



MAYOR & COUNCIL MEMORANDUM

January 22, 2025

Subject: Update on Strategic Initiatives Related to Unsheltered Homelessness, Opioid Public Health Crisis, Violence Interruption and Vitalization Action (VIVA) Program, and Development of Low Barrier Shelter (City Wide)

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Issue – Time has been set aside at the request of Mayor Romero to provide an update on the efforts to support housing unsheltered persons and the regional opioid response and how the City is addressing the concerns expressed by residents and business owners in Tucson.

City Manager's Office Recommendation – No action is required by the Mayor and Council as part of the Study Session item; however, Mayor and Council can provide feedback and direction on the update.

Background – The ongoing needs and challenges of addressing the unsheltered, and impacts of various encampments, have been a priority for Mayor and Council. On December 6, 2022, Mayor and Council requested updates every 30 days on these efforts.

Present Consideration(s) This update will provide information on the following items:

1. Encampment Protocol

Our Encampment Assessment team has been actively engaged in offering social services to unhoused individuals residing in encampments reported, identified, and assessed throughout the region via the Encampment Protocol Dashboard. The following information outlines our current effort and the importance of continuing to follow the protocol and enforce encampment management.

Current Efforts:

- **Daily Outreach:** Our team members conduct daily outreach to provide support and resources to the unhoused population. We collaborate with various agencies and departments that offer services such as emergency shelters, mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, medical care, and housing assistance. This helps us to ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing the diverse needs of the individuals we serve.
- **Building Accountability:** By consistently returning to the encampments and offering assistance, we aim to build trust and accountability while encouraging individuals to engage with the services available to them.
- **Site cleanup:** Our Environmental and General Service Department is a key player in this effort. They work tirelessly to help address encampment clean-ups and document their work through the dashboard for reporting purposes.

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Encampment Management:

To protect the safety and well-being of the unhoused individuals, the surrounding community, and the environment, it is essential to maintain established protocols and uphold rules and consequences for encampment remediation.

Protocol Measures:

- **Clear Guidelines:** We must follow clear guidelines established for assessments of encampments, collect data from assessments, and triage resources for monitoring or remediation.
- **Behavioral Standards:** Behavioral standards that promote safety and order within our community. We must continue to separate the behavior from the housing status and address issues such as open-air drug use, trespassing on private property, and conditions that can create a public safety hazard.
- **Enforcement and Support:** Work with law enforcement and outreach teams to enforce these guidelines and provide necessary support to individuals to comply with them. This includes offering educational resources and interventions to address harmful behaviors.
- **Continuous Monitoring:** Regularly monitor the encampments in highly populated areas to ensure compliance with established rules and address any emerging issues promptly.

While our primary focus remains on providing humanitarian aid, it is essential to balance this with clear rules and consequences to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all. Our commitment to offering compassionate support continues, and we are dedicated to finding solutions that address both immediate needs and long-term stability.

Current numbers for the Encampment Protocol Regional Dashboard are below, these numbers are cases that have been created after assessment of original report to confirm that they are officially an encampment and de-duplicated.

Encampment Protocol Data 10/27/2022-12/23/2024	
Cases created	3,865
Tier 1	23%
Tier 2	14%
Tier 3	21%
Immediate Removal	26%
Private Property sent to Code Enforcement	6%
No Tier/Closed	10%

2. Housing Central Command Update:

The work for the Housing Central Command (HCC) initiative through Tucson Pima Collaboration to End Homelessness (TPCH) is working with Encampment Protocol to combat unsheltered homelessness. Modeled after disaster response strategies, the HCC uses a coordinated, multi-agency approach to move individuals from encampments into stable housing rapidly. This involves identifying eligible households and available housing units, then working towards streamlining the process of moving people into those units.

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The initiative emphasizes person-centered care, community collaboration, and data-driven tracking of progress toward its goal. Through the HCC effort, individuals are offered help getting their needed identification documents, assistance with justice services, offering of medical care to include detox or mental health services and assistance with the application process of applying for housing units. The program's success is measured by the number of individuals transitioning into housing.

Typically, this process has shown a faster response to housing individuals by averaging approximately 48 days to house folks from assessment to move-in. This is about 30 days less than the average housing timeline following traditional coordinated entry.

To date the initiative has served 201 participants for the program, and 94 have been housed since January 2024. With every encampment that is completed using the HCC model we are learning how we can better reach more individuals and improve the process. The idea is that with the knowledge that is gained by this initiative we can help to improve the effectiveness of the whole continuum when it comes to housing those in need.

In summary, ending homelessness is a complex challenge that no single solution has fully resolved. It requires the ongoing dedication of a collaborative and strong regional team; that continues to show up. We will continue to work tirelessly across various sectors to address the diverse needs of individuals and families in the City of Tucson. By combining efforts, resources, and expertise, we can make meaningful progress in tackling this issue and provide hope and stability to those experiencing homelessness.

