

Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness And its Impacts on the Community

Submitted to the City of Chico, California

February 28, 2022

“We must stop setting our sights by the light of each passing ship; instead, we must set our course by the stars.” General George C. Marshall



Introduction

General George C. Marshall was the Army leader in charge of Allied operations in World War II. He organized and grew the United States military to its largest size ever to address the threats of that war.

George Marshall was a delegator and admired because of his non-political approach. As Secretary of State, he proposed a plan to rebuild Europe from the destruction of WWII. “The Marshall Plan” earned Marshall the 1953 Nobel Peace Prize. As Sam Quinones writes in *The Least of Us*, the plan “grew from the idea that our self-interest lies in helping the ruined, the once-hated, who are flat on their backs.”

The quote above recognizes that, while circumstances change and there are many distractions, it is best to work from fixed reference points to achieve success.

Homelessness is a complex set of issues, but it does hold a few fixed references. One reference point is the critical role housing and shelter play in moving people toward stability and self-sufficiency. Another reference point is the inextricable link between homelessness, drug use and addiction, and mental illness. Lastly, is the role of municipalities in regulating public spaces and acting as a facilitator to sheltering, housing, and treating those most in need.

In essence, cities serve as the provider of last resort. They can use both carrots and sticks to ensure public order and regulate the shared spaces and economies in a way that accommodates our broad and diverse interests. When people are unable to navigate the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter – or even accept the help of charities – cities must intervene.

In order to assist the City of Chico in determining a way forward among the limited resources and alternatives in addressing homelessness and its impacts on the community, the City of Chico contracted with Hope Street Coalition to develop a set of recommendations and develop a strategic plan. The work contracted by the City detailed work including research, meetings and data collection, and the delivery of a set of written reports to support the development of a strategic plan to define priorities, objectives, goals, and set objectives to reduce homelessness and recommend measures to facilitate the City’s efforts to reduce unsheltered homelessness and improve the community.

Hope Street Coalition has delivered a series of reports on:

1. Policy and Law Impacting Homelessness Reduction Efforts
2. Objectives, Data, and Municipal Costs of Addressing Homelessness and Its Impacts in Chico and Butte County
3. Approaches and Programs to Address Homelessness and Their Impacts and Outcomes, and
4. Findings and Desired Outcomes of Community Input Regarding Homelessness and Its Impacts in Chico

This Strategic Plan builds on these reports weighing heavily on the limits that policy and law create for the City and the input from stakeholders and community input. In short, a consensus exists in the City of Chico that the current approach to housing the unhoused and addressing the impacts on the community created by homelessness is not working.

The desire of the community is a return to the strong sense of safety, community, and self-determination that people consider the core of what it means to be Chico.

This strategic plan offers a set of recommendations to the City of Chico to address homelessness and its impacts on the community. It does so by understanding a limited, practical role for the city considering its size and budget, the context of federal, state, and regional policy, action within its control, and the desires of its citizenry.

Strategic plans on homelessness typically evaluate the number of individuals experiencing homelessness, the amount of housing needed to house them, the resources necessary to develop that housing, and the services required to maintain that housing. Strategic plans typically focus on outreach, prevention, regional collaboration, and how best to leverage the regional Continuum of Care.

Strategic plans of these types often recommend unrealistic housing goals, unrealistic levels of support, and, therefore, unrealistic plans. They fail to consider the desires of the general community, the costs of homelessness to the community, and the support from the community in terms of solving both issues of people living in places not intended for human habitation and the impacts and costs to the community.

Community input and consensus is often limited or manipulated to manufacture support for the creation of permanent supportive housing regardless of the lack of funding available, a suitable place to develop such housing, and other local circumstances. In short, by limiting strategies to homelessness to housing, the recommendations will always be housing oriented.

This plan is not limited to solely housing and housing outcomes. This plan will focus on efforts within the City's control, since the development of housing, state law regulating housing, and state policy impacting the development of housing is outside of the authority of the City. The city does not create housing but provides zoning, permitting, and other duties to ensure that development conforms to the standards of the city.

