



**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Brian Sjothun, City Manager  
**From:** Angela Durant, Principal Planner  
**Date:** January 31, 2020  
**Subject:** Homelessness: A Potential Legislative State of Emergency

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**INTRODUCTION**

House Speaker Tina Kotek addressed the House of Representatives on January 19, 2019 in support of declaring homelessness as a state of emergency. During her address, she made a statement that “we just have to step up and do something more drastic.”<sup>1</sup> Speaker Kotek has since intensified her legislative movement by preparing a bill that would declare homelessness a state of emergency and allocate \$40 million to create new emergency shelters in communities that lack capacity. Smaller allocations would fund rapid rehousing, navigation centers, and public facilities such as hygiene centers.<sup>2</sup> As we all realize, Speaker Kotek will be up against competing priorities. This memorandum serves as a demonstration of support by summarizing actions the City of Medford has taken, as the hub of the Southern Oregon region, to better position the region to achieve outcomes that support the success of the proposed bill.

**BACKGROUND**

In April 2019, the City completed the Medford Homeless System Action Plan (HSAP) to help the City gain a better understanding of the City’s role in addressing homelessness and housing instability; identify goals and actions for the City to implement based on identified system and service gaps; and develop a driving document to assist Council with establishing priorities, partnerships and funding decisions.

In August 2019, Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) completed the Oregon Statewide Shelter Study to gain a better understanding of how to strengthen shelter policies and services; identify barriers and opportunities to implement a system-wide approach that includes emergency shelters and alternative resources; align state and community goals that encourage low-barrier, safe, and housing-focused shelters; gain information and tools to form a more robust network of shelter providers; and provide recommendations on how OHCS can nurture a statewide shelter system to help vulnerable individuals and families transition into permanent and sustainable affordable housing.<sup>3</sup>

The Medford Homeless System Action Plan and the Oregon Statewide Shelter Study are well-aligned and mutually support Speaker Kotek’s proposed bill. The summary below identifies key actions and sends a positive message that the City of Medford is proactively in support of this legislative movement through a commitment to actions and outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> VanderHart, Dirk. Speaker Tina Kotek: Oregon Should Declare A Homelessness State Of Emergency. Oregon Public Broadcasting. January 10, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregon-tina-kotek-homelessness-state-of-emergency/>.

<sup>2</sup> Harbarger, Molly. Tina Kotek Proposes \$40 million investment in homelessness: a first in Oregon. The Oregonian/OregonLive. January, 21, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.oregonlive.com/politics/2020/01/tina-kotek-proposes-40-million-investment-in-homelessness-a-first-for-oregon.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Technical Assistance Collaborative. August 2019. Oregon Statewide Shelter Study; page 2. Retrieved from <https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/ISD/RA/Oregon-Statewide-Shelter-Study.pdf>.

## **SUMMARY OF SUPPORTING ACTIONS**

On November 21, 2019, City Council took a courageous step by adopting a roadmap of 32 actions identified through the HSAP to be implemented by June 30, 2021. This is one of the most significant actions that fuels support of Speaker Kotek's bill. Additional actions to increase funding and resources; implement priorities, performance standards and best practices; and adopt policies are listed below.

### **Funding and Resources**

- Established the Housing Opportunity Fund (HOF) through adoption of a construction excise tax for development of affordable and supportive housing. In November 2019, the City allocated \$250,000 to the production of 16 permanent supportive housing units for Veterans and \$150,000 to 12 new emergency shelter beds for youth.
- Increased funding for rapid re-housing and housing stabilization programs by dedicating \$150,000 from the General Fund during the current biennium.
- Identified and leased City-owned land for the development of Hope Village, which has doubled capacity in the past year from 14 to 30 units.
- Dedicated \$150,000 from the General Fund to support the implementation of the HSAP; \$82,000 was allocated to the Kelly Shelter (Southern Oregon's first and only permanent, low-barrier shelter); \$13,000 to pilot a new outreach and housing navigation project referred to as the Chronically Homeless Outreach Partnership (CHOP); \$50,000 to pilot a new reunification program; and \$5,000 to facilitate a convening to develop solutions for the distribution of goods and services, and inspire development of coordinated sites that could also serve as severe weather event shelters.
- Received a \$50,000 grant from Providence Health and Services to enhance the CHOP pilot project by securing a five-bedroom home that will serve as a co-housing "navigation" option for residents transitioning from the Kelly Shelter.
- Implemented a City process for identifying and evaluating City-owned properties and other properties within the city that could be used to increase shelter programs.

### **Priorities, Performance Measures and Best Practices**

- Dedicated 100% of HOF dollars to develop new units, including transitional and shelter beds, in support of Council's goal to fund 100 new units during the current biennium.
- Directed the establishment of a five-year housing production goal.
- Implemented funding priorities favoring programs that participate in the Homeless Management Information System and Coordinated Entry System.
- Adopted an 85%, 6-month stabilization performance standard for all homeless and housing stabilization programs funded by the City, in direct alignment with Oregon's Statewide Housing Plan.
- Aligned the City's funding opportunities with OHCS by holding simultaneous, annual Council study sessions in support of a streamlined calendar and transparent alignment of funding opportunities.
- Adopted a Council goal to coordinate efforts with the OR-502 Medford, Ashland/Jackson County Continuum of Care (CoC) to implement community-wide best practices and evidence-based performance measures.

### **Adopted New Policies**

- Adopted policy to allow safe parking on properties owned by faith-based organizations. Council also directed staff to identify 1-2 churches to implement a pilot program to address barriers to meeting code requirements preventing the use of this tool.
- Adopted severe weather event shelter policy that established standards and best practices for declaring events; and soliciting, assessing, and managing shelter sites. The City also created a shelter team

consisting of members of City Council and leadership staff, the CoC, and other local partners to share the responsibility and resources. As part of this initiative, the City will host bi-annual community meetings to solicit new shelters and train volunteers.

- Directed a code amendment adding two persons of “lived experience” to Council’s appointed advisory commission on issues of homelessness.

## **STAFF ANALYSIS**

Although the City’s emergent actions are helping cultivate a new approach to addressing homelessness, the region is significantly lacking resources to enhance shelters, services, and transitional and permanent housing to meet the current demand. The shelter study identifies a strong deficit of shelter beds needed to serve 317 unsheltered individuals and 283 households without children. The study further uncovers a strong disproportionate percentage of Hispanic families with children who are homeless, 27% as compared to 17% with incomes below the Federal Poverty Level.<sup>4</sup> A third significant deficiency involves specialized shelters and services for persons with serious mental illness and substance use disorders. As a City staff member working with community partners to identify solutions, implement strategies, and streamline new projects, I confidently state that our region is lacking adequate capacity to meet the urgent needs of these three subpopulations.

In conclusion, the City is well-positioned to support the success of Speaker Kotek’s legislative movement by serving as convener, collaborative change agent, partner to help build a more robust statewide shelter system, and administrative agent for new funds and policy needed to make drastic strides to end homelessness in the Southern Oregon region.

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<sup>4</sup> Technical Assistance Collaborative. August 2019. Oregon Statewide Shelter Study; pages 17 and 32. Retrieved from <https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/ISD/RA/Oregon-Statewide-Shelter-Study.pdf>.