

# City of Santa Clara Homelessness Plan: Summary of Taskforce Discussion and Community Engagement Feedback

## Overview

Below is a summary of ideas that were raised and key themes that 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, public comments provided during Taskforce meetings, and additional feedback and information shared with Homebase by City staff. Please note that while these are not direct quotes and some ideas that were shared in multiple venues have been synthesized to reduce repetition, Homebase has presented the feedback and ideas below as they were shared by partners and stakeholders.

To facilitate alignment with the countywide Community Plan to End Homelessness, the themes have been categorized loosely within the three strategies of the County Plan available [here](#).

Feedback was also collected through a survey of City of Santa Clara business owners, and those responses are summarized separately. Finally, this summary includes initial feedback from Taskforce members on the draft City Plan Framework.

## Community Plan Strategy 1: Address the root causes of homelessness through system and policy change.

This strategy of the countywide Community Plan is targeted to address the entrenched economic and societal causes of homelessness through transformational systemic and policy change.

### Theme 1.1: Community Engagement and Education to Increase Knowledge of and Expand Support for Efforts to Reduce Homelessness and its Impacts

- Community education about what homelessness looks like, what resources are available, and the reasons people end up unhoused is a space where the City can provide support (**Community Forum, PD Advisory Committee**)
  - Share stories and fight against stigma of people experiencing homelessness.
  - Talk more about Housing First and how it works.
  - Host more Community Forums to talk about the issue and connect with the community.

- Partner with local businesses, e.g. host a fundraiser to bring awareness to the issue and give proceeds to assist people that are unhoused in the City **(Public Comment)**
- Increase community connection between community members that are unhoused and those that are housed. **(Community Forum, Lived Experience Focus Group)**
  - Identify volunteer opportunities and other ways for community members to help that are safe and impactful
- Improve community outreach and education to City residents, especially those that are concerned about homelessness and believe more needs to be done. **(Public Comment)**
- Address concerns of community members who might oppose new housing developments in the City. **(Community Forum)**
  - Assuage fears that low-income housing will negatively impact neighborhoods.
  - Address concerns from long-time residents about maintaining property values as new apartments or developments pop up.
  - Provide more community conversations before housing projects are brought to large community meetings.
  - Identify a recommended set of “good neighbor” practices that regular communication between property managers, city departments, and neighbors
- Recognize that homelessness is a regional issue and requires partnership and ongoing communication and coordination between the County, cities, service providers, etc.; strengthen collaboration between County and surrounding cities. **(Taskforce Discussion, City Staff Focus Group)**

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### Theme 1.2: Lack of Affordable Housing is a Key Driver of Homelessness

- There is an extreme lack of affordable housing available to low-income folks; the cost of housing is a primary barrier for people who are experiencing homelessness to regain housing. Affordable housing is not always affordable enough for people with extremely low income. **(Community Forum, Lived Experience Focus Groups, Provider Focus Group)**
- Developers of affordable housing face a variety of obstacles; City leaders can and should do more to make it more feasible for developers to develop low-income housing. **(Community Forum, Provider Focus Group)**
- Changes to local housing policy are needed to allow for development of more housing for people with extremely low income (ELI)/supportive housing. **(Community Forum, Provider Focus Group, Taskforce Discussion, Public Comment)**
  - Increase housing supply for the most vulnerable by exploring inclusionary housing policy and requiring more affordable housing units in new developments.
  - Explore changes to expedite the permitting process.
  - Create a mechanism to determine how many mid or high-rent properties remain unfilled and require the units that have been empty for a certain period of time to be opened to low-income community members.
  - Create formal city policies to prioritize affordable housing development.
  - Charge a surtax on vacant residential properties.