Chico citizens are seeking recommendations on where housing and shelter should be developed, how much housing or shelter is necessary, what service improvements or ideas could get people to quickly accept shelter and housing and clear public spaces, and how programs should operate to produce better outcomes. They are desperate for some solution that threads the needle between the law, the available resources, the authority of the City, and the desire to restore Chico to a time before the negative impacts of homelessness plagued the community.

Such a plan and set of recommendations does not exist.

Instead, this plan identifies the current circumstances of the City and community, the tremendous lack of direction, leadership, and consensus on what should be done, and suggests a set of strategic starting points that will inform and engage the community.

This plan focuses on how the City of Chico in partnership with its citizens, can not only address the problem of people living in places not meant for human habitation but the significant impacts on the community homelessness creates. It recommends a broad path to move forward that serves the entire community with its diverse needs and desires, and provides practical recommendations within the limits of City, community, and regional resources.

The strategic north star of homelessness in Chico focuses on the ability of the community to determine an objective and a means to achieve it. Relying on the City Council and lawsuits will not create consensus, address the diverse desires and needs of the community, and re-establish the sense of safety and community citizens want. Political divisions need to be mended, practical solutions need to be considered, and the community must come together as a whole to address the needs and challenges posed by people living in public places.

Just like the Marshall Plan, Chico needs smart delegation to wise members of the community and a non-political approach. Chico needs to understand that its self-interest lies in restoring those who are most vulnerable and healing in addition to housing.

While the number of shelter beds and housing units, the ability to enforce laws, and the make-up of city leadership will change, the City of Chico needs to set some fixed reference points to achieve success and restore its sense of who it is.

Disclaimer:

Due to the Warren v Chico lawsuit brought against the City regarding enforcement of anti-camping and other ordinances, and the concern to discuss details of a potential settlement, Hope Street Coalition was not privy to nor did not engage in discussions, analysis, or recommendations regarding the pallet shelter site, the provision of shelter and services at the pallet site, or potential policies regarding the regulation of public spaces. The settlement of Warren v Chico was finalized without review, comment, or discussion from Hope Street Coalition about how it could be incorporated in a strategic plan or the work under this contract.

Background

Policy and Law - Addressing the challenge of homelessness must be viewed as more than an issue of housing. It must recognize the impacts of federal and state law on mental and behavioral health, crime, funding restrictions, and policy working at cross purposes and with significant unintended consequences. Federal and state law and regulation exert significant influence, prioritization, and restrictions on all manner of issues related to homelessness. For more information see *Report on Policy and Law Impacting Homelessness Reduction Efforts*, Deliverable #1.

Approaches and Programs - Societal developments have resulted in the current approaches to providing housing for low-income individuals and families, the connection of mental illness treatment and homelessness, and the normalization of drug use. The policies of homelessness assistance and funding availability do not always match with the needs of the community. Many programs in Butte County and Chico attempt to address homelessness but fail to reduce the number of people living in places not meant for human habitation. Part of this failure is the lack of accurate data and metrics to determine the effectiveness of programs and how they impact the number of people living on the streets. Attention must be paid to measuring these efforts and understanding how they contribute to the objectives of the community. For more information see *Report on Approaches and Programs to Address Homelessness and Their Impacts and Outcomes*, Deliverable #2.

Costs – Setting objective(s), implement measurement gathering systems, and determine what metrics will guide the City toward achieving the objective(s) are important to determine success and value. The lack of data and cost information available to measure efforts to address homelessness and its impacts is significant. Steps to collect City data of addressing homelessness and its impacts specific to the City of Chico should be considered. For more information see, *Objectives, Data, and Municipal Costs of Addressing Homelessness and Its Impacts in Chico and Butte County*, Deliverable #3.

