with a limit of six people in one area, if only a tarp and sleeping bag were used. Tents were allowed on city property, but not on sidewalks. He also allowed overnight parking for those sleeping in cars and RVs. This policy was meant to allow the city to enforce clear rules while not having to constantly sweep camps that constantly moved. The mayor also promised space for “organized camps” on city land and more temporary shelter space.²⁴ Soon after the announcement, an alt-weekly published “A Field Guide to Urban Camping” in Portland.²⁵

Because of the hasty rollout and limited public input, residents, businesses, law enforcement, and the homeless themselves were confused about the mayor’s “safe sleep” policy. Homeless camps spread quickly throughout the city. In response, businesses, neighborhood associations, and a nonprofit filed a lawsuit against the mayor and the city claiming the policy was in conflict with city ordinances and state laws.²⁶

By the end of the policy’s six months, Charlie Hales abandoned the plan. According to the Portland Mercury, Hales said:²⁷

People believed that camping was made legal, and outreach workers and law enforcement struggled to educate people about the difference between a safe night’s sleep and unsanctioned camping.

In November 2016, Portland voters approved a \$260 million bond measure to build more affordable housing in the city.²⁸ Two years later, voters within Metro, the regional government, approved a \$650 million affordable housing bond.²⁹ Combined, the measures promised to build more than 5,200 units of affordable housing throughout the region.^{30 31} As of October 2020, only 51 units have been completed.³²

In 2009, several homeless people sued the city of Boise, Idaho for violating their Eighth Amendment rights. The plaintiffs had been cited for sleeping or resting illegally, but successfully argued that since there was no accessible open shelter space available, the city’s camping ordinance was criminalizing the lack of housing. The Ninth Circuit Court ruled ordinances that criminalized resting on public property were unconstitutional if the homeless had nowhere else to go.

In 2020, Metro voters approved the creation of a personal income tax and a business income tax to fund “supportive housing services” throughout the region.³³ Under the measure, “supportive housing services” include rent assistance, eviction prevention, landlord tenant education, legal services, and fair housing advocacy. The measure goes

into effect at the beginning of 2021, so there is no way to assess its success or failure.

Today—five years after the first emergency declaration—Portland is still operating under a housing emergency. The last Point-in-Time Count reports 4,015 homeless in the county, 1,781 of whom are chronically homeless. The number of unsheltered has increased by 8% since 2015 to more than 2,037.

THE CURRENT STATE OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE PORTLAND REGION

Most estimates of homelessness are derived from counts conducted for HUD’s Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. Counts are conducted by Continuums of Care (CoCs). CoCs cover individual cities, counties, parts of states, whole states, and groups of any of these. The Portland region is covered by three CoCs: (1) Portland, Gresham/Multnomah County, (2) Hillsboro, Beaverton/Washington County, and (3) Clackamas County. CoCs are supposed to report every year, but are only required to count unsheltered people in odd years.³⁴

Often the PIT counts are gathered by amateurs who work for homeless service providers or advocacy organizations. However, many CoCs have contracted their responsibilities to organizations, both nonprofit and profit-making, that have come to specialize in this task. Even so, the PIT count of unsheltered homeless people in each CoC almost always relies on a loosely supervised group of amateur volunteers for the one-night count.

While PIT counts are the most widely used, accepted, and cited estimates of the number of homeless people, differences across CoCs and across time call into question the reliability of the estimates. In particular, almost everyone involved in the PIT counts admits that the surveys underestimate the total number of homeless, especially unsheltered homeless.³⁵ Differences in methodology and conditions from year to year can contribute to differences in counts from year to year.³⁶ Consider the differences in methodology and conditions for the Multnomah County CoC between 2017 and 2019.³⁷ It is unknown—and unknowable—whether the increase in counted unsheltered was because of an increase in the actual number of unsheltered homeless people, or because of a combination of better weather, increased training and incentives, and additional outreach efforts.

Under HUD rules, the PIT count places individuals and families into three categories of homelessness:

Table 1³⁸

	2017	2019
Timing	Last week of February	Last week of January
Weather	Cold and wet	Temperate and dry
Volunteer training	7.5 hours	10.5 hours
Outreach to BIPOC	None	African-American: Spanish, Russian, and Vietnamese-speaking
Incentives to volunteer organizations	None	Gift cards based on number of collected forms
Number of volunteers	70	142
Number of counted unsheltered	1,668	2,037

- **Unsheltered** are individuals and families sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., abandoned buildings, train stations, or camping grounds);³⁹
- Those in **transitional housing** designed to provide homeless individuals and families with the interim (up to 24 months) stability and support to successfully move to and maintain permanent housing; or⁴⁰
- Those in **emergency shelter** which is temporary shelter that does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements.⁴¹

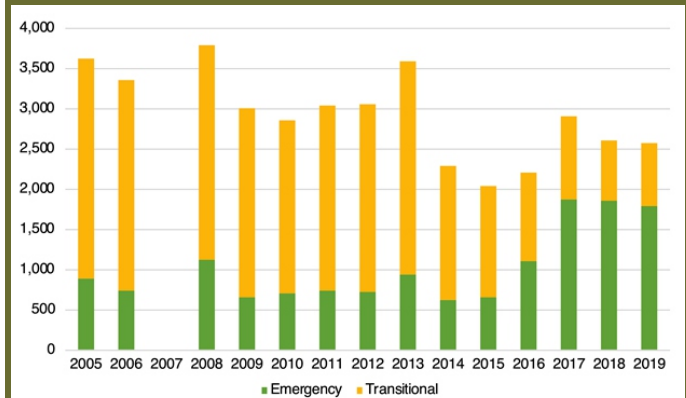
For purposes of the PIT counts, formerly homeless individuals and families in community-based housing without a designated length of stay, known as *permanent housing*, are not considered homeless.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11360) defines as *chronically homeless*, an individual or family that is unsheltered or in an emergency shelter, and has been homeless and residing in such a place for at least one year or on at least four separate occasions in the last three years. The statutory definition also requires that the individual or family has a head of household with a diagnosable substance use disorder, mental illness, or developmental disability, among other things.

