

City of Santa Clara Homelessness Plan

Draft Framework

This framework provides a proposed overview of the City’s plan to reduce homelessness and its impact, including an outline of the major plan sections and a summary of the proposed strategies.

Proposed Plan Outline

The City’s plan to reduce homelessness and its impacts will include the following sections:

- I. Introduction and Background
 - o Context for the plan: City of Santa Clara Homelessness Taskforce and adoption of the Santa Clara County Community Plan to End Homelessness
 - o Homelessness in the City of Santa Clara [Point in Time (PIT)Count, Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data]
- II. Planning Process
 - o Summary of planning process, including avenues for collecting feedback
- III. Overview of Existing Resources and Programs
 - o City’s ongoing efforts, initiatives, programs, and resources
 - o High-level overview of homeless system of care and services provided at the County-level
- IV. Needs and Gaps
 - o Summary of needs and gaps identified by the community and available data
- V. Strategies for building upon existing efforts to reduce homelessness and its impacts throughout the City

Needs and Gaps

The following needs and gaps emerged during Taskforce meeting discussions, focus groups with a variety of stakeholders, feedback from the Community Forum event, public comments sent to the Homebase team, and additional feedback and information shared with Homebase by City staff. A few common themes from the feedback include:

- Lack of affordable housing is a key driver of homelessness;
- More community education is needed about homelessness, its causes, and current efforts to address it and its impacts;
- Education, employment, and living wage opportunities are key to keeping people housed and helping them to return to housing;
- More resources should be located within the City;
- Trash, bio waste, graffiti, and fires impact public health and quality of life for all residents;
- City staff need more support and resources to respond to safety concerns and feeling overwhelmed; and
- Dedicated, proactive outreach is needed within the City, including rapport building, basic needs, and assessment for connection to housing resources.

Proposed Strategies

Below is a list of proposed strategies compiled by the Homebase team to address the needs and gaps identified by the Homelessness Taskforce, available data, various community feedback processes, public comment, and input from City staff. The proposed strategies are grounded in best practices in the field, aligned with the City-endorsed Community Plan to End Homelessness, honor the lived experiences and expertise of people experiencing homelessness, and consider the collective needs of all community members.

How the Strategies are organized

In considering the breadth of feedback that was collected and the strategies most likely to address the feedback and needs of the community in a meaningful and long-lasting way, Homebase identified six priority areas of focus for the potential strategies:

1. Conduct proactive street outreach with the goal of assessing people for supportive housing.
2. Address basic needs of people living outside, including shelter, health, and hygiene.
3. Build community understanding of the causes, needs, and experience of homelessness.
4. Reduce the impacts of unsheltered homelessness throughout the community.
5. Create broad based support for interim and permanent supportive housing as well as Extremely Low Income (ELI) housing development across the City.
6. Prevent homelessness for City residents at-risk.

What is included in the Framework

The following section identifies strategies for each of the six priority areas and addresses:

- The Santa Clara County Community Plan to End Homelessness strategies that align with each priority area;
- Objectives to be achieved by the proposed strategies; and
- Existing or ongoing efforts and investments already underway that the proposed strategies are intended to build upon.

Priority Area 1: Conduct proactive street outreach with the goal of assessing people for supportive housing

Aligns with Countywide Community Plan Strategy 3

Objectives:

- ✓ Ensure that people experiencing homelessness in the City are assessed as part of the community's Coordinated Entry System¹ and connected to other services to meet their health and basic needs wherever possible.

¹ The Coordinated Entry System is a community-wide access model for supportive housing that assesses, prioritizes, and refers households experiencing homelessness to supportive housing resources as they become available.

- ✓ Increase utilization of existing City and County homeless assistance resources by people experiencing homelessness in the City.
- ✓ Increase connections to mental health services (including crisis services) for people experiencing homelessness in the City, especially those who have been hesitant or lack the capacity to access services.
- ✓ Proactively engage, develop rapport with, and ultimately house people with the highest needs in the community.