Stakeholder Findings - Citizens desire the restoration of the quality of life they believe exemplifies life in Chico. They are concerned with issues of safety, crime, the destruction of public spaces, and aggressive behavior. They also are skeptical that current systems and programs are up to the task of solving the problem of homelessness. Citizens expect that assistance will be accepted by those experiencing homelessness. They believe that competing narratives are polarizing the community and creating unrealistic expectations. The way forward must include agreed upon basic principles and realistic objectives and be grounded in the realities of what is actually happening in Chico and the ability of the city to effectively address it. For more information see *Findings and Desired Outcomes of Community Input Regarding Homelessness and Its Impacts in Chico*, Deliverable #4.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1	Better Understand those Experiencing Homelessness and the Impacts of Programs on the Number of People Living in Public Spaces
Action	Collect More and Better Data
Potential Costs	\$15,000 - \$80,000 per year

When discussing homelessness and its impacts on the community, nobody really knows what they are talking about because of a lack of detailed and accurate data. The Point in Time Count is a derived statistic collected by volunteers with little technology and poor statistical methods. It is used as the basis for significant policy and funding decisions, despite its inaccuracy.

To rectify this and better substantiate decision making, the City should collect its own data. The City should design a system to collect its own data and that data should serve the purposes and objectives of the City as it addresses homelessness.

Municipalities, including the City of Chico, do a poor job of understanding the true costs of homelessness and its impacts because they often do not include managerial categories of homelessness in departmental budgets, activity reports, and expenses. They are unaware of the specific costs associated with clean ups, environmental mitigation and maintenance of public spaces from encampments. Even the true amount and costs of emergency responses to individuals experiencing homelessness by law enforcement, fire, and paramedics is an estimate.

The collection of real-time data should occur in five areas:

- 1) The City should collect more and better data as its obligation to the State of California under the City's declaration of a shelter Crisis. The City of Chico is required to collect and report certain data to the State per Government Code §8698.4 that includes:
 - The total number of residents in homeless shelters within the city, county, or city and county.
 - The total number of residents who have moved from a homeless shelter into permanent supportive housing within the city, county, or city and county.
 - The estimated number of permanent supportive housing units.

- The number of residents who have exited the system and are no longer in need of a homeless shelter or permanent supportive housing within the city, county, or city and county.
 - The number and bed capacity of new homeless shelters built pursuant to this section within the city, county, or city and county.
- 2) The City of Chico should produce an annual report of activities and costs incurred by the City to address the impacts of individuals and families living in places not meant for human habitation. City functions should include managerial categories to reflect costs and activities as a response to the impacts of homelessness on city functions. Chico Police and Fire Departments should keep track of requests for service that stem from individuals experiencing homelessness or encampments. Interactions by any City department with individuals without a fixed address should be documented as homeless. City workers responding to maintenance issues, vandalism, encampment clean ups and other responses to people living in public spaces should track and report time spend and expense of service.
 - 3) The City of Chico should collect and analyze data of outreach and engagement functions of the pallet shelter settlement. Outreach and engagement functions should constantly update local censuses of where people are living in public spaces and how many people make up encampments. Anonymized data or unique identifiers should be used to track the movement of people living in public spaces. Every engagement should be an opportunity for an intake with specific questions to determine location of origin, time spend residing in Chico, mental illness or drug use status, and offerings for housing and services. Those who refuse the offer of housing and services should be noted so that the City can maintain a record of the number of people experiencing homelessness that have been offered housing and services, their rate of acceptance, and the disposition of each individuals.
 - 4) Homeless services providers should be required, as a condition of their conditional use permit, to submit weekly census of the people experiencing homelessness in their care and the length of time they have resided with the provider. This data can help the city understand the flowrate or pass-through rate, and efficiency of service providers in assisting those in the city experiencing homelessness. Likewise, efforts and programs that feed those experiencing homelessness should be required to count the number of individuals being fed, at what frequency, and those receiving multiple meals over time to determine how many people are being fed who are residing in public spaces. This data can be used to determine opportunities to engage individuals experiencing homelessness that access public feedings.
 - 5) Activities and outcomes of the pallet shelter site should collect data on the individuals sheltered and the services offered. Examples of data to collect include:

- a. Occupancy ratio of the number of beds available and the number of beds utilized at the pallet site.
- b. Number of people accepting services provided at the pallet site.
- c. Exact type and nature of services offered and rate of acceptance / participation.
- d. Outcomes of the provision of offered services.
- e. Number of people that completed employment training, number of people accepting and completing addiction treatment, number of people referred to County Behavioral and Mental Health services.
- f. Number of guests that are in need of behavioral health and addiction services vs the number of guests that do not need those services.