Since 2015, the PIT counts report the total number of homeless in Portland's tri-county region has been relatively

stable at about 5,000 (Figure 2). Assuming the counts accurately reflect the actual trend, several factors have contributed to the widespread perception that homelessness has worsened. In particular, the number of homeless in transitional housing has decreased with an offsetting increase in the number of homeless in emergency shelters. Since 2005, the unsheltered share of the homeless population has been stable at a little more than 50% of the PIT count.

Figure 3: Housing Inventory Count of Beds, Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas Counties



Since 2009, the homeless population has migrated out of downtown Portland. In 2009, the PIT counts reported about 40% of the Multnomah County's homeless were in the city center; in 2019, only 20% were downtown. With outlying areas seeing increased numbers of homeless individuals, the public believes the number of homeless is increasing throughout the region.

In addition to the migration of the homeless population out of the downtown area, the makeup of the population has changed dramatically over time. In 2015, approximately one-quarter of the tri-county area's unsheltered population was chronically homeless. The most recent PIT count reports in 2019, nearly two-thirds of the unsheltered population was chronically homeless. Multnomah County reports 60% of its unsheltered population suffer from mental illness and/or substance abuse.

Table 2

Category	Multnomah	Washington	Clackamas	Total
Emergency	1,459	186	216	1,861
Transitional	519	112	32	663
Unsheltered	2,037	232	223	2,492
Chronic	67%	41%	42%	62%
Total	4,015	530	471	5,016
Chronic	44%	26%	31%	31%

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, it appears the number and spread of homelessness has increased substantially. In the fiscal year ending June 2020, the City of Portland received nearly 42,000 reports of homeless camps in the city, up 20% from the previous year.⁴² In the week ending October 18, 2020, the city identified 198 active campsites.⁴³

EXISTING RESEARCH ON PROGRAMS ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

Research on the effectiveness of programs for the homeless can be divided into two broad categories: “micro” (individual) and “macro” (aggregate) studies.

Micro-level studies research individuals or their households. These studies predominate the homelessness literature, especially the literature outside economics. The primary value of these studies is to service providers, such as those in health care, social work, and public health. For these providers, their key objective is to assist individuals and their families, rather than to reduce homelessness overall. Consequently, micro-level studies are useful in evaluating the mechanics of programs to reduce or prevent homelessness, but are less useful in evaluating the overall effectiveness of programs or the extent to which successful programs can be scaled.

In contrast to micro-level studies, macro-level studies evaluate whether a policy or program reduces the overall number of people who are homeless and, if so, by how much. While macro-level studies are better at evaluating the effectiveness of broad-based policies and programs, they suffer from the downside of sparse or unreliable data. As a result there are few reliable peer-reviewed macro-level studies.

HOUSING FIRST AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Housing First appears to be a simple concept, but even among its proponents and practitioners there is substantial disagreement about what it is and what it does. Some researchers and practitioners define Housing First as a general approach of attending to housing issues quickly with any type of housing resource and for any population. Others define the approach more narrowly to apply only to people with serious disabling conditions. Under the latter definition, affordable housing assistance is combined with wrap-around supportive services to address individuals' disabling conditions. Because there are usually no limits on how long someone can remain in the program, a Housing First approach is often conflated with Permanent Supportive Housing programs.

To add to the confusion, some researchers and practitioners

include Rapid Rehousing as part of the Housing First approach. Rapid Rehousing provides short-term rental assistance—up to 18-24 months—in private market housing, rather than longer term housing with support services.

Richard Cho, deputy director of United States Interagency Council on Homelessness during the Obama administration, admitted to widespread confusion in the council regarding Housing First, noting “... one of the very first tasks I was given was to help provide a clear, operational definition of Housing First.”⁴⁴ Cho describes Housing First as an approach that can incorporate a range of programs, but is not a program itself. For example, Cho argues that Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Rehousing can both be part of a Housing First approach, but not all Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Rehousing programs are Housing First.

JOIN, a Portland-based homeless service provider describes Housing First:⁴⁵

... permanent, affordable housing as soon as possible for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, while also providing a variety of supportive services to help them maintain their housing.

JOIN notes that Housing First does not require individuals experiencing homelessness to address addiction and/or psychological problems, or to graduate through a series of programs before they can access housing.⁴⁶

Housing First is a reversal of traditional approaches to addressing homelessness among those with mental health or substance use issues. The traditional approach typically requires individuals to address their mental health or substance use issues with successful treatment before receiving housing or housing subsidies.⁴⁷

Because Housing First does not require psychiatric treatment or sobriety as a precondition for attaining housing, the approach typically includes a harm reduction component.⁴⁸ Harm reduction approaches to destructive behavior work with individuals to reduce the harm associated with the behavior rather than—or in addition to—attempting to stop the individual from engaging in the destructive behavior. For example, a harm reduction approach to intravenous drug use would provide for a clean needle exchange rather than, or along with, a substance use rehabilitation program.

Since the introduction of Housing First in New York City in 1992, the approach is now the dominant model today. The City of Portland, Multnomah County, and the Portland-area regional government have all adopted Housing First as their model for addressing homelessness.

