February 19th, 2021

## A Regional Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness

The City of Tacoma, and Pierce County as a whole, needs a comprehensive plan to help every human being experiencing homelessness establish permanent housing. We must target functional zero – a state where every person who enters homelessness is immediately offered both shelter and an appropriate permanent housing intervention. Unfortunately, there is no such a plan.

The time has come for a **Pierce County Regional Plan to End Homelessness.** The Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness will lead this effort.

The Pierce County Regional Plan to End Homelessness will be a road map to functional zero – a state where everyone entering homelessness has access to shelter and a permanent housing intervention on day one. This model is called Built for Zero.

## Past and Current Efforts

Some efforts, such as the City of Tacoma’s Declaration of Emergency around homelessness held promise. But that proved to be more a tactical plan to address homeless encampments, not an overarching strategy to end homelessness. The County has made focused attempts to create a plan for targeted populations to reach functional zero – notably for youth and veterans – but no plans have been formally adopted.

The Continuum of Care and the County both have 5-year Homeless Housing Plans, but neither attempts to quantify the scope of the need, let alone design a system to address it. They are good tactical plans to improve the system, but more is needed.

The City of Tacoma has begun strategic planning around Tacoma homelessness, but a regional approach is needed. The Continuum of Care 5-year Strategic Plan is an excellent starting point. However, those plans do not design a system sized to meet need.

We require a comprehensive **Pierce County Regional Plan to End Homelessness** led by the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness.

To do so, the Coalition needs the formal support of the Tacoma City Council and the Pierce County Council.

Formal support includes endorsing the planning process, dedicating staff time to shape the plan under the direction of the Coalition, ratification of the plan, centralizing homeless program funding decisions in alignment with the priorities in the plan, aligning homeless policies and procedures with other jurisdictions, and lobbying for local, state and federal funding sources to fund the plan.

## Role of the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness

The Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness has evolved to fill the leadership role in ending homelessness. We recently brought key community leaders together to commit to better serve people experiencing homelessness. In that spirit, The Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homeless commits to end homelessness in Pierce County. We take responsibility to fulfill this task and expect to be held accountable for completing it. We are growing from a grassroots organization into a body capable of the analysis and stakeholder engagement needed to bring the community together to develop and then implement a plan to achieve functional zero. We will employ the Built For Zero methodology – a data-driven, best-practices approach proven in communities across the Country.

While the Coalition will assume the leadership and convening role around homelessness, we will not fund or operate direct service programs. The City of Tacoma and Pierce County have shown exceptional skill in packaging state, federal, foundation and local funding into best-practice programs. That will not change. Those resources, however, will be prioritized and deployed in accordance with the agreed upon plan.

The Coalition will be responsible for monitoring progress on the plan, producing monthly dashboards, and reporting directly to County and City Councils when appropriate.

The Coalition will continue to be a big tent – open to all sectors of the community.

## Design of the Pierce County Regional Plan to End Homelessness

The design of the plan will continue to be open to all who wish to participate – from people experiencing homelessness to direct service providers to community members to government and nonprofit leaders. Always, the plan will be driven by best-practices, and by the collected expertise of City of Tacoma and Pierce County staff. However, people with histories of homelessness or currently experiencing homelessness are key to every decision. We must ensure the unique needs of traditionally underserved populations – especially people of color, the LGBTQ community, and people with disabilities – are appropriately represented in the planning and decision-making processes.

## Commitment to End Street Homelessness by November 1, 2021

The Coalition will launch an effort to end street homelessness in Pierce County by November 1st, 2021. This will require an aggressive launch of traditional shelters, non-congregate shelters, tiny home villages, safe encampments, and safe parking sites by municipalities across Pierce County.

Ending street homelessness by November 1st, 2021 may seem optimistic, but our community is absolutely capable of it. Pierce County residents deserve to use their parks for their intended use. A stroll on the sidewalk in front of your residence should not require navigating through someone’s living space. Cleaning feces off your front stoop should not be a daily task at your place of business. Most of all, people experiencing housing insecurity need the safety and dignity of a permanent residence as soon as possible. But until then, they need a place they belong. Only by all of us joining together as the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness will we be able to fulfill the promise of our Coalition name.

The City of Tacoma will continue to lead the efforts around shelter. The City has shown exceptional resourcefulness in standing up additional congregate shelter space. Their work will be expanded into the breadth of shelter options acceptable to those without shelter.

Pierce County Human Services will continue to drive Coordinated Entry, Diversion, Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing program operation. Their focus on best practices and provider supports are a testament to the professionalism of Pierce County Human Services.

Both the City of Tacoma and Pierce County will support a variety of homeless outreach teams including non-traditional self-help models.

## Permanent Housing

An important piece of addressing homelessness is increasing access to permanent Housing and ensuring there are enough affordable housing units across Pierce County. That means maintaining existing housing units and adding new ones either through acquisition or new construction. Mayor Woodards and County Executive Dammeier have put that work, through SSHAP, on a trajectory to be enormously impactful. The Coalition stands ready to assist with this work.

## Funding

Once the community, coordinated by the Coalition, develops the overarching strategy to end homelessness, adequate funding will make or break the effort. As with developing the overall strategy, the Coalition will take a leadership role in developing the advocacy needed to bring needed funding to Pierce County. Only by joining together with other advocacy organizations, government, business, nonprofits, and community groups to speak with a common voice will we have success. The City of Tacoma cannot sustain shelter without additional funding. Pierce County cannot launch the needed coordinated entry system and rapid rehousing programs without adequate funding. Together, we can make that happen. But only if we make the requests of funders together.

## Program Design

Successful implementation of the plan will also require housing first policies and procedures. We must design our programs to meet the need of people as they are. To that end, the Coalition will work with funders and providers to ensure program policies are as open as allowable. We cannot end street homelessness unless we ensure shelter and program options are acceptable to all those in need. Every program cannot accommodate every individual, but every individual must have options of programs that are able to serve them.

## The Provider Community

Ensuring a healthy provider community is also of prime importance. Professional development and living wage jobs are a priority of the Coalition. Conducting Stress Tests with providers to identify programs that need additional financial support will be part of the Coalition’s charge. It is unwise to launch a new shelter if an existing shelter closes because of inadequate funding.