Collecting more and better data is essential in determining a strategic plan on homelessness and its impacts. Better data will assist the City in understanding the reality that is occurring on the streets, the amount and costs of City actions, and the type and frequency of interactions and services to better assess the level of crisis going on in Chico among the unhoused.

Understanding exactly what is happening among the unhoused will provide valuable information to decision making bodies to better assign resources, make determinations of efficacy in providing services, and compare claims against actual data. It will also create a rolling assessment of how needs are being met by entities such as the County of Butte, efforts funded through the Continuum of Care, mobile health vans, mobile showers, and other relief providing entities.

The state statute (Government Code §8698.4) governing cities that declare a shelter crisis requires a publicly available "plan" to develop homeless shelters and permanent supportive housing and that includes transitioning of the homeless from shelters to permanent supportive housing. It is difficult to conceive of how the City can fulfill these reporting requirements if they don't undertake steps to collect the necessary foundational data specific to the City of Chico.

In collecting data, it should be consistent with the priorities and objectives of the community not an extension of data required by HUD through the Continuum of Care. Data should contribute to iterative, real-time responsiveness necessary to understand trends and make necessary changes in a timely fashion. Data should be oriented to support objectives, goals, and activities of the community as considered and recommended by the Council or other deliberative bodies.

It is recommended that the City of Chico obtain the services of a data collection company to capture and report data within the city and to equip outreach and engagement workers in the field. Data collection should be an ongoing, longitudinal process instead of a once-a-year activity. HMIS data standards are not necessary as this data should be in service to the City of Chico and not necessarily HUD or the Continuum of Care.

Customized and real-time data collection technology and support is available through a variety of vendors. Equipping outreach workers with simple, hand-held technology is an inexpensive way to increase the reliability of information. Internal city functions to account for activities and costs related to homelessness and its impacts can be achieved within the City's existing data systems or vendors can be brought in to build these resources.

Recommendation #2	Increase Outreach Effectiveness and Continually Refine Data
Action	Acquire the Services of a Full-Time Social Worker
Potential Costs	\$61,000 - \$89,000 per year salary

Nationwide research demonstrates that chronically homeless people are reluctant to accept services from law enforcement personnel. Instead, teams reaching out to chronically homeless people with a trauma informed and recovery-oriented approach led by a social worker may deliver more effective outcomes in navigating individuals into shelter and/or programs. TARGET Teams respond to homelessness by engaging people in an attempt to connect them to housing, services, and treatment. The addition of a full-time social worker may increase successful engagements and enhance efforts to systematically collect data related to homeless activities and responses.

The City should contract with a service provider to engage a full-time social worker who will outreach with CPD, County Behavioral Health representatives, mental health providers, and other local service providers.

The contracted social worker will provide quarterly reporting to the City Council that includes anonymized data, detailed program activities, and itemized expenditures. The social worker should possess extensive experience with mental health and addiction and recovery issues and programming. The social worker will lead a team that includes law enforcement officers, County Behavioral Health outreach workers, mental health providers, and other local service providers to encourage and navigate individuals into shelter and/or programs. The team, using a trauma-informed and recovery-oriented approach, will focus on reducing chronic homelessness and gathering data for evaluation.

The role of the social worker should include the collection, analysis, and management and reporting of data collected from City operations, outreach and engagement activities, providers of housing and services, and the new pallet shelter site. Having one central hub for data and

analysis provides the City an important resource to inform and engage the City Council to determine the effectiveness of its activities.

Based on the recent settlement agreement of the Warren v. Chico lawsuit, it is required that Outreach and Engagement staff “be a licensed social worker, or other similarly trained professional” (3)(f)(i). To reduce liability, maintain control and confidentiality of information, and increase the accuracy of data collection and recording, it is recommended that Outreach and Engagement staff be employees of the City of Chico.