One reason for the spread of the Housing First model is that several randomized control trials suggests that Housing First performs better than the traditional approach in some measures. In particular, one review of the research found that in 11 out of 12 randomized control trials, Housing First produced greater housing retention than the traditional approach.⁴⁹ For example, a study in Canada reported the Housing First group were housed 63-77% of the time in the two years following the random assignment, while the control group were housed only 24-39% of the time.⁵⁰

Whether Housing First provides significant improvements over traditional approaches is much more mixed. While many studies find no significant differences between the two approaches, there is no evidence that Housing First performs worse.⁵¹ Nevertheless, a few studies show significant improvements for Housing First participants relative to those assigned to treatment-as-usual groups:

- **HIV:** After one year, 55% of the Housing First group were alive and had intact immunity compared with 34% of the traditional care group.⁵²
- **Alcohol use:** Housing First participants experienced fewer days experiencing alcohol problems and a larger decline in spending on alcohol than the traditional care group.⁵³ However, there was no difference between the two groups regarding drug use.
- **Community functioning and well-being:** Housing First participants had fewer psychiatric hospitalizations and arrests than the traditional care group. Housing First participants also reported greater improvements in self-reported quality of life regarding living conditions.⁵⁴

Despite these findings, a comprehensive review of research published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine concludes that with the exception of HIV/AIDS, “there is no substantial published evidence as yet to demonstrate that PSH improves health outcomes or reduces health care costs.”⁵⁵

A review of more than 70 peer reviewed publications evaluating permanent supportive housing, income interventions, and cost or cost-effectiveness of programs was recently published in *The Lancet*.⁵⁶ The review found permanent supportive housing interventions increased long-term (6 year) housing stability—relative to usual care—for participants with moderate and high support needs. However, permanent supportive housing had no measurable effect on the severity of psychiatric symptoms, substance use, income, or employment outcomes, when compared with usual social services.

Some Housing First proponents claim the approach saves governments money by reducing service use by participants

and will reduce the costs of homelessness in the long-run. However, there have been few studies that have attempted to measure the costs and benefits, but most of these attempts have been poorly specified (e.g., excluding benefits to participants) and poorly measured (e.g., relying on average costs rather than marginal costs), calling into question the reliability of their estimates. No studies have attempted to examine long-run costs and benefits.

In 2014, Portland State University's Northwest Economic Research Center (NERC) published research trying to evaluate the costs associated with permanent supportive housing.⁵⁷ The researchers evaluated differences in the costs of medical service, housing, supportive service, law enforcement, and emergency medical services. However, the sample size was too small to provide reliable estimates. The study involved 23 households and 51 participants: 10 individual adults and 13 families. The families consisted of 15 adults, and 26 children.

It would seem straightforward to argue that because evidence indicates Housing First reduces incidences of homelessness for participants, then a widespread implementation of Housing First would reduce community-wide homelessness. However, this argument is naive because it ignores how Housing First would change the behavior of others in the community. For example, increases in permanent supportive housing may attract people from outside the region seeking the housing services. It has also been argued that a robust permanent supportive housing program may allow property owners to be more bullish on renter screening or terminating leases.⁵⁸

Despite Housing First being practiced for more than a quarter century, there has been no reliable research examining macro effects of the approach. It is still unclear whether the Housing First approach reduces the total number of homeless individuals or households in the community. It is clear, however, that none of the jurisdictions that have used a Housing First approach have ended or even significantly reduced their homeless population.⁵⁹

FAMILY OPTIONS AND FRAGILE FAMILIES

The Family Options study involved nearly 2,300 families in emergency shelters. Families were followed for approximately three years and were randomly assigned into different interventions, including:⁶⁰

- Subsidy-only, no support services: a permanent housing subsidy, usually a Housing Choice Voucher;
- Project-based transitional housing with support services: temporary housing for up to 24 months with an “intensive package” of supportive services offered on-site;

- Rapid re-housing with limited services: temporary rental assistance for up to 18 months; or
- Usual care in which families had to find their way out of shelter without priority access to a program that would provide them with a place to live.

A key finding from the Family Options study was that the subsidy-only intervention provided much greater housing stability than the other interventions. In particular, families randomized into subsidy-only were less likely to become homeless again and moved less often. This result is consistent with a study that found homeless veterans with cash benefits from the Social Security Administration experienced fewer days of homelessness than those who did not receive the cash assistance.⁶¹ Results such as these have led one researcher to conclude, “Every step away from paternalism seems to result in better outcomes, and so why not take the next step?”⁶²

Because the Family Options study drew from families who were already homeless, it does not necessarily provide useful information regarding whether any of the interventions would be effective in reducing or increasing homelessness overall.

Fragile Families followed disadvantaged families with young children for fifteen years in 20 U.S. cities, with interviews conducted at birth and at 1, 3, 5, 9, and 15 years. One weakness of Fragile Families is that its only measure of homelessness is whether the family was homeless for at least one day in the year before the interview. Research based on Fragile Families data finds that higher Earned Income Tax Credit payments reduced “doubling up,” but did not reduce homelessness.⁶³ This suggests increasing EITC payments may not be an effective tool for reducing homelessness.

CASE MANAGEMENT AND PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES

A review of several studies assessing the effects of providing case management and psychiatric services found mixed results.⁶⁴ Services included alcohol and substance abuse treatment and mental illness.

In one study, homeless veterans were placed in three intervention groups:

- “Section 8” housing vouchers (the precursor of Housing Choice) with intensive case management,
- Intensive case management without housing subsidies, and
- Usual care of standard time-limited case management.

After three years, the group with the combined vouchers and intensive case management had fewer days homeless, more days housed, and better substance use outcomes. Outcomes for intensive case management without housing subsidies were little different from those with usual care.

In another study, participants were placed into four interventions:

- Housing vouchers with high intensity case management,
- Housing vouchers with low intensity case management,
- High intensity case management with no vouchers, and
- Low intensity case management with no vouchers,

The study found that intensity of case management had no significant effect on housing outcomes. However, housing vouchers were associated with better housing outcomes.

Other studies in St. Louis, New York, and Baltimore found mixed results. In these studies, all participants received housing subsidies, but were provided different levels of services and case management. The St. Louis study found that differences in case management had no effect on housing outcomes. New York and Baltimore found better housing outcomes with relatively expensive case management interventions.

In general these studies suggest that more intensive case management may produce better housing outcomes. However the cost associated with more intensive case management programs call into question the overall effectiveness of spending on the programs.