3. Housing First

Housing First continues to collaborate with City departments, divisions, and external partners to address outreach, navigation, shelter and stable housing for Tucson's most vulnerable residents. Currently, the Wildcat Inn shelter program supports 52 adults and 57 children, and is operated by City of Tucson staff, Desert Cove, operated by Community Bridges reports 23 adults, 3 children, with both operating as low-barrier shelters. The Housing Emergency Action Response Team (HEART) currently provides critical wrap around services to 124 housed participants, and an additional 259 in other supportive housing programs also receive wrap around services through other Housing First case management staff. Additionally, the Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team, alongside encampment assessors, works closely with the Multi-Agency Resource Coordinator, Tucson Police Department Community Outreach Resource Engagement Team (CORE), and the Housing Central Command initiative to resolve encampments and achieve lasting solutions to homelessness in partnership with community shelter and service providers. In the last 12 months the Housing First team has been able to serve approximately 2000+ individuals and families with much needed resources ranging from street outreach to permanent housing.

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4. Shelter and Safe Parking options

The City Manager's Office has directed HCD to establish an emergency shelter operation with a capacity of 70 or more beds on or before March 1, 2025. This memorandum provides Housing and Community Development's (HCD) planned approach to meet this directive and outlines alternatives which were considered.

HCD has researched local options including the acquisition of non-congregate hotel properties for use as shelter, long-term leasing of non-congregate hotel space, use of the County-owned Drexel property which currently provides migrant shelter services, construction of a congregate tension-fabric structure for use as emergency shelter, and accelerated use of the congregate indoor space available at the former Amphi Fire Station 8 located on King Road.

Selected Approach: With the approval of the City Manager's Office, HCD has initiated the process to accelerate use of the indoor congregate space available at the former Amphi First Station 8 site located on King Road in Ward 3. The site can accommodate up to 70 congregate beds upon rehabilitation. The site will require additional modular restroom, shower, and laundry facilities as well as modest interior rehabilitation to allow use as a shelter.

While the indoor space can provide overnight shelter, additional space is needed to support daytime use allowing an on-site location for shelter guests to congregate, eat meals, recreate, and participate in educational and social services. HCD has initiated contracting processes to construct a tension-fabric building, known as a Sprung Structure, on the property to meet these needs. HCD anticipates that these improvements can be made by the March 1, 2025 launch date provided that permitting processes are expedited.

Tension-fabric structures can last 10 or more years and can be constructed much more quickly and at a reduced cost to traditional buildings. Tension-fabric structures are currently used to provide emergency shelter in cities across the west including but not limited to Phoenix, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, and San Francisco.

Current Project Status: HCD has submitted an emergency procurement request for design, construction, and installation of the tension-fabric shelter at the Amphi 8 site and is working with an experienced architectural and engineering firm to develop site plans for the property which are anticipated to be received within the second week of January. HCD is collaborating with PDSD to expedite permitting processes. Extensive community engagement occurred in 2023 and HCD has reserved \$3.5M in framework funds allocated by Mayor and Council to complete the project.

HCD has also collaborated with Old Pueblo Community Services (OPCS), a local non-profit shelter provider, which has received funding from the Arizona Department of Housing to operate the shelter property through 2026. OPCS is an experienced provider of low-barrier shelter which offers a more inviting alternative to many existing shelters which limit access to a single gender, cannot accommodate pets, and lack storage solutions for personal property. Each of these issues are commonly cited as reasons for denial of services by persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The proposed low-barrier approach is intended to address concerns raised by unsheltered persons and reported by encampment assessors through the 2024 encampment protocol evaluation conducted by the Multi-Agency Resource Coordinator for Unsheltered and Encampment Protocol.

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Next Steps: Upon approval of the requested emergency procurement determination by the Business Services Department (BSD), HCD will work with BSD procurement to enter into contracts for design, acquisition, and construction of the tension-fabric structure at the N. Amphi 8 site and initiate improvements to the Amphi 8 interior. HCD will concurrently initiate collaborative planning with PDS, Tucson Fire, and Tucson Police Department to begin permitting and emergency access processes.

Interim Solution: Using funding awarded by the Arizona Department of Housing, HCD has initiated a temporary hotel shelter solution through which 130 beds of non-congregate shelter will be provided through June 30, 2025 using an existing per diem hotel contract. The project is leasing 65 rooms of hotel shelter with two persons per room and is being operated by the City's Housing First program using a low-barrier model. The project is staffed with a Shelter Coordinator and five Housing Navigators who will provide on-site daily assistance for guests to transition to permanent housing solutions. Households unable to transition to permanent housing during the program operating period will be transitioned to the congregate shelter described in this memorandum and/or other City-owned low-barrier shelter sites such as the Wildcat Inn operated by the Housing First program and the Craycroft shelter operated by Pima County.