<p>Recommendation #3</p>	<p>Get Past Political Divisions and Reduce the Urge for Rent Seeking</p>
<p>Action</p>	<p>Create a Community Task Force to Focus on Homelessness and Its Impacts on the Community</p>
<p>Potential Costs</p>	<p>Negligible</p>

Homelessness has split the community of Chico in two. One group seeks to solve homelessness through acts of compassion. They believe that alleviating human suffering is the ultimate good.

Another group seeks to solve homelessness through enforcement of laws and community standards. They believe that everyone benefits through the equal and fair application of the law.

These two views are both correct but are often presented as exclusive solutions. This leads to political conflict and division and reduces the set of potential solutions or alternatives as individuals and ideas are seen as advancing one or the other view. It also reduces opportunities for community consensus and the ability to support views and efforts that are both compassionate and provide accountability.

It is recommended that the City Council of Chico form a task force that encourages dialogue from a wide variety of perspectives and issues related to homelessness and its impacts on the

community. The task force should serve as an advisory and sounding board for the City as it seeks to expand alternatives and reduce political division. It can also serve as a source of information and recommendations to the City.

Membership of the task force should be broad to reduce reliance on a set of experts or service providers. When a few people or organizations are seen as having special knowledge or providing exclusive services, a behavior known as rent seeking occurs that seeks increased support and resources from government entities without reciprocal productivity.

Chico is concerned with much more than the provision of housing, shelter, and services to reduce homelessness and its impacts on the community. They are also concerned with the quality of the community, the availability of community treasures and resources, such as Bidwell Park, and how homelessness impacts the image and economy of Chico.

The task force membership must include points of view that include:

- Community safety and crime,
- Access and maintenance of public parks and waterways,
- The local economy and concerns of businesses,
- Impacts on home ownership and the rental markets,
- Efforts from churches and faith-based organizations,
- Health care providers including Enloe Medical Center,
- Mental illness and addiction recovery and treatment,
- Environmental impacts,
- And community well-being and civic life.

A task force, focused on specific issues and outcomes, can reduce political division by focusing on the community good instead of specific agendas or interests. It can increase the set of alternatives by considering ideas and solutions outside of the existing narratives and challenge the status quo. A task force can also reduce the urge to rent seek by those providing social services by requiring objective analysis of outcomes, costs, metrics, and externalities.

The task force can serve a very useful purpose for the City in fostering compromise, exploring issues without taking up the time and resources of the City, providing sets of recommendations that have been pre-considered by members of the community, and providing solutions that do not require City approval or resources.

For example, through the collaboration of its members, communities have fostered housing, treatment, and employment services for addicts seeking recovery and housing. Another community created neighborhood watch and business patrol services that not only increase safety and reduced crime but provide a helpful connection to assistance and services for those living on the streets. Another set of volunteers engaged in outreach services and assisted those exploited by drug and human trafficking.

The task force must act as a stabilizing force on the actions and plans of any particular City Council. Therefore, the terms of task force members must be longer than two years.

The actions of the task force must be safeguarded against factions and political favoritism by requiring large majorities (such as 60 percent or greater) to make recommendations.

Certain authority over budgetary recommendations, information, and tasks should be granted to the task force to foster a sense of responsibility to the community, a deeper knowledge of certain issues, and an eye toward longer-term impacts.

The objectives of the task force must be the reduction of individuals and families living in places not meant for human habitation and the reduction of the impacts of such living on the community of Chico. These two objectives are centered on the individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and on the community that bears the costs and consequences of homelessness.

It is important to note that the objectives do not include an increase in the provision of housing and services. The provision of housing and services to the unhoused is a means to an end, not an end in itself. By focusing on reducing the number of people living in parks, cars, on the streets, etcetera, the task force can look at a variety of means to accomplish this objective and it can receive frequent data to determine how it is being achieved.

Similar to this objective is the objective of reducing the impacts of homelessness on the community. The objective is not accomplished by a clean-up or passage of an enforcement ordinance, but how those activities reduce costs, increase a sense of safety, reduce emergency responses, and the like.