INCREASING BED INVENTORY

The most recent empirical research concludes that adding permanent housing supportive housing beds is associated with only modest reductions in the overall number of homeless in a community (CoC).⁶⁵ In particular, the research finds that 100 additional PSH beds was associated with a long-run decline in PIT counts of 4 to 12 individuals. The paper reports larger effects for individuals than for families, and larger effects for the unsheltered than for the sheltered. The paper finds smaller effects at the state level than at the CoC level because, the author argues, additional permanent supportive housing beds in a CoC induce migration from elsewhere in the state.

There is very little research evaluating the effects of emergency or transitional housing on the number of unsheltered homeless. For example, the study cited above

includes emergency and transitional housing in its statistical models. But, the dependent variable is the overall number of homeless. Under HUD definitions of homeless, however, those in emergency or transitional housing are considered homeless. Say a community adds 10 emergency shelter beds which are immediately occupied by those who were previously unsheltered. While the unsheltered population would decrease by 10, the overall number of homeless would remain unchanged.

LEGAL CHALLENGES

Cities' attempts to reduced overnight camping have been stymied by legal decisions restricting enforcement of anti-camping ordinances. For example, many cities are bound by the Ninth Circuit Court's decision in *Martin v. City of Boise*. This ruling prohibits city anti-camping ordinances from being enforced if there is no shelter space available. In addition, the City of Portland is bound by a settlement agreement requiring 24-hour notice before homeless camps can be cleared. The delays associated with the notice requirement means once a camp is reported, it can take the city a week or more to clear a camp.

ANDERSON AGREEMENT

In 2007 and 2008, four homeless individuals were told on several occasions to “move along” or be cited for violating the City of Portland's anti-camping ordinance. The individuals filed a class action lawsuit against the city, *Anderson v. City of Portland*, claiming the ordinance criminalized the status of being homeless and enforcement of the ordinance amounted to cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.⁶⁶ The city argued that the ordinance targets conduct rather than status and that the plaintiffs did not have standing to file a lawsuit because none of them were convicted under the ordinance.

In 2009, the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon dismissed many of the plaintiffs' claims. In 2012, the plaintiffs and the city entered an agreement that set guidelines for illegal camp removal (Figure 4). The “Anderson Agreement” requires among other things:⁶⁷

- Carts and personal property are defined as campsites.
- Camps will not be cleared at night, unless in an emergency situation.
- Police officers will notify all campers before citation or property removal. If citations don't include property removal, a verbal warning with reasonable (about one hour) time to move will be given.
- A posted notice of a camp cleanup will occur at least 24 hours prior to property removal and the cleanup

will be cleared within seven days.

- Personal property cleared from a camp will be stored for at least 30 days and any confiscated property must be photographed and inventoried.

Because of the Anderson Agreement, Portland police no longer clear camps. The Homelessness and Urban Camping Impact Reduction Program (HUCIRP) oversees the storage of the property, while private firms such as Pacific Patrol Services and Rapid Response Bio Clean clear the camps.⁶⁸ Camps may only be cleared without a 24-hour notice when responding to illegal activity and safety concerns or if no property is moved.⁶⁹

MARTIN V. BOISE

Boise, Idaho had an ordinance that banned “[o]ccupying, lodging or sleeping in any ... place ... without ... permission.” The city also had an ordinance that barred the “use [of] any ... streets, sidewalks, parks or public places as a camping place at any time.”

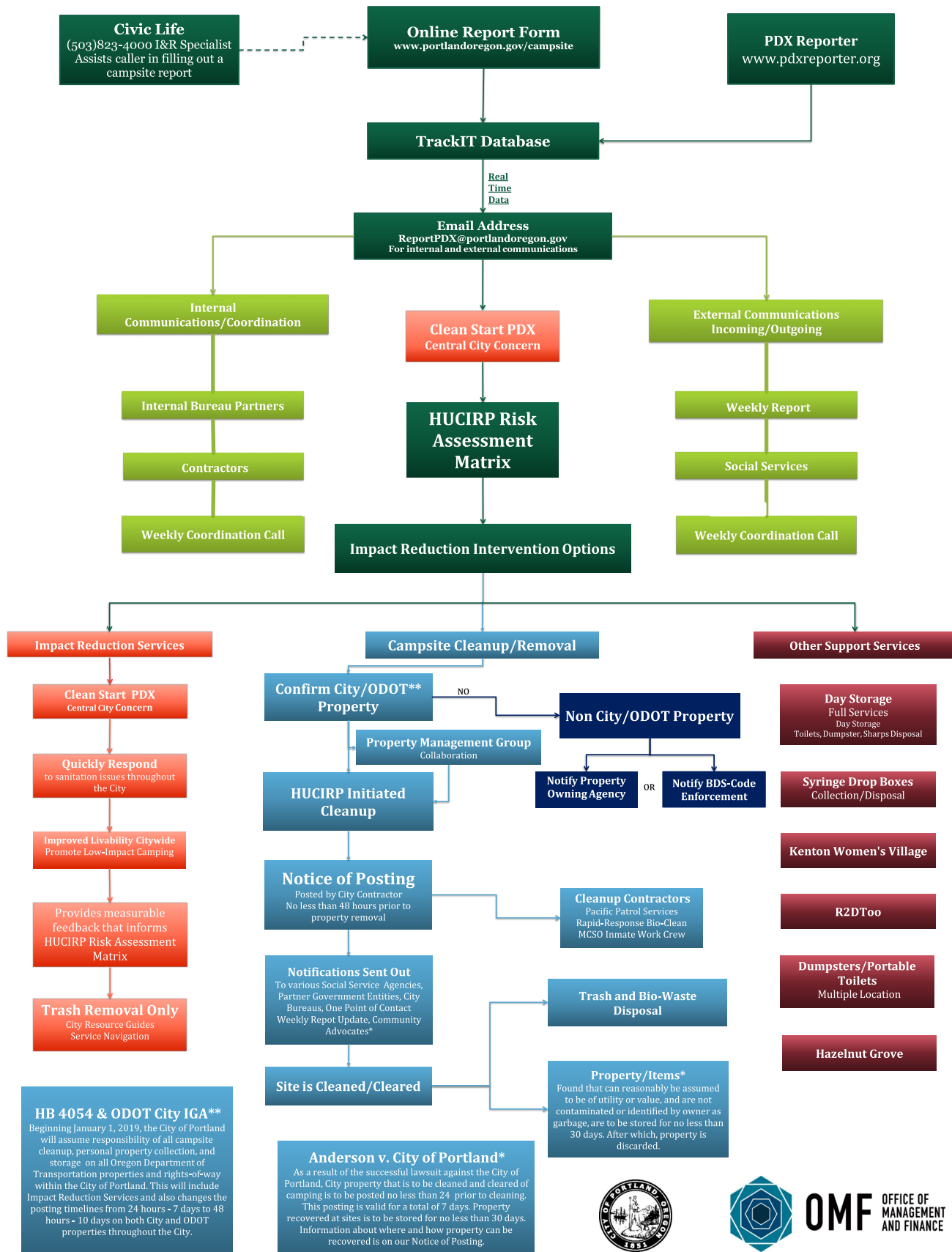
Janet Bell was cited twice, once for sitting on a riverbank with her backpack, another time for putting down a bedroll in the woods. She pled guilty and received a thirty-day suspended sentence. Robert Martin, who has difficulty walking, received a citation for resting near a shelter. He was found guilty at trial and charged \$150 in fines and court costs.