Existing/Ongoing Efforts by the City:

- The City Police Department’s Community Response Team conducts outreach while not in uniform to respond to crises and connect people experiencing homelessness to existing services. The team does not conduct housing assessments for the County’s supportive housing system, but it does facilitate assessments with partnering entities.

Proposed Strategies

1.1: Fund a coordinated street and encampment outreach team serving the City of Santa Clara that includes staff from a mix of different disciplines, including healthcare, behavioral health, and housing navigation.

- Outreach and engagement programs and staff should be person-centered and housing-focused.
- Support efforts to assess people experiencing homelessness in order to connect them to the Coordinated Entry System.
- Ensure unhoused and housed community members are aware of available outreach services and when and how to contact them.
- Collect lived experience feedback from people living unsheltered who are not engaging with services or accepting services/resources about the reasons why and to inform improvements to both outreach/engagement efforts and shelter/housing/service programs.

1.2: Explore opportunities to support peer outreach that trains and employs people with lived experience of homelessness to provide street outreach and system navigation services.

1.3: Improve coordination with the County Office of Supportive Housing and the County’s Office of Behavioral Health Services to increase access to reliable and timely options for responding to crises that require clinical responses or de-escalation.

- Partner with the County and local service providers to train City staff about crisis response and other resources that are available in the community.
- Create clear guidelines for outreach workers, volunteers, and other City staff about the crisis response services available and how and when to use them.
- Train outreach workers and volunteers in outreach and engagement best practices, including de-escalation.

- Work with the County Office of Supportive Housing and other local jurisdictions to explore opportunities to expand mental health outreach and crisis response within the City.

1.4: Increase coordination between City staff and County Behavioral Health to ensure that outreach teams serving City residents can provide a warm hand off to connect people with available behavioral health services, including mental health care and substance use treatment.

Priority Area 2: Address basic needs of people living outside, including shelter, health, and hygiene

Aligns with Countywide Community Plan Strategy 3

Objectives:

- ✓ Create opportunities for engagement, connection, and trust-building with people living unsheltered by providing resources to meet basic needs and build a foundation for making progress toward housing goals.
- ✓ Address the immediate unsheltered crisis in the City by creating spaces for people experiencing homelessness to safely stay, address immediate needs, and access services.
- ✓ Improve the accessibility and experience of public areas throughout the City for both housed and unhoused residents.

Existing/Ongoing Efforts

- The City, in partnership with WeHope, is piloting a mobile shower and laundry service. This service also includes case management.
- The City, through NextDoor Solutions, funds support and counseling services for survivors of domestic violence.
- Covenant House provides transitional housing for youth experiencing homelessness.
- The City, in partnership with the County Office of Supportive Housing, funds \$125,000/year for intensive case management.
- The City, in partnership with the County Office of Supportive Housing, funds \$50,000/year for Homeless Prevention Services.
- The City funds school-based homelessness prevention through Bill Wilson Center's Family Advocacy Services.
- The City, in partnership with Abode and Bill Wilson Center, funds a Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) program of more than \$1,000,000 combined each year.
- The City, in coordination with Tucker Construction and the Police Department, funded Homeless Encampment Clean-Up at \$90,000 in FY 2022-2023.
- The City, in coordination with United Way, provides funding of \$5,000 per year for 2-1-1 services to help residents locate shelter and food.

Proposed Strategies

2.1: Assess current hygiene, shower, biowaste, and laundry services and determine optimal locations and times to expand access and participation in existing programs.

- Leverage and coordinate with County mobile services.
- Build in opportunities to connect people accessing services to outreach workers, services, and the Coordinated Entry System.
- Ensure unhoused and housed community members are aware of available services.

2.2: Explore partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, faith-based, and volunteer organizations to leverage funding, facilities, expertise, and staffing to support provision of basic needs services, such as food, hygiene supplies and services, and restrooms for people living unsheltered. For example:

- Donation drives
- Volunteer days or programs
- Community events staffed in part to connect housed and unhoused community members

2.3: Establish safe and welcoming places for people living in unsheltered situations to access.