- Locate affordable housing and interim housing in opportunity zones - parts of the City that have access to good jobs, schools, and are safe - rather than concentrating permanent and interim housing in areas of the City that are inaccessible and unsafe. **(Community Member Focus Group)**
- Use the Housing Element planning process to prioritize ELI housing development. **(Community Forum)**
- Identifying sites for affordable and/or supportive housing is difficult, there is often push-back from neighbors **(Community Forum, Taskforce Discussion, Public Comment)**
- Supportive housing must have adequate ongoing budget for supportive services and operations **(Taskforce Discussion)**

### Theme 1.3: Protections from Eviction and Displacement

- Expand eviction protections; cover more properties under these protections. **(Provider Focus Group)**
- Enact anti-rent gouging protections and security deposit limits. **(Provider Focus Group)**

### Theme 1.4: Education, Employment, and Living Wage Opportunities

- Education and employment are key to keeping people housed. **(Provider Focus Group, Lived Experience Focus Group)**
- Increase minimum wage. **(Lived experience focus group)**
- Lack of available and affordable childcare is a huge barrier for single parent households, especially to hold a job and even to search for housing. **(Lived Experience Focus Group)**
- Provide more long-term sustainability supports (e.g. life skill building) **(Provider Focus Group, Lived Experience Focus Group)**
- Need more resources for youth within the City, to get them on the right track with their education/employment and set them up for success in the future. **(Lived Experience Focus Group)**
  - Preventing homelessness for youth in the first place.
  - Increase access and funding for apprenticeships for youth experiencing homelessness or in the child welfare system.
- Many folks experiencing homelessness or housing stability have jobs, but cost of living is so high that folks can't maintain housing themselves. **(Lived Experience Focus Group)**
  - Eligibility to receiving resources is a challenge for folks that have some income (in poverty but don't qualify for help).

## Community Plan Strategy 2: Expand Homelessness Prevention and Housing Programs to Meet the Need

Strategy 2 of the countywide Community Plan focuses on building capacity to provide a broad array of housing, prevention and supportive services over the next five years.

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### Theme 2.1: Increase Development of ELI/Supportive Housing

- Set metric goals for the City for supportive housing production – both permanent and interim solutions. (e.g. identify pieces of land, build a certain number of units). **(Taskforce Discussion)**
- Use funding that’s already available but may not be fully utilized (e.g. invest in more Measure A). **(Community Forum)**
- Need to ensure there is funding for supportive services to be attached to developments; State is making money available for capital improvements but not services. **(Provider Focus Group)**
- Require that supportive housing communities and other providers in the City have open discussions and regular meetings with public safety entities in order to maintain open communication **(Community Forum, Taskforce Discussion)**
- Advocate for an increase in PD and first responders to anticipate increase in service calls to supportive housing communities. **(Taskforce Discussion)**
  - Recognize that first year or two when new housing opens can be especially challenging as residents stabilize. This is not a constant throughout the life of the project.

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### Theme 2.2: More Local and Population Specific Programs and Services are Needed in the City

- Santa Clara lacks a “one-stop” service provider like Sunnyvale Community Services. **(City Staff Focus Group)**
- City needs to invest in services to prevent folks from slipping back into homelessness because they lack resources/connections/social support after being housed. **(Provider focus group)**
- Need for more services located within the City and available to people who live in the City. **(Community Forum)**
- Increase resources specializing in serving older adults, who are increasingly becoming a bigger portion of the unhoused population in the City and often require skilled nursing. **(Provider Focus Group, Community Forum, Taskforce Discussion)**
- Target housing and wrap-around services to help subpopulations that are especially vulnerable to becoming unhoused – including survivors of domestic violence and LGBTQ+ youth that may have been kicked out of home by their families. **(Community Forum)**
- Provide services and housing to people that may have criminal history, low credit scores, or other risk factors for homelessness to find housing. **(Community Forum, Lived Experience Focus Group)**
- Increase intensive case management services within the City, like Homesafe Program **(Provider Focus Group)**

- Help people with rent deposits and other homelessness prevention services to keep people from experiencing the trauma of homelessness in the first place, especially as cost of living and housing costs continue to increase. **(Lived Experience Focus Group, Community Forum, Provider Focus Group)**

### Theme 2.3: Increase Community Knowledge of Available Resources in the City

- Need more information about what services/ resources are available. **(Community Forum, Taskforce Discussion, (Lived Experience Focus Group, Provider Focus Group, Public Comment)**
  - It's hard for people experiencing homelessness to navigate.
  - Service providers, City Staff, and community members don't always know what is available and how to help folks.
    - County's Shelter Hotline does not have much knowledge of what resources the City has.
    - Ensure that food pantries and other resources are visible and accessible.
    - Ensure resources/ services provided by County are also accessible within the City.
- Ensure information about available resources/ services are disseminated to people who have English as a second language by creating partnerships with agencies, churches, synagogues, mosques, and other entities that have close relationships with cultural groups within the City **(Community Forum)**

