



Commerce City

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Council Communication

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Homeless Services and ARPA Project Update

Summary & Background

As part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the City of Commerce City will receive a total of approximately \$10.5 million from the federal government to support the community and provide significant aid to those adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on Council direction, staff has pursued utilizing a large portion of those funds to construct and provide support for a homeless navigation center and temporary transitional housing. This presentation will update Council on both homelessness at-large in our community and the status and action plan for the ARPA Navigation Center project.

Homelessness

Since the Community Navigator- Homeless Outreach position presented to Council January 2022, there has been an increase in services provided and updates on a few projects. Since Jan 2022 the Community Navigator has seen 249 more people during outreach in 8 months than last year's total number. During the Severe Weather Activation Program (SWAP) season (typically Oct- March) 61 more motel vouchers were administered. Lastly, 27 more people received public benefit assistance. The Community Navigator received an intern to provide support from Feb-May 2022. When the internship ended, a part time position was created and hired as the Community Navigator Assistant in June 2022. Due to the additional staffing, the capacity of services provided were able to be increased and outreach days have become consistent and occurring at least twice a week while the Community Navigator is available for in office walk ins. This year there has already been at least 340 people walking into the Eagle Pointe Recreation Center seeking assistance/resources from the Community Navigator.

Colorado Safe Parking Initiative has launched its first Safe Parking Lot in Adams County in early August in Commerce City. This lot is located at Nativity Lutheran Church. The second Safe Lot at South Platte Crossing is set to launch Sept 30th. These lots are cars only with eligibility requirements for parkers who get referred into the program. In July, the Community Navigator coordinated a free pet and medical clinic hosted at Central Elementary School. Yahweh Health Clinic and Street Dog Coalition provided services to approximately 17 dogs, 5 cats, and 13 people (medical and dental). As the homelessness program is growing, staff is making it priority to have a presence in the community by conducting presentations and focus groups. Some previous audiences include Our Lady Mother Church and St Vicent De Paul, Chamber of Commerce, and Veterans Commission. The community presentations include position summary

of the Community Navigator, informing the group on current/upcoming projects, and asking for community input. A summary of some notable updated outreach numbers and assistance are provided below.

2021 Final Numbers (Apr- Dec)

- 292 Commerce City outreach contacts
- 16 state ID assistance
- 9 public benefit application assistance

2022 Numbers (Jan-Aug)

- 601 outreach contacts
- 17 identification document assistance
- 36 Public benefit assistance

The Community Navigator - Homeless Outreach position is intimately involved with the planning and coordination of our American Rescue Plan homelessness project and serves as a member of Commerce City's core team on intergovernmental collaborations.

American Rescue Plan Project and Program

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) is a 2021 federal COVID-related relief package. Commerce City will receive a total of approximately \$10.5 million from the federal government through the ARP's State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF), half of which, approximately \$5.25 million, has already been received. The other tranche has been applied for and will be received in Q3 2022. These are funds designed to support the community and provide significant aid to those who have been most adversely affected by the pandemic.

On January 6th, 2022, the Department of the Treasury issued its Final Rule identifying the allowable uses for the SLFRF. Staff has identified multiple options through the SLFRF Final Rule. If you are interesting, the final rule is available at this link: [SLFRF-Final-Rule.pdf \(treasury.gov\)](#)

Council's previous direction to staff in 2021 was to "go big" and utilize ARPA funds to help address homelessness in Commerce City. Since staff's last formal update with Council on the ARPA Project in early 2022, staff has continued to work diligently to ensure this project is maximally effective in addressing homelessness. Staff recommends utilizing funds to purchase land and construct/renovate a homeless navigation center with temporary transitional pallet shelters. Information about the project is below.

ARPA Homeless Navigation Center and Transitional Housing

A homeless navigation center provides wrap-around services and helps unhoused individuals

navigate the wide variety of programs, supports, and organizations that can help them address some of the root causes of chronic and temporary homelessness. The center would not function as a homeless day shelter. While the barrier to entry and utilize resources at a navigation center is generally low to encourage engagement, the facility will not allow loitering or camping at/near the site.