In addition to setting the above objectives of the task force, one of its first activities should be establishing guiding principles and goals to inform a practical strategy. Examples of guiding principles could include:

- A shared commitment toward preventing and reducing homelessness and its impacts on the City and improving the quality of life for the community.
- Approaches and strategies should be fiscally responsible that lead to measurable outcomes with a commitment to tracking these outcomes.
- The safety of every individual is a priority including residents and business owners along with people experiencing homelessness.
- The community supports long-term solutions.
- Community awareness and involvement is critical to success.
- Policy from the federal and state governments focuses on a regional approach. The community supports regional and state resources that support City objectives and priorities.

Examples of task force goals could include:

- Creation of a framework and guidance for a city-wide system of shelter.
- Increase shelter resources so that no one goes unsheltered in the city of Chico.
- Increased safety and reduced incidence of crime associated with people experiencing homelessness.

- Restoration of parks, waterways, and public spaces impacted by people living in places not meant for human habitation.
- Increased resources and opportunities to serve and treat the unhoused and untreated mentally ill and addicted.
- Increase the sense of community well-being and civil life through enhanced dialogue and activities intended to connect people with programs and initiatives.
- Workforce training programs for those without skills or recovering from addiction.
- Increased volunteer opportunities for organizations and efforts to reduce human suffering.
- Creation of community-based and led initiatives that seek to fill gaps in shelter and service providing organizations and liaison with law enforcement, health and medical services, addiction and recovery services, and business and community groups.
- Recommend initiatives, strategies, and programming to City Council.
- Increase awareness of community concerns and attach that awareness to specific initiatives and activities.

Suggested Task Force Duties and Goals		
Issue	Duties	Goals
Crime and Safety	Gather statistics and report to the community issues related to crime and safety	Increase the sense of safety and rally community-driven activities such as ambassadorship, monitoring, neighborhood watch, and liaison with CPD. See Hemet Gatekeepers.
Parks and Public Spaces	Monitor and report on damage, negative environmental impact, and public nuisances of residing in public spaces	Increase awareness of negative impacts on parks and public spaces and seek ways to mitigate damage and improve utilization.
Sheltering and Housing Efforts for People Experiencing Homelessness	Monitor shelters and housing and report on the ability of people experiencing homelessness to accept offers of shelter and housing.	Raise awareness of the ability of sheltering and housing efforts to provide opportunities for people experiencing homelessness to accept offers of shelter and housing. Make recommendations on efforts to improve flowrate and alternatives to reduce the number of people living in public spaces.
Housing and Development	Monitor and report on creation of housing and development of additional sheltering and treatment residences.	Increase awareness, develop support for, and identify opportunities to amend zoning, improve planning, and other city actions to increase the amount of housing, shelters, and treatment facilities to serve people experiencing homelessness.
Business and Economy	Determine and report on economic impacts of homelessness to the business community.	Raise awareness and decrease the negative impacts on local businesses by identifying specific challenges and opportunities such as additional BIDs, business patrols, fencing, hiring of security, and documentation of enforceable actions.
Community Engagement	Determine and report on issues threatening or enhancing Chico's sense of community.	Increase and improve Chico's sense of community by enlisting community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and other entities in awareness raising, problem identification, and coordinating activities and volunteer opportunities.
Health, Wellness, and Treatment	Gather information and report on ER utilization, treatment opportunities, and recovery community efforts.	Increase the awareness and the amount of information available to the community regarding health, treatment, and recovery needs. Incentivize the creation of recovery programs and communities.

Recommendation #4	Create More Places for the Unhoused and Untreated to Reside and Receive Treatment
Action	Incentivize the Creation of a Detox Facility, Step Down Housing, and More Formal Psychiatric Treatment Facilities
Potential Costs	Depends on Incentive and Level of Support

To encourage the City to create more housing of all kinds is to state the obvious. Much has been made of the creation of additional affordable housing and the City and County are executing plans to develop more of this critical asset. This year, the County is set to open more than a thousand units of affordable housing.

With respect to homelessness and the populations that appear to make the majority of those living in encampments, a housing strategy should focus on housing that is tied to behavioral health and mental illness treatment and the establishment of structured, regulated environments for the mentally ill and addicted. Three significant examples come to mind.