1. Violence Interruption and Vitalization Action (VIVA)

In February 2021, the City of Tucson (COT) undertook a holistic, data-driven, and evidence-informed approach to address gun violence under a program called Place Network Investigations (PNI). By leveraging various COT departments, schools, community groups, Ward offices, and others, PNI developed sustainable interventions into positive spaces to enhance community safety. This program was piloted in three separate areas of the city and analyses of Tucson Police Department (TPD) and Tucson Fire Department (TFD) calls for service and incident data showed PNI had meaningfully reduced violence and city resource expenditures within the three PNI sites, revitalizing each site's surrounding neighborhoods.

In the summer of 2024, this pilot approach was adopted under a new program name, Violence Interruption and Vitalization Action (VIVA). Of the original three PNI pilot sites, one has moved into a maintenance phase allowing a new site to be identified and worked under the VIVA program in Ward 3.

As of August 2024, the new VIVA site encompasses Fort Lowell Road from Oracle Road to Mountain Avenue. This location is unique from other VIVA sites in the city due to the fact there is not a large apartment complex or singular problem location contributing to violent crime. Instead, in addition to being a gun violence hot spot, this corridor has a high concentration of unsheltered population that is contributing to quality-of-life issues for residents and business owners; specifically related to trespassing, theft, criminal damage and open-air drug usage.

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The unsheltered population has been known to frequent the following areas:

- Washes/Tunnels on Oracle (Navajo Wash and Cemetery Wash)
- 202 E. Mohave (vacant property)
- 3200 N. 1st Ave (Amphi Plaza)
- Sacred Heart (510 E. Mohave)

Under the initial VIVA phase of crime and our network identification, the Tucson Police Department has taken proactive measures to address these areas; to include:

- Partnering with Environmental and General Services (EGSD) to clean and remove the overgrown brush in the Navajo/Cemetery washes.
- Collaborating with Code Enforcement to provide crime data at 3200 N. 1st Avenue.
- Addressing ongoing issues at 202 E. Mohave Road; which resulted in the property being transferred to Pima County and set for demolition in the future.
- Implementing daily special checks on businesses; each squad is assigned a business or location in the area for a direct point of contact to address non-emergency issues.
- Utilization of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) to assist in identifying issues on business owner's properties in an effort to reduce crime.
- Specialized deployments with TPD's CORE Unit.
- Implementation of specialized equipment such as pole cameras to assist in identifying subjects involved in narcotics trafficking within the VIVA location.
- TPD Community Response Teams and patrol officers conducting pro-active policing and responding to Problem-Oriented Precision Policing (POPP) checkouts.

Statistics from TPD CORE deployments are as follows:

- October 2024: 77 community members contacted (4 arrested)
- November 2024: 48 community members contacted (2 arrested)
- December 2024: 79 community members contacted (5 arrested)

Other items of note:

- CODAC Behavioral Health: Transported 20 people for drug treatment in the last three months.
- SPDAT (Housing Assistance Placement List): October (21), November (13), December (8).
- Community Engagement: TPD has been building positive relationships with area residents, businesses, and church groups.
- VIVA area cleanups: ongoing involvement regarding cleanups with EGSD in removing encampments.
- Community Court: Two people arrested and transported to Community Court.
- Deflection to drug treatment services/alternative to making an arrest: 6 in the last 3 months.
- Nonprofits organizations: Coordinated several street outreach deployments with partners from ARC, CODAC, CBI, El RIO, and HOPE.

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- Tucson Fire Department TC-3 Program: Passing out naloxone to area businesses and community members suffering from substance use disorders.
- Partnership with Community Safety Health and Wellness/Community Enrichment Coordinators.
- Fort Lowell Road Safety Assessment for enhanced lighting, additional HAWK lights, and traffic calming measures to reduce pedestrian fatalities.

Over the past three months, the proactive policing from TPD has resulted in 21 felony arrests; 14 of which were narcotic related and 7 were firearm related. TPD command staff has held multiple meetings with several stakeholders in the community to explain the mission of the VIVA project and to solicit feedback. This multi-faceted approach to address gun violence by not only interrupting violent activities but also revitalizing communities to prevent the recurrence of such issues is proving to be effective based on preliminary data showing a reduction of gun-related crime in the area.

In summary, all the updates provided in this Memorandum support the priorities of Mayor and Council, which are also reflected in the upcoming Proposition 414, Safe and Vibrant City. Should Safe and Vibrant City be approved by voters, this will provide a significant, stable, and reliable funding source to support Housing First, Community Safety and Public Safety staff who are on the front lines implementing proven strategies to reduce homelessness and interrupt and prevent gun violence.

Plan Tucson Consideration(s) – This item supports the following Plan Tucson policies:

H1: Evaluate the social, physical, and spatial needs related to housing program design and location, including neighborhood conditions and access to basic goods and services.

H7: Increase access to safe, healthy, and affordable housing choices, including mitigating the impacts of foreclosure.

H8: Address the housing needs of the most vulnerable populations in the community, including those at risk of homelessness.

Financial Considerations – There are multiple funding sources supporting the various programs outlined in this Memorandum, which include General Funds, State and Federal funding.

Legal Considerations – City Attorney's Office has reviewed this Memorandum.

Respectfully submitted,



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City Manager's Office