- Locations should be places where people can find day-time respite from inclement weather, rest indoors, access restrooms, use computers, wifi, and phones, charge devices, and access services.
- Staff locations with volunteers and/or paid staff who can engage with, provide information, and connect people with services if needed.
- Aim to establish additional options for people beyond parks, libraries, etc.

2.4: Create storage options for people experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness to enable safe storage of personal items.

Priority Area 3: Build community understanding of the causes, needs, and experience of homelessness

Aligns with Countywide Community Plan Strategies 1 and 3

Objectives

- ✓ Build community support for new housing developments or programs for people experiencing homelessness in the City.
- ✓ Foster greater understanding, support, and a stronger sense of overall community by increasing connections between housed and unhoused people.

Existing/Ongoing Efforts

- The City convened a Homelessness Taskforce and hosted an interactive community forum event to provide education and gather feedback from residents.

Proposed Strategies

3.1: Engage people with lived experience of homelessness to inform decision-making about funding, housing development, and to support community education efforts.

- Set aside seats on the City’s planned Housing Commission for people with lived experience of homelessness within the City.
- Coordinate with the Lived Experience Advisory Board-SV to obtain input about funding decisions and community engagement efforts.

3.2: Provide opportunities for members of the public to engage with people who have lived experience and to learn about the causes of homelessness, the impact of high housing costs and other barriers to exiting homelessness, existing resources and how to access them, what is needed to effectively respond to homelessness, and how different stakeholders can help right now (e.g. shelter, new housing, locating sites for development).

- Develop educational materials and marketing campaign to disseminate information (e.g., flyers, posters, information shared via City websites and social media)
- Use existing public meetings and forums focused on housing topics to raise awareness of the experience of and contributing factors to homelessness in the City.

3.3: Work with local service providers to coordinate information sharing and connections with business, faith-based groups, and other community organizations interested in fundraising or volunteering.

Priority Area 4: Reduce the impacts of unsheltered homelessness throughout the community

Aligns with Countywide Community Plan Strategies 2 and 3

Objectives

- ✓ Ensure safe and healthy community spaces for all City residents.
- ✓ Leverage collective community resources to create efficient and impactful interventions.
- ✓ Improve interactions between people experiencing homelessness and housed community members by empowering, educating, and building capacity of City staff and other housed community members who regularly interact with unhoused people.

Existing/Ongoing Efforts

- The City has hired Tucker Construction to provide clean-up services at encampments and other needed areas in the City.

- The Police Department’s Community Response Team partners with the Santa Clara Valley Water District, the Santa Clara County Roads and Airports Department, Caltrans, Railroads, private property owners, and others to conduct clean-up and abatement.

Proposed Strategies

4.1: Develop City protocol to triage crises and concerns.

- Determine what issues should be routed to specific City departments and agencies (e.g., Police, Parks and Recreation, Housing), County services (e.g., Behavioral Health), outreach teams, and hospital emergency departments.
- Disseminate protocol to outreach teams and City staff who receive calls about or regularly interact with people experiencing homelessness

4.2: Provide training and support to City staff who regularly interact with people experiencing homelessness as part of their job.

- Topics may include trauma informed care, information about available resources in the City or County, how to get assessed for housing placement, and how to connect with other services and assistance.

4.3: Provide additional emergency shelter and interim housing options until more permanent affordable housing options are available.

- Include people with lived experience in the planning process to ensure that new options are designed to meet the needs of people living in unsheltered situations.
- Prioritize client-choice in shelter and interim housing options (e.g., to the extent possible, allow people who have developed support networks while living in encampments to move into shelter or interim housing with or near members of those support networks/”street family”)
- Coordinate with County to ensure people experiencing homelessness in the City are aware of and accessing the full spectrum of existing shelter and interim housing options.
- Set aside interim housing for unhoused residents currently living in the City of Santa Clara.

4.4: Explore opportunities to implement innovative models for safe parking (e.g., rotating safe parking programs) throughout the City, including with access to supportive services, hygiene services, and biowaste and trash services.

4.5: Explore partnerships with Valley Water, the County, Caltrans, railroads, businesses, nonprofits, faith-based, and volunteer organizations to leverage funding, facilities, expertise, and staffing to manage the impacts of encampments and support biowaste and trash collection and clean up near encampments, parks, creeks, and other locations in the City.