The first is the current lack of a detox facility in Butte County to assist those seeking help from addictions and substance use disorder. It is recommended that the City work with the County to identify a facility that would house a County-run detox facility. By establishing such a resource, more opportunities will be created to get those experiencing homelessness with substance use disorder access to receive the treatment they need and support efforts to end the cycle drug use, justice involvement, and returning to the streets.

Second, the city should prioritize the creation of sober-living homes so that after detox, clients are able to maintain their sobriety and reduce the temptation to return to homelessness and their addiction. Communities are developing recovery communities that focus on housing, peer support, and employment training to assist those seeking to overcome substance use disorders. Incentivizing the creation of these types of residences, that are characterized by peer-support systems, clinical outcomes, structure, and employment, improves the lives of those suffering from addiction and benefits the community with resources that instill human dignity and reduce the number of individuals living unhoused and untreated for substance use disorders. Sober

living homes help reduce returns to the streets by supporting sobriety, recovery, and employment opportunities.

Third, the state has acknowledged that more must be done to create more structured institutions to address severe mental illness. Without them, vulnerable individuals with particular needs have led many from structured institutional settings to group homes, to the criminal justice system and ultimately, to the streets. Funding at the state level is available to reverse this policy and provide structured, institutional environments such as adult residential facilities, board and cares, and other residences that provide clinical treatment for the seriously mentally ill. These programs provide places for those suffering unhoused and untreated to receive the care they need in a long-term supervised and clinical environment. The lack of adult residential facilities contributes to unsheltered homelessness by preventing people with serious mental illness places where they can become stable, maintain medical therapies, receive clinical treatment and supervision, and stop self-medicating with illicit drugs.

Because the Butte County Continuum of Care will continue to develop permanent supportive housing that is prohibited from requiring therapeutic services or requirements of sobriety, workforce training, or mental illness stability, the City should explore ways to reduce permitting costs and provide other incentives to develop housing connected to behavioral health and mental illness. This will provide a diversity of residences to help those with fewer needs from the Continuum of Care, and greater needs supported by the County and State for the addicted and mentally ill.

Recommendation #5	Recognize and Address Mental Illness and Addiction as Root Causes of Homelessness
Action	Partner with Butte County to Develop Innovative Strategies to Increase Access to Treatment and Outcomes
Potential Costs	Unknown

Law enforcement, behavioral health directors, and national surveys confirm that a significant number of those experiencing homelessness experience mental illness and substance use disorder. While efforts have been made to reduce the clinical and behavioral challenges of those experiencing homelessness with the provision of housing, the national, state, and regional data suggest that the seriously mentally ill and addicted do not respond to offerings of housing and services. They often refuse offers of housing and services preferring to continue to reside in public spaces.

Often, those living untreated and unhoused end up in emergency rooms or other facilities under holds for mental observation to determine if the individuals are gravely disabled or pose a threat to themselves or others. According to a recent RAND study, California faces a shortage of psychiatric beds for acute, subacute, and community residential beds and that shortage will continue to grow. That means that after holds for observation, the lack of beds creates very few if any places for people who are unhoused and untreated to go to receive the care they need.

The ultimate result is people living in public spaces with addiction and mental illness challenges on display adding to the trauma experienced by these individuals and decompensation of their physical and mental states. Untreated and unhoused individuals experience increasing health challenges, are more likely to overdose and die, and develop long-term serious mental illnesses.

Therefore, it is incumbent on municipalities to recognize the significant challenge of mental illness and addiction on efforts designed to reduce the number of people residing in places not meant for human habitation and to address mental illness and addiction as root causes of homelessness. It is recommended that the City of Chico partner with the County of Butte to identify this challenge, identify opportunities for engagement, and initiate collaborative

objectives and activities to advocate and initiate new approaches in increasing access to care for the untreated and unhoused individuals of Chico.

A welcome development is the significant commitment by the California Legislature and Governor Newsom to increase funding and identify strategies to address mental illness and substance abuse disorder. The Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program will award \$2.2 billion across California to construct, acquire, and expand properties to provide greater behavioral health.