In October 2009, Bell, Martin, and nine other homeless people sued the city. Among other things, they claimed that the enforcement of the ordinances violated their Eighth Amendment rights, criminalizing them for carrying out basic bodily functions. The plaintiffs sought expungement of their records, reimbursement for fines, enjoinder of enforcement, and a declaration that the ordinances were unconstitutional.

After the lawsuit was filed, the city made several changes to the ordinances and their enforcement. The ban on camping was limited to overnight camping. The city police issued special orders that limited enforcement to daytime hours and prohibited enforcement when shelters were full. In light of these changes, the court ruled in 2011 that the ordinances criminalized conduct, rather than homeless status.

After several rounds of appeals, in *Martin v. City of Boise*, 920 F.3d 584 (9th Cir. 2019), the Ninth Circuit Court ruled any ordinance that allowed for the “imposition of criminal penalties for sitting, sleeping, or lying outside on public property for homeless individuals who cannot obtain shelter,” unconstitutionally criminalized homeless status. The court determined the Eighth Amendment bars punishing a person only “for lacking the means to live out the 'universal and unavoidable consequences of being

Figure 4: Flow Chart of Portland Homeless Camp Clean-Up Process



human.” The ruling was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which denied review.

The Ninth Circuit ruling noted, “only ... municipal ordinances that criminalize sleeping, sitting, or lying in *all public spaces, when no alternative sleeping space is available*, violate the Eighth Amendment. [emphasis added]”

Courts have begun to follow the precedent set by Martin and have more clearly described local governments' authority. For example, under Martin, cities can clear homeless camps, arrest those who refuse to leave, and force those arrested to show that shelters are full.⁷⁰ Thus, it appears local governments have ample authority to regulate and restrict homeless people's access to public space.

While Martin appears to severely constrain local governments' abilities to regulate camping, the Harvard Law Review argues that one “minor policy” can relieve these constraints:⁷¹

Moreover, to effect the panel's narrow holding, cities must enact only a minor policy. To satisfy the Ninth Circuit's ruling that a city cannot prosecute homeless people for sleeping in public when there are more homeless people than available beds in shelters, cities need simply to create some way to know that shelters are full or, because of restrictions, effectively so.

EXISTING EFFORTS TO INCREASE EMERGENCY AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Homeless camps not only produce a large amount of waste, but they are surrounded by higher crime rates. In 2020, researchers found a relationship between crime rates and camp sites. A 349-foot radius was layered on top of known camps that were spotted between October and December of 2019. While the area of the radius took up 14% of its jurisdictional boundary, 50% of crimes occurred within this area in 2019.⁷² Areas within a one-block radius of a camp experienced 2.8 times more property crimes, 4.2 times more social crimes, and 3.6 times more person crimes compared with Portland as a whole. According to the research:⁷³

As crime concentration was utilized in this study as a proxy for risk of victimization, these results indicate that the risk of victimization near reported homeless camps is almost three times that in the greater Portland area.

MORE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING: BYBEE LAKES HOPE CENTER

The Bybee Lakes Hope Center officially opened its doors

on October 2, 2020. At the grand opening, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler stated, “We're gonna have to think outside the box ... maybe we have to burn the box.”⁷⁴ This sentiment described the journey from an unfunded jail to a fully functioning transitional housing shelter.

In 2003, Wapato Detention Facility was built for more than 500 potential inmates in Multnomah County.⁷⁵ Construction was financed with a 1996 bond measure funded with \$46 million in property taxes. While voters approved funding to construct the facility, the county never budgeted money to cover operating costs and the facility never opened. Instead, approximately \$300,000 was spent every year maintaining the never-opened facility.⁷⁶

In 2005, Multnomah County adopted a resolution directing the county to look for alternative uses for the facility.⁷⁷ Yet, interest from potential investors or public service providers never materialized. In addition, Multnomah County claimed that it could not sell the jail to a private buyer, because construction relied on tax-exempt bonds and those bonds would not be fully paid off until October 2016. That changed in 2013, when the Oregon Legislature approved a measure to allow the county to issue a long-term lease to a private entity. As the final bond payment was coming up, Deborah Kafoury emphasized that the jail was for sale, but there was almost no interest for two more years.⁷⁸

In November 2017, the county adopted a resolution declaring the Wapato Jail was government surplus and approved the sale of the jail to Kehoe Northwest Properties, LLC.⁷⁹ Kehoe's initial offer was \$10.8 million, but after three months of due diligence, Kehoe's reduced final offer of \$5 million was accepted.

