



# TOWN OF FAIRFAX

## STAFF REPORT

### July 7, 2021

**TO:** Mayor and Town Council

**FROM:** Garrett Toy, Town Manager

**SUBJECT:** Authorize the Town Manager to enter into an agreement with the County of Marin to provide funding for homeless case management in an amount not to exceed \$33,000.

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#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Authorize the Town Manager to enter into an agreement with the County of Marin to provide funding for Housing First Case Management in an amount not to exceed \$33,000.

#### **BACKGROUND**

In January 2017, according to a report from the Bay Area Economic Institute and McKinsey Consulting, Marin County had the seventh highest per capita rate of homelessness in the entire country. By January 2019, however, overall homelessness in Marin had fallen by 7%, long-term chronic homelessness had declined by 28%, and unsheltered homelessness in San Rafael had dropped by 30%. Over this same two-year period, approximately 80% of California counties saw increases in homelessness, including a 20% increase in San Mateo County, a 31% increase in Santa Clara County, and a 43% increase in both Alameda County and Contra Costa County.

These results were not an accident. Over the last five years the City of San Rafael has been partnering closely with the County of Marin and local nonprofit partners to implement services and housing for people experiencing homelessness.

In 2016, the City of San Rafael and its partners launched the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), which from March of 2016 through September of 2017, housed 23 of the most visible and vulnerable people experiencing chronic homelessness in downtown San Rafael. HOT has subsequently been named a statewide best practice by the League of California Cities.

This success helped inform the launch of Coordinated Entry (CE), which officially kicked off on October 1, 2017. Since the implementation of CE, countywide over 330 of the most vulnerable people experiencing chronic homelessness have been housed (and over 90% remain housed). Today, the most current data indicates there are fewer than 400 people still experiencing chronic homelessness in Marin County.

These housing placements have been the result of strategically pairing local housing subsidies (e.g. Section 8 housing vouchers) with intensive “Housing First” case management. Housing First is an evidence-based best practice for housing people experiencing chronic homelessness that prioritizes getting back inside and then working on the underlying issues that might have caused a person’s homelessness.

## **DISCUSSION**

Despite this impact, the last year has raised many new challenges and concerns in the County about homelessness, and it is yet again requiring a fresh look at the way the County and its partners address this complex issue. While objectively there has been tremendous success over the last five years, subjectively, over the last year in particular, the rise of large homeless encampments (e.g. Lee Gerner Park in Novato, the Central San Rafael viaduct and Boyd Park in San Rafael, Dunphy Park in Sausalito) has suggested just the opposite.

What's important to remember is that despite their outsized visibility and impacts, encampments remain relatively rare overall. Based on the best data available (the 2019 Homeless Point-in-Time Count), it appears only 15% of people experiencing homelessness in Marin County reside in tent encampments. Moreover, at least in San Rafael, upwards of 90% of people residing in encampments are in fact chronically homeless. Thus, continued progress around the core Housing First strategy for people experiencing chronic homelessness will ultimately also result in a reduction in encampments.

Due to the fallout of COVID-19, the federal government is making even more resources available for people experiencing homelessness. For example, the Biden Administration recently announced the rollout of 70,000 new housing vouchers for people experiencing homelessness, over 100 of which will come to Marin. However, as we have learned over the last few years, people only have success with housing if they also have wraparound support services. Fortunately, thanks to federal stimulus funding coming to local communities, there are now resources that have never existed before.

The goal is ultimately for all the cities and towns in Marin to contribute to this effort, which will help dramatically expand local service capacity. Through regional meetings, there has been discussion of setting aside approximately \$2 million countywide towards additional case management tied to the new emergency housing vouchers. It's important to remember that this funding will be highly leveraged by allowing the County to utilize more Section 8 housing vouchers. Using a population-based formula, *Fairfax's share is approximately \$33,000.*

This program is scalable because it is employing case managers to work with people experiencing homelessness and matched up with a housing voucher. For example, the Marin Housing Authority has said they will make approximately half of the new vouchers available in July, so this program would be able to get up and running fairly quickly. Each voucher will need to be matched with a willing landlord. Additional funding, such as through the State budget or additional federal funds, would allow expanding the program to have a larger reach and assist more people. The County and its partners are working on an initial program that manages the funding sources to flex up case management services for a period of 3-5 years.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

The recommended \$33,000 would come from Fairfax's allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars.