



Legislation Details (With Text)

File #:	Pres 22-20	Version:	2	Name:	
Type:	Presentation	Status:		Filed	
File created:	1/2/2022	In control:		City Council	
On agenda:	1/24/2022	Final action:			
Title:	Homelessness and American Rescue Plan Act Updates				
Sponsors:					
Indexes:					
Code sections:					
Attachments:	1. Council Communication, 2. Presentation, 3. ARP SLFRF Final Rule, 4. Homelessness MOU (Draft), 5. Aurora Pallet Shelters				

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
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Homelessness and American Rescue Plan Act Updates

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 provide support, resources, program, and a potential navigation center to the homeless community in Commerce City.

Purpose

Council has directed staff to utilize ARP funding to address homelessness in Commerce City. This presentation will update Council on homelessness initiatives, projects, and partnerships since Summer 2021. The presentation will then provide Council with an update on what actions staff has taken to effectively utilize the ARP funding to address homelessness, along with what action steps will be taken in Q1 and Q2 2022.

Homelessness

Since the Community Navigator- Homeless Outreach position presented to Council in the Summer 2021, there have been additional partnerships and projects that have been created.

ShowersForAll, Yahweh Health Clinic, and Colorado Safe Parking Initiative are actively working in collaboration with the Community Navigator with upcoming homelessness projects that provides services in Commerce City.

ShowersForAll will be providing mobile laundry and shower services hosted by ACCESS Housing once a month starting late January 2022. In partnership with the Yahweh Health Clinic, a volunteer outreach program was created to allow student volunteers from CU Anschutz to join on street outreaches twice a week. This volunteer program is currently active. Lastly, Colorado Safe Parking

Initiative is planning to host a safe parking lot at Nativity Lutheran Church. This will be a car only lot with eligibility requirements for parkers who get referred. The lot is in discussion to open in March 2022.

A summary of final outreach numbers and applications assistance is provided below, along with some successes from the Community Navigator- Homeless Outreach position:

2021 Final Homelessness Numbers

- 292 Commerce City outreach contacts
- 16 state ID assistance
- 9 SNAP application assistance
- 5 Stimulus payment 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

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. These are funds designed to support the community and provide significant aid to those who have been most adversely affected by the pandemic.

Allowable Uses Update

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. Staff has worked directly with the Treasury to confirm out interpretation of the Final Rule. Based on the Final Rule, staff has two options for properly utilizing the SLFRF:

1. The Treasury has created a "Standard Allowance" to provide smaller communities like Commerce City with greater flexibility in utilizing the funding. By electing the Standard Allowance, the City can claim up to \$10 million of our total \$10.5 million as revenue replacement. This option would allow the City to transfer nearly all of the allocated funds directly to the City's coffers with little additional required reporting to the Department of the Treasury. With this option, the City would still have to provide an eligible use justification for the remaining \$500,000.
2. The Treasury has further clarified the process by which the City can utilize funding to address the "Public Health and Economic Impacts" of the COVID-19 pandemic. With this option, the City would need to (a) identify an economic impact to a particular class or group of people in the community and (b) design and clarify a related response that utilizes the funding. This option would be available to the City whether or not we elect for the "Standard Allowance".

One major outstanding question the City has worked to have resolved is whether the SLFRF could be used to contribute to a project's capital stack to construct or renovate a brick-and-mortar facility. The Final Rule has clarified that capital projects are allowable uses for SLFRF assuming that they address an identified economic impact like affordable housing or homelessness. A written justification for utilizing the funding for capital projects is required, but staff is confident that this project fits squarely into the Final Rule.

The full text of the Final Rule has been included in Council packet tonight.

Staff Research on Homelessness Initiative Design

Based on Council direction, staff has conducted extensive research on the most effective and efficient solutions for addressing and ending homelessness in our community. There are a number of philosophies that are considered best practices for municipal homelessness initiatives.

Housing First

The first major philosophy for homelessness initiatives is called 'Housing First'. The simple summary of this philosophy is that solving homelessness starts with providing unhoused individuals with housing. The necessary services that help homeless individuals get out of homelessness are helpful, but they are not complete if individuals are still focused on where they will sleep and are they safe. By providing Housing First, individuals know they are safe and have a place to sleep, allowing them to focus on the activities and services they need to end their homelessness, such as job training or addiction services.

Collaboration

The second key philosophy for addressing homelessness at a municipal level is collaboration. Much of this philosophy comes from a highly successful global intergovernmental group called "Built for Zero" which has researched how to most successfully eliminate homelessness in communities. They identified that while individual interventions can help on the individual level, collaboration as central to solving the 'upstream' causes of homelessness. Collaborating on a regional level requires four components: "An integrated, community-wide team; a shared accountability for a community-wide aim; real-time, by-name data on homelessness; and the use of real-time data to target key resources and interventions flexibly." City staff believes completely that collaboration is central to the success of City homelessness initiatives.

Homelessness Project and Program

Based on this research, staff has identified that successfully addressing and solving homelessness in Commerce City will require two separate but important components: project and program.