After an agreement with Marty Kehoe, Harsch Investment Properties, under the leadership of Jordan Schnitzer, bought the entire property to redevelop as a homeless shelter in 2017. Because local governments refused to lease the property from Schnitzer for use as a homeless shelter, the investor began searching for alternative uses for the area.⁸⁰ He went as far as sending a check for \$110,000 to gain a building permit for a warehouse in hopes of making something out of his investment.⁸¹

Schnitzer indicated that about 500 people called and visited to assess the use of the facility and “[e]very single one of them has said this building can be repurposed and help those in need.”⁸² Yet legal complications with zoning and public transit service to the facility remained unresolved with the local governments. Public officials couldn't imagine that a place with no public transportation, services, and costly renovations could become the operation that it is today.

As late as December of 2018, Portland City Council Commissioner Amanda Fritz continued to argue that “[l]egal, logistical, and philosophical barriers” made the

conversion of Wapato “impossible.”⁸³ She cited difficulties in changing the zoning for another nonprofit organization's land, a lack of transportation and services, and the idea that people wouldn't be comfortable being housed in a facility originally designed as a jail.

Despite these challenges, Schnitzer continued his plans for the never-opened jail, which was renamed Bybee Lakes Hope Center. He sought out organizations that provide homeless services and picked Helping Hands after about a year. TriMet, the regional transit agency, cooperated with efforts to reroute a bus line directly to the facility.⁸⁴



Jordan Schnitzer, Allen Evans, and Mayor Ted Wheeler celebrate the opening of Bybee Lakes Hope Center.

Source: <https://vimeo.com/464320816>

Helping Hands provides all the necessary services in-house, so residents will not have to travel long distances for support. Allen Evans, who struggled with homelessness earlier in life, is the CEO of Helping Hands Reentry Outreach Centers. This nonprofit organization has almost a dozen successful emergency and transitional housing shelters. It plans to make the Bybee Lakes Hope Center a transitional housing facility with wrap-around services for its residents. Evans says that Helping Hands is a:⁸⁵

... data-driven, trauma-informed organization that actually evaluates the people we're helping and provides assistance to them based on the obstacles they face to reenter society.

Bybee Lakes Hope Center is a referral-only facility. Partnerships between other shelters will grow to allow surrounding shelters to send residents who are ready to transition. The Center is explicitly against “warehousing the homeless.” Wrap-around services are built into the facility and include drug detox, mental health services, vocational training, and job placement. By working with surrounding shelters to accept residents, relationships, information, and services are more accessible and useful.

Helping Hands makes use of a database called Tactical Demographics that facilitates personalized and complete care of individuals experiencing homelessness. Evans says he understands that every person who experiences

homelessness has their own story and requires personalized solutions. To remain at the facility, residents must be clean and sober, work on community service, attend classes that support and educate them, and pay dues every month.⁸⁶

INCREASED EMERGENCY SHELTER

As COVID-19 limited the ability for homeless shelters to house and staff facilities, public and private resources have been activated within Multnomah County. In total, about 375 temporary socially distanced beds have been added. Sites include the Oregon Convention Center as well as several community centers run by the city's parks department. Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury stated, “This is the kind of partnership, the kind of quick solutions that this crisis demands.”⁸⁷ The price tag for opening these temporary shelters is estimated to be around \$1.7 million per month. This means the cost per bed is approximately \$4,500 per month.⁸⁸

In March, the 81-bed privately owned Jupiter Hotel was also used to house vulnerable homeless people. This established hotel was voted “best hotel” in 2006 by a Willamette Week poll.⁸⁹ The general manager, Nick Pearson, said, “Working together seemed like a no-brainer,” since cancellations were rampant and homeless shelters had to limit beds due to the virus.⁹⁰

In early June 2020, Multnomah County was attempting to “get ahead” of reopening efforts.⁹¹ The most vulnerable population of residents at the newly opened emergency shelters were being transferred into the Chestnut Tree Inn. Each month, the Joint Office of Homeless Services has been paying the hotel \$64 monthly for each of the 58 beds. But renting rooms for individuals or buying motels is not a long-term strategy. While Chestnut Tree Inn charges less than the \$79 per room that Jupiter Hotel is charging, it is still more expensive than simply designating vacant public land for urban camping.

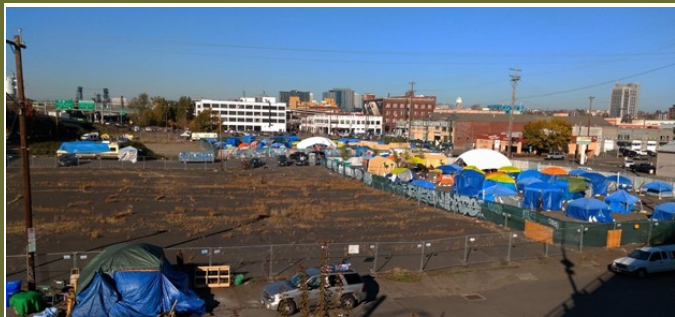
In May, Portland Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty proposed that the city should explore operating homeless shelters from two functional but unused buildings. The recently abandoned Greyhound bus terminal in Old Town Chinatown is set to house about 100 people in November of 2020 until March of 2021.⁹² The Joint Office of Homeless Services will pay \$30,000 per month for this venture.⁹³ Transition Projects, a local homeless services provider, will manage the 30,000-square-foot facility.

The Joint Office of Homeless Services estimated that it would cost roughly \$50 million to move about 375 people into motels until June of 2021.⁹⁴ To escape some of this burden, the county has also been investigating whether purchasing the motels outright would be feasible, since that would likely halve the costs.⁹⁵

Despite the increase of temporary emergency housing, one

solution has received only scant attention. In late May 2020, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler balked at the price of using motel rooms to house homeless people during the pandemic. Instead, he offered FEMA-style housing that includes tents, trailers, and mobile homes.⁹⁶ While not particularly excited about the possibility, he conceded, “They weren’t glorious ... but they worked. And I’m wondering if this is the time we need to seriously consider a FEMA like response to the crisis on our street.”⁹⁷

Figure 5: Outdoor Emergency Shelters Near SE Water Ave.