In the ideal situation, the navigation center would also have on-site temporary transitional housing in the form of a pallet shelter village. Best practices currently recommend a “housing first” approach to allow people to feel a sense of security for themselves, partners, pets, and personal belongings, which increases their willingness and motivation to engage with wrap-around programs and long-term solutions. Based on point-in-time counts and other engagement from the Community Navigator, the highest need communities in Commerce City are single men, couples, and individuals with pets, all communities that need assistance with temporary security and safety options.

A pallet shelter is perfect to support those communities. Pallet shelters are a series of shed-sized shelters that allow people to safely sleep, store personal belongings, and house any pets. Shelters are insulated and air conditioned to protect against extreme weather. The pallet shelters would not be open to the public; instead, there would be required engagement with the navigation center wrap-around services. Individuals or couples selected for a shelter would be housed at one shelter for 90 to 180 days while they participate in job training, addiction counseling (if necessary), and are connected to permanent supportive housing. The City of Aurora recently completed a pallet shelter village in which their tenants have a more than 90% rate of moving into permanent supportive housing.

Project Updates and Next Steps

Staff has worked diligently to conduct research, engaging with neighboring communities and non-profits to ensure this project is thoroughly planned and successful. Below are some highlights of staff action on this project:

- Monthly, Continuous - Adams County Homelessness Municipal Working Group Core Team Meetings attended by Jim Tolbert, Director of Community Development, Sarah Nachtman, Community Navigator - Homeless Outreach, and Trenten Robinson, Management Analyst. This Core Team has constructed the non-binding MOU on homelessness and connects different resources among cities in Adams County.
- Q1 through Q3 2022 - Real Estate Broker research to identify potential locations for a navigation center located in core Commerce City managed by Jim Tolbert, Director of Community Development.
- Q1 and Q2 2022 - Meetings with the Cities of Thornton and Aurora at their homelessness resource sites attended by Sarah Nachtman, Community Navigator - Homeless Outreach and Trenten Robinson, Management Analyst to receive guidance on needs for a navigation facility.
- Q2 2022 - Presentation for Commerce City Chamber of Commerce to receive business feedback on topic of homelessness and potential navigation center given by Sarah Nachtman,

Community Navigator - Homeless Outreach and Trenten Robinson, Management Analyst.

- Q3 2022 - Meetings with Governor's Office and Denver Metro Counties and Municipalities on coordination for potential state homelessness and navigation center grants attended by Sarah Nachtman, Community Navigator - Homeless Outreach and Trenten Robinson, Management Analyst.

Staff has contracted with a real estate broker who has worked to identify potential properties within core Commerce City that would support a navigation center and space for temporary transitional pallet shelters. Staff has worked with the broker to identify sites with the most ideal proximity to services and resources such as public transportation, existing homelessness resources, food banks, and others. If Council so chooses, staff is prepared to bring facility options to Council via executive session in early October.

As part of the ARPA project, to fully comply with the Department of the Treasury's Final Rule, Council would need to pass a budget ordinance formally attributing the funds to the navigation center project. If Council so chooses, staff is prepared to bring a budget ordinance upon receipt of the second tranche of ARPA funds.

Programming and Collaboration

Discussions of programming are on-going, with staff working closely with Adams County to provide programming and management for the facility, minimizing on-going costs for the city. Other municipalities are forming similar relationships with their Counties, wherein the municipality funds the construction of the facility, and the County provides wrap-around services. With these similar dynamics forming, there are significant opportunities for collaboration across the Denver Metro area.

As part of these on-going partnerships, staff is looking for Council's approval on a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Adams County and surrounding municipalities. Since early 2021, the City of Commerce City has been an active participant in the Adams County Regional Working Group on Homelessness. The purpose of this working group is to coordinate each municipality's homelessness policies and projects to create a network of resources for unhoused individuals across the region, prevent the unnecessary duplication of resources in Adams County, and to support each other's efforts in order to improve the effectiveness of these resources. To affirm each community's commitment to collaboration, an MOU has been prepared and approved by Adams County and the Cities of Northglenn, Aurora, Westminster, Thornton, and Brighton. This MOU does not commit any Commerce City funds or resources. A copy of the MOU is included in your packet. If Council so chooses, staff is prepared to bring the MOU back to Council in early October for approval.