### Theme 2.4: Raise the Voices of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness

- Center the voices of those with lived experience as the City considers funding, policies and changes that impact those that are unhoused. **(Taskforce Discussion, Provider Focus Group)**
- Strengthen representation of lived experience from the City of Santa Clara on the County's Lived Experience Advisory Board. **(Taskforce Discussion)**

## Community Plan Strategy 3: Improve Quality of Life for Unsheltered Individuals and Create Healthy Neighborhoods for All

Strategy 3 of the countywide Community Plan addresses the immediate crisis of homelessness in our community by focusing on doubling temporary housing and shelter capacity, meeting health, safety, and other basic needs of people living in unsheltered conditions, and addressing concerns about the impacts of homelessness in the community.

### Theme 3.1: Ensuring Safe and Welcoming Community Spaces for All Residents

- Improve cleanliness and increase trash removal throughout the City. **(Public Comment, Provider Focus Groups, City Focus Group, Community Forum, City Staff Focus Group)**
  - Increased trash, bio waste, graffiti, fires, vandalism generate expenses for clean-up and repairs at City facilities.
  - Funding limitations and cuts have impacted the ability to meet the need for trash removal and clean-up in City parks.
  - Focus on creeks and waterways; partner with Valley Water to increase abatement in the creek and waterway system; hold quarterly creek cleanup and removal of encampments, trash, and pollutants from waterways in the City.
  - Address increase in RVs parked for extended periods of time and the trash and bio waste impacts of RV residents.
  - Ensure that health and safety guidelines are followed at encampments and around the City.
  - Provide garbage bins by creeks and throughout the City.
  - Improve responsiveness to cleanup requests from residents.
    - The frequency of trash cleanup needed is also an issue – trash will get picked up but then be there again the next day.
  - Focus on Central Park.
  - Businesses in Santa Clara are impacted by people who are unsheltered living on the sidewalk or nearby.
  - Eliminate the city-wide Clean-Up Campaign and replace it with a voucher for each household to visit a dump site. **(PD Advisory Committee)**
- City staff need more resources/training/assistance to City staff to feel safe and equipped to handle issues as they come up. **(City Staff Focus Group)**
  - Noticing more people with severe mental illness and substance abuse issues and City staff are not equipped and are concerned about safety at work.
    - Crisis mental health outreach often requests PD presence for increased safety
  - Concerned about financial liability due to damaged facilities and vandalism.
  - Provide opportunity for City staff to partner with the Lived Experience Advisory Board to learn how to interact with people experiencing homelessness. Meeting with people with lived experience to better understand the mindset they were in when they were in that experience may be really powerful.

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### **Theme 3.2: Increased City-specific Outreach and Connection to Services, Especially for Those who are Hardest to Reach or to Engage in Services**

- Need dedicated street outreach team for the City **(Community Forum, Taskforce Discussion, Provider Focus Group, PD Advisory Committee, Public Comment, City Focus Group)**
  - Andrea's estimate for two full-time people with a dedicated vehicle would cost the city around \$200,000/ year.

- On top of building rapport and meeting basic needs, outreach must connect the City's unhoused residents with VI/SPDAT assessment which is needed prior to accessing all supportive housing opportunities.
- Outreach needs to be focused on those that are hardest to reach.
- Police department provides crisis response but does not have capacity to respond to all calls/do proactive outreach; recent legal reforms have limited some of their tools.
- Add outreach/clinical team response as an alternative to police for quality of life/behavioral health calls.
- Track and reduce the number of "service-resistant" people (individuals who are not receptive to services).
- Improve quality of life for people that are unsheltered in the city; need more immediate solutions to meet basic needs through outreach, hygiene services, etc. **(Community forum, Lived Experience Focus Group, Taskforce Discussion, City Staff Focus Group)**
  - Provide free or low-cost healthcare services within the City (similar to Gardner Family Center in San Jose)
  - Increase Dignity on Wheels locations and advertise it through flyers throughout the City; place in locations near schools (e.g. community colleges), jobs and other resources; provide longer time frame for showers.
- Increase access to behavioral health services **(Community Forum, Provider Focus group, Lived Experience Focus Group, Taskforce Discussion)**
  - Need stronger coordination between City, County behavioral health services, and housing providers; clients get lost in the County system.
  - Address hesitancy to accept services (e.g. ensure folks significantly impaired by a mental health or substance use condition receive psychiatric assessment and are connected to services if accepted).
  - Explore options to provide treatment if they are significantly disabled by a mental health or substance use condition and do not currently meet the standard for conservatorship.
  - Substance use treatment in our community is not designed to effectively serve people who are unhoused. Access to treatment takes time, is often scheduled weeks or months out, and is often outpatient (with no bed attached.)
- Provide public transit passes and other transportation options (E.g. GoPasses, which is provided in San Jose) to enable people to access services. **(Lived Experience Focus Groups, Provider Focus group, Taskforce Discussion)**

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### Theme 3.3: Opportunities to Increase Temporary Housing and Shelter

- Identify city-owned land for temporary housing and encampments. **(PD Advisory Committee)**
  - Interim in nature while City waits ongoing permanent structures like the old Bella Vista motel, Kifer Senior, etc.

- Explore options like safe parking (with supportive services) for people living in vehicles and RVs. **(Taskforce Discussion, Provider Focus Group, PD Advisory Committee)**
- Utilize empty buildings as low-barrier shelters. **(Lived Experience Focus Group)**
- Provide vouchers for short-term hotel/motel stays. **(Provider focus group, Community Forum)**
- Continue what the City is doing with Homekey. **(Lived Experience Focus Group)**
- Utilize hotels and motels to convert to transitional/interim housing. **(Community Forum)**

## Summary of Responses to City of Santa Clara Business Community Survey

The Business community survey was open to people who own or operate a business within the City of Santa Clara. The survey consisted of several multiple choice questions to prioritize proposed strategies, as well as opportunities for open ended feedback. The survey was circulated by the Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce September-October 2022 and received 276 responses.

For the multiple choice questions, business owner expressed the most support for the following proposed strategies:

- Expand outreach within the City to proactively connect people experiencing homelessness with case management, assessment, and potential housing opportunities (177 respondents)
- Improve communication among service providers and businesses in the City (91 respondents)
- Change local housing ordinances to make it easier to build additional housing (81 respondents)
- Increase community education and conversations about what homelessness in the City of Santa Clara looks like, what resources are available, and where community members can volunteer (81 respondents)

Common themes from the open-ended responses included:

- Increase policing and enforcement of existing laws, especially related to drug use, theft, and property damage
- Address mental health and addiction with increased services, including in-patient mental health or mandated treatment. Relocate people and/or resources to different areas (e.g. rural areas outside of the City or specified areas within the city with co-located services)
- Provide job training and connect homeless people to job opportunities



## Initial Response to Draft Strategic Plan Framework from Taskforce Members

The sixth and final meeting of the Homelessness Taskforce was held on October 27 where a draft framework was presented. Below is a summary of feedback from that discussion:

- Several Taskforce members suggested making it more clear the affordable housing is a priority. It's currently listed last, which doesn't match with the importance of housing to address homelessness.
  - There need to be enough housing programs to connect people to when engaged through outreach. Have learned through a site visit that sustainable funding for ongoing services and operation of housing programs is as important as the building.
  - Interested in more in the plan about the mechanisms the City will use to embrace housing development.
- Several Taskforce members appreciated the inclusion of prevention strategies and cited that as a priority.
  - Add a strategy to provide prevention support for families through collaboration with school districts.
- Several Taskforce members recommended separating interim housing and permanent housing programs into separate strategy areas.
- Street outreach strategies under Priority Area 3 were identified as a priority for several Taskforce members.
- Add concrete parameters for the strategies. For example, add information about the funding amounts available, and/or set targets for the type and amounts of housing and services to be created, along with expected costs.
- In Priority Area 1, consider language more broad than "assessing people for supportive housing." Conducting Coordinated Entry assessments isn't the only role outreach plays in connecting people to housing. Outreach also develops relationships with people that make them more likely to engage with available resources.
- Include more targeted strategies for subpopulations, such as young people and seniors.
- Appreciated that feedback from the Taskforce and community is clearly reflected in the draft framework.
- Mental health can be a cause of homelessness, particularly in young people, so recommend investing in youth mental health.
- Do more to highlight the importance of building broad-based support in the community.