Source: Vlad Yurlov

While not at the magnitude of a Hurricane Katrina response, Portland has sanctioned three “temporary outdoor emergency shelters” as part of its pandemic response.⁹⁸ Two camps on Southeast Water Avenue and another at the base of Broadway Bridge serve up to 72 people at each camp, who have access to safety, food, and water.⁹⁹ Residents report feeling safe and secure.¹⁰⁰ In April, when the camps housed about 30 people each, the projects had a total start-up costs of \$214,000 and a projected monthly bill of over \$155,000 to provide things like portable toilets, hand-washing stations, and pallets.¹⁰¹

HUCIRP’s 2019-2021 Strategic Plan includes the goal of identifying:¹⁰²

... underutilized City properties, or properties in pre-development stages, that could be used for alternative shelter purposes to provide lawful and organized places for people experiencing homelessness to sleep.

POTENTIAL FUTURE EFFORTS TO INCREASE SHELTER CAPACITY

CONVERT TEMPORARY PANDEMIC-RELATED SHELTER SPACE INTO PERMANENT SHELTER SPACE

Many of the issues the pandemic has spurred impact homeless people the most, which has led to a large

investment in temporary emergency housing. While Multnomah County added about 375 emergency shelter beds due to the pandemic, they are only meant to relieve the distancing pressures on the current shelter stock, not to add permanent beds.¹⁰³

After the pandemic has passed, some of the temporary emergency shelters should remain open, while additional appropriate areas should be sought. Places such as the Greyhound Station and the outdoor shelters near the Broadway Bridge and Southeast Water Avenue serve better as shelters for hundreds of people than sidewalks, underpasses, parks, or vacant property.

Because Portland is still in a housing emergency, the Portland Council could remove many, if not all, of the obstacles that this method may encounter.¹⁰⁴ Portland has already proven that finding several hundred beds within weeks is possible, so filling the long-term need of emergency housing is not insurmountable.

While speaking about the homeless crisis, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler stated:¹⁰⁵

My conclusion has been that we need to be much more aggressive as a city, as a county, and as a region, in getting as many people, as quickly and humanely off the sidewalks as possible.

CONVERT THE EXPO CENTER INTO AN EMERGENCY SHELTER

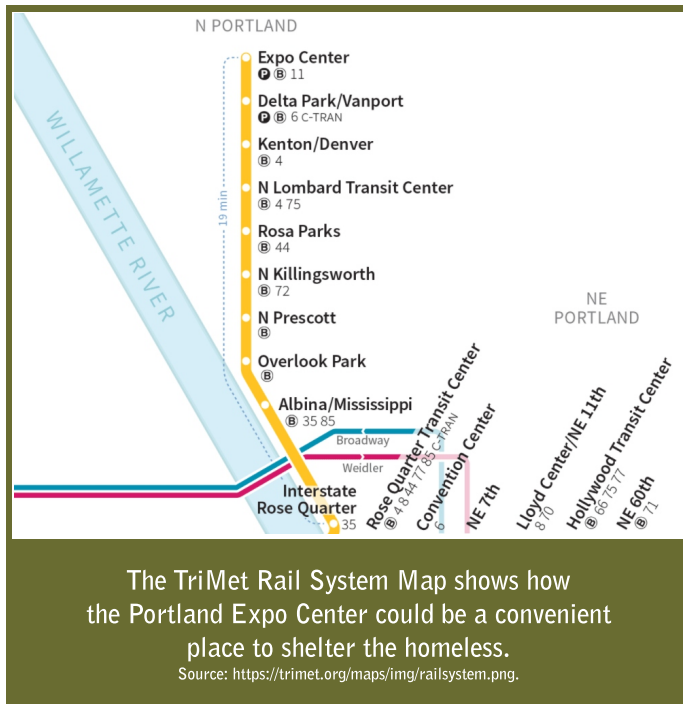
The Portland Expo Center is a 330,000-square-foot exposition center sitting on 53 acres. The Expo Center is owned and operated by Metro, the Portland area’s regional government. The facility has meeting rooms, a full-service kitchen, a restaurant, and flexible outdoor exhibit space.

Metro’s charter mandates that the government’s enterprises cannot charge more than the cost of providing the goods or services, with the exception of food and beverage sales, parking, and other concessions.¹⁰⁶ As a result, operations of the Expo Center tend to generate a loss or a small profit. Excise taxes for use of the facility generate less than \$2 million a year in tax revenues for Metro.

Metro reports the Expo Center has significant capital needs and has no identified funding source to meet these needs over time.¹⁰⁷ At the end of 2019, Metro amended its agreements with Multnomah County and the City of Portland to provide \$575,000 in subsidies to support the operations of the Expo Center, with the amount of the subsidy increasing with inflation.¹⁰⁸ Metro is currently in the middle of a “development opportunity study” to identify options that could “complement, support or replace the current event center’s operations.”¹⁰⁹ Put simply, the Expo Center is losing money, needs “significant” capital

investment, and may need to be replaced or repurposed.

In many ways the Expo Center is well suited to serve as an emergency shelter. At 100 square feet per person, exhibition space alone could serve 2,000-3,000 individuals. Its 2,500 vehicle parking lot provides ample space for individuals who prefer to camp or sleep in vehicles. While the Expo Center is approximately seven miles from Portland's city center, it is also located away from residential and commercial areas. It has easy access to public transit as the TriMet Yellow Line terminates at the front of the Expo Center and provides frequent service to downtown Portland.



Because the Expo Center is effectively closed because of the pandemic, Metro should work with other local governments to immediately open the Expo Center as a temporary emergency homeless shelter. Over time, Metro can use its Supportive Housing Services funds to redevelop the Expo Center into a permanent emergency and/or transitional housing shelter providing services to those in need.