4.6: Create mechanisms to supplement existing sanitation and safety efforts throughout the City, especially at encampments and parks, such as:

- Downtown Streets Team program for City of Santa Clara to supplement sanitation efforts and offer employment opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness.
- Volunteer opportunities for housed community members to assist with clean-up and basic outreach services, including in partnership with Street Team or other unhoused or recently housed community members.
- Assess needs for expanded fire prevention or other safety protocols.
- Create regular trash pick-up routes (incorporated in or similar to routine City trash collection services) to service encampments and other needed locations. Provide trash cans, bags, and/or dumpsters for use by unhoused residents to facilitate efficient pick-up.

4.7: Develop a targeted plan for engaging and housing the highest utilizers of County and City resources.

- Include people with lived experience (including currently unsheltered community members) in planning.
- Identify and assess participants to determine resources needed.
- Convene and engage outreach, and housing providers.
- Develop housing and support goals and plan in partnership with participants.

Priority Area 5: Create broad based support for interim and permanent supportive housing as well as Extremely Low Income (ELI) housing development across the City

Aligns with Countywide Community Plan Strategies 1 and 2

Objectives

- ✓ Use all the tools available to the City to increase housing affordability, especially at ELI levels.
- ✓ Reduce opposition to new development at all stages – from initial planning through operation.
- ✓ Create new housing that is affordable and accessible to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Existing/Ongoing Efforts

- The City has invested in 1,286 units of affordable housing, 306 of these units are ELI housing.
- The City invests in intensive case management for individuals residing in permanent supportive housing.

Proposed Strategies

5.1: Continue to support implementation of the Santa Clara County 2016 Measure A Affordable Housing Bond to encourage developers to build ELI and supportive housing within the City.

5.2: Prioritize available City resources (e.g., HOME ARP, PHLA, CDBG, local affordable housing funds) to fund ELI and supportive housing development.

5.3 Explore amendments to City’s housing-related policies to make affordable housing easier and less expensive to create. For example:

- Update the Affordable Housing Ordinance to require a minimum amount of Very Low Income housing units in market rate developments.

5.4: Engage housing developers to leverage new state funding for housing for people experiencing homelessness, including Homekey.

5.5: Engage with and support Destination: Home’s Housing Ready Communities program to increase awareness of the causes and impacts of homelessness and best practice solutions to foster support for affordable housing development.

5.6: Develop a protocol in collaboration with developers, service providers, people with lived experience of homelessness, property management companies, and neighborhood groups to ensure successful integration of new interim and supportive housing developments into the community. This protocol should include:

- Guidelines for staffing ratios and availability of supportive services;
- Key messaging/education for housed community members as well as incoming tenants;
- Creating channels for communication between neighbors, including during planning phases and after housing is open;
- Connection and community-building opportunities for existing neighborhood residents and incoming tenants; and
- Coordination with and expansion (if needed) of emergency response services, as well as other community-based service options for complaints or concerns that do not warrant emergency response.

Priority Area 6: Prevent homelessness for City residents at-risk

Aligns with Countywide Community Plan Strategies 1 and 2

Objectives

- ✓ Reduce the inflow into homelessness among City residents at imminent risk of losing their housing.
- ✓ Increase the availability and accessibility of services within the City for City residents.

Existing/Ongoing Efforts

- The City funds Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) for families with children who are homeless or are fleeing domestic violence.

- The City contributes to the Countywide Homelessness Prevention System and provides emergency rental assistance and landlord tenant mediation.

Proposed Strategies

6.1: Invest additional City funds in the Countywide Homelessness Prevention System to provide services within the City and to increase access to prevention services for City residents.

6.2: Implement stronger protections to prevent people from losing their housing through eviction, rent increases, or other forms of displacement. For example:

- City ordinances or property owner/landlord incentives to prevent evictions and rent increases.
- Informational campaign for households at risk of homelessness about existing financial and other resources.
- Adopt a City Displacement policy which would be applicable when existing units are proposed for demolition.