The **project** will consist of the purchase, construction, and/or renovation of a central facility for services with additional temporary or supportive housing and shelter options. The central facility, likely a navigation center, would have community spaces, private offices, washrooms, and additional facilities for groups to provide services like addiction counseling and job training. City staff is currently working with GIS to identify which locations would be most suitable for such a project, including both undeveloped and developed land.

The **program** will consist of creating a network for ‘wrap-around’ services and staffing the navigation center. This will be a collaborative effort with the City, the County, and non-profit partners to provide both case management and services to individuals involved. This programming will allow us to fully leverage the partnerships fostered by city staff while also minimize on-going costs of staffing and maintaining the facility.

It is critical to note that the SLFRF funding alone will not be enough funding to cover either the project or programming. Staff is already researching numerous funding mechanisms for this project, including public-private partnerships, agreements with non-profit organizations, or partnerships with other municipalities.

Intergovernmental Collaboration

Since mid-2021, staff has been involved with an intergovernmental collaboration group called the Adams County Housing and Homelessness Municipal Working Group. The group has been meeting monthly and has full participation from Westminster, Thornton, Aurora, Federal Heights, Northglenn, and Adams County. The purpose of this working group is to coordinate efforts that each government is individually undertaking to address homelessness in their community.

The Working Group has multiple goals. Primarily, this collaboration allows for resource and information sharing across governments which makes any individual homelessness initiative more targeted and more effective. The Working Group also builds tight relationships between cities and with the County which serves to any individual government’s benefit if collaboration is needed on projects and programming. This collaboration also represents a commitment from most governments in Adams County to address homelessness which can multiply the effectiveness of Commerce City’s individual initiatives.

Next Steps

ARPA

Staff has been working internally on identifying numerous locations that would be suitable for our project and subsequent programming, including city property, county and federal property, and private property. After completing this mapping, staff will conduct a cost analysis for each feasible

location.

First tranche of SLFRF funding must be fully attributed by Summer 2022. Staff can pursue either a revenue replacement or capital improvement to attribute as allowable uses. Staff will review and pursue the option that gives the City the most flexibility in usage.

Pallet Shelters

Staff was approached by Adams County with an opportunity to place a small selection (around 4 to 8) of temporary shelters called Pallet Shelters. Most recently, the City of Aurora voted to place 30 pallet shelters at the Salvation Army warehouse located on 33rd Ave just west of Peoria St. Their pallet shelters are similar to 'tiny homes' that provide individuals a safe place to leave and to store any personal belongings for a brief amount of time. Shelters are outfitted with basic living and safety components, including a cot, heating and ventilation, a locking door, and other safety measures like fire extinguishers. Pallet shelters are designed to be temporary or emergency shelters for individuals. Images of Aurora's pallet shelters are below:



Individuals utilizing Aurora's pallet shelters must register with case management provided by the Salvation Army, allowing them to get connected to the 'wrap-around' services with the goal of transitioning them into permanent supportive housing. The City of Aurora utilized their SLFRF funding for purchase of 30 pallet shelters in 2021. Staff in Aurora indicated that 30 shelters cost approximately \$290,000.

Staff is continuing pursue a partnership with Adams County to construct a small set of pallet shelters in Commerce City. Staff intends on utilizing this smaller project as a 'proof of concept' to analyze whether a upscaled pallet shelter community, similar to Aurora, would be an appropriate option for our homelessness project.

More information on Aurora's pallet

Memorandum of Understanding on Homelessness

The Adams County Housing and Homelessness Municipal Working Group has drafted and refined a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between all participating governments, affirming their commitment to addressing homelessness in Adams County. Staff from most municipalities in Adams

County were involved in the creation of the MOU, including Adams County, Northglenn, Commerce City, Thornton, Aurora, Westminster, Brighton, Bennett, Federal Heights, and Broomfield. Staff ensured that no fiscal contribution would be required of the signing municipalities; instead, this MOU serves as an official agreement to collaboratively work to solve homelessness in Adams County.

The purpose of the MOU is to strengthen regional coordination and improve outcomes for people experiencing homelessness or at a risk of homelessness through a shared vision. The Working Group designed the MOU to accomplish the following: share data on homelessness; identify areas of opportunity to provide a system of services and housing; develop a single navigation and entry system; identify possible and future funding sources; and identify possible development partners, both governments and non-profits. Staff supports the MOU because its outcomes will directly improve the efficacy of our homelessness initiatives by: encouraging and facilitating collaboration between the local governments in making homelessness rare, brief and one time; improving service provision and infrastructure by increasing access to data and reducing unnecessary service duplication; and, overall, increased housing opportunities and wrap-around services for at-risk and unhoused individuals.

Staff intends to bring the MOU to Council for review later in Q1 2022.

As part of the Working Group, the Board of Adams County Commissioners intends on reaching out to the Councils of all participating municipalities to conduct a 'Road Show' of homelessness projects and initiatives across the County. This event will be key to collecting feedback from elected officials on future projects across the County.

Staff Responsible (Department Head): Jason Rogers, Deputy City Manager

Staff Member Presenting: Sarah Nachtman, Community Navigator - Homeless Outreach; Trenten Robinson, Management Analyst; Jim Tolbert, Community Development Director