Repurposing an existing exposition center would be much less expensive than Metro and the City of Portland's current “affordable housing” construction projects which cost more than \$300,000 per unit to build, or nearly twice the cost of private sector developments.^{110,111}

Converting the Expo Center could bring immediate relief to thousands of homeless individuals and families while providing a much better return on investment than current plans to remodel the site for future low-attendance expositions.

In addition, the massive increase in shelter capacity from converting the Expo Center would provide local jurisdictions with the opportunity to reduce overnight camping and to clear camps, while remaining in compliance with the Ninth Circuit's *Martin v. Boise* ruling.

DEVELOP A REGISTRY OF SHELTER SPACE AND DAILY UPDATES OF OCCUPANCY

The Ninth Circuit's *Martin v. Boise* ruling decided that a city cannot prosecute homeless people for sleeping in public when there is no other shelter available. One step toward satisfying *Martin* would be for cities to develop some way to know how much shelter space is available at a given time. So long as space is available, broad laws that prohibit public camping may be enforced. As simple as this may seem, Oregon does not have such a system. Oregon Housing and Community Services, a state agency, indicated:¹¹²

OHCS lacks adequate resources to track shelter capacity in real time. We rely on 211, Community Action Agencies and other local partners to help refer those in need to shelter.

The information systems used by OHCS merely provide addresses, telephone numbers, and websites for shelters. Until users contact the shelters, it is unknown whether there is space available at a specific facility.

After the *Martin* decision, Modesto, California implemented a straightforward inventory/vacancy system. Each day, one staff member takes up to two hours to contact emergency homeless shelter providers in Stanislaus County to track the availability of shelter beds. The document is then distributed to outreach workers and law enforcement officers.¹¹³ Police officers are then able to offer people who are camping illegally a more stable place to stay.¹¹⁴ While the current system runs manually, Modesto is developing an online dashboard that links with its Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database required under HUD rules. Once the online system is up-and-running, each shelter would be able to track and report occupancy and vacancy to assist in enforcement with the city's camping ordinances.

Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) has several “off-the-shelf” applications that use geographic information systems to track homelessness resources, including a homeless services locator, a homeless resources locator, and a warming/cooler center locator. These ESRI products can be configured to provide real-time or near-real-time data on shelter occupancy and vacancy.

Indeed, the City of Portland uses an ESRI product to map reports to its “One Point of Contact Campsite Reporting

System” that allows anyone to report campsites.¹¹⁵ This indicates the city has the staff and resources to use ESRI products and could quickly develop a database mapping shelter occupancy and vacancy.

REVISIT CITY OF PORTLAND'S ANDERSON AGREEMENT

While the *Anderson* Agreement has been followed by Portland's agencies, there are ways to minimize its impact. The agreement requires only the Portland Police Bureau to adhere to its tenets.¹¹⁶ After the Agreement was signed, many of the city's bureaus worked together to create the “Unified Policy for Unlawful Camp Posting.”¹¹⁷ This policy is not a mandate; rather, it is a set of guidelines for city bureaus to follow in developing their own urban camping policies and enforcement procedures.¹¹⁸ Other than the Portland Police Bureau, bureaus that enforce camping restrictions can simply discard their own rules and clear urban campsites before they have time to grow.

CONCLUSION

Every city in the United States has homeless individuals and families. In addition to the personal toll homelessness takes on individuals and their families, the spread of unsheltered homeless populations and homeless camps imposes enormous social costs in the form of impacts on public health, public safety, and livability for the community at-large. After many years attempting to address or “solve” homelessness, the crisis seems to have worsened in many places, especially in Portland, Oregon.

To be blunt, we don't know what works, and there appear to be no economies of scale. For more than two decades, the “Housing First” approach has been heralded as the best solution. The approach focuses first on providing housing to individuals and families, then addressing issues that led participants to homelessness and are keeping them from being housed. These “wrap around” services are expensive and require individuals to have the ability and will to fully use them. However, there is no evidence that such Housing First approaches have had any effect on reducing overall homelessness or the number of unsheltered homeless.

Many cities are bound by the Ninth Circuit Court's decision in *Martin v. City of Boise*. This ruling prohibits city anti-camping ordinances from being enforced if there is no shelter space available. In addition, the City of Portland is bound by a settlement agreement requiring 24-hour notice before homeless camps can be cleared. The delays associated with the notice requirement means once a camp is reported, it can take the city a week or more to clear a camp.

One way to enforce a camping ban, while complying with

Martin, is to develop a database of vacant and available shelter space. If the database indicated space is available, broad laws that prohibit public camping may be enforced. As simple as this may seem, neither the City of Portland nor the State of Oregon has such a system. Yet Modesto, California has demonstrated such a system can be up-and-running relatively quickly.

In response to the pandemic, Portland has increased temporary emergency shelter beds to allow shelters to practice socially distancing. Among other locations, beds filled the Oregon Convention Center, three community centers, a recently abandoned Greyhound bus station, and vacant outdoor land. Cascade Policy Institute proposes the city should continue to pursue making permanent some of these low-cost emergency shelters and camping sites.

In October 2020, Bybee Lakes Hope Center opened its doors as a supportive transitional housing facility for the homeless at the site of the never-opened Wapato Jail in Portland. Now the site provides a template for repurposing surplus public land and buildings into facilities that serve the homeless. Toward that end, Cascade Policy Institute urges Metro, the regional government, to convert into emergency housing the now-shuttered Portland Expo Center, a 330,000-square-foot exposition facility sitting on 53 acres of land at the end of a light rail line. The site's exhibition space alone could serve 2,000-3,000 individuals.

None of these solutions “solve” or “end” homelessness. Instead, they take some big steps toward a coherent framework for addressing homelessness: reach out to those who want help, be firm with those who don't, and create an environment where residents feel safe and businesses can flourish.

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