The State legislature has also funded \$3 billion for the Community Care Expansion Program to “fund the acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation of adult and senior care facilities that serve applicants and recipients of Social Security Income (SSI) including individuals who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness and those who have behavioral health conditions, expanding the state’s housing and care continuum and ensuring better treatment outcomes and preventing the cycle of homelessness or unnecessary institutionalization.

Recommendation #6	Protect Local Investment and Programmatic Support
Action	Engage in Governmental and Legislative Advocacy
Potential Costs	Staff Time

Many times, actions taken at the Federal or State level, whether legislative or in the courts, have a significant impact on how local governments can plan and implement important actions. In 2018, the *Marin v Boise* ruling set significant restrictions on how Cities can enforce city ordinances. At the state level, homelessness prevention and reduction has increases in importance, and more programs have been created and funding made available. However, in many casts the resources and funding come with requirements that disadvantage municipalities, such as weakening zoning laws and mandating certain types of housing. The City should establish a process to successfully advocate for legislation, funding, programming, and other tools that will assist the City in the prevention and reduction of homelessness.

Furthermore, the City can collaborate with neighboring cities on shared issue. Staff could research options and continue to work with county, state, and federal agencies and representatives to advocate for funding and other resources, and maintenance of local control. Staff would engage in a specific effort to enhance relationships with County officials to work toward regional solutions. Regular meetings with state Senate and Assembly district staff and elected officials when in the district will enhance advocacy efforts. Similar efforts and relationship building should be made with Congressional staff and members.

Advocacy Issues relevant to Homelessness and its Impacts in the Community:

- Lawmakers at all levels must work urgently to secure funding to increase access and availability for the treatment of addiction and mental illness. Lawmakers should weigh in on upcoming reforms of the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act with governs conservatorships and guardianships for the gravely disabled who comprise a portion of those living in public spaces. Given the overpowering effects of readily available street drugs on users and the urgent need for individual intervention, short term conservatorships can assist people in acquiring sobriety and stabilizing underlying mental illnesses. Local leaders should work to receive a fair portion of the billions of dollars being made available to communities by the state of California in the previously mentioned BHCIP and CCEP programs.
- State policies and regulations strangle development and have led to demand for rental housing outstripping supply, leading to 1% vacancy rates and across-the-board rent increases. Concurrently, lawmakers across the state have a long-standing preference for subsidized housing while also limiting low-cost market-built housing through land-use, zoning, and environmental regulations. Recommendation: Permit the development industry to meet the demand of regional population growth by reversing the effects of an artificially constrained growth boundary, and also support necessary changes to foster in-fill development. As the private-sector development industry takes the lead in adding low-cost housing, reallocate resources for subsidized housing to mental illness and addiction treatment programs.
- Amend drug legalization: Fentanyl-involved deaths in King County spiked by 150% in the third and fourth quarter of 2021ix, which correlates with the implementation of sweeping changes to drug policy in the wake of the State vs. Blake decision, and the CDC notes a 29% increase in overall drug-related fatalities in 2021. The legislature responded to State v. Blake by seeking to reestablish some amount of legal control over street drugs (including cocaine, heroin and methamphetamines) through making the third or subsequent citation a misdemeanor. However, to the average person it appears to be a full decriminalization, which is the case with 57% of respondents to the EMC Research survey. Eliminating the possibility of nearly all interactions between addicts and the criminal justice system contributes to speeding up the

irreversible effects, ultimately death, from street drugs, when many people who overcome these addictions point to arrest and jail as the moment when they seized the determination to turn their lives around. Recommendation: Seek to overturn the legislation which effectively decriminalized drugs, and/or, build and staff treatment facilities which get addicts the treatment they need.

Summary Table of Recommendations

Recommendation	Purpose	Cost	Notes
Collect More and Better Data	Create metrics for evaluation and accountability	\$15,000 - \$80,000 per year	Starting point to determine scale, costs, and effectiveness of current efforts.
Hire a Social Worker	Perform intake and gather data points from outreach and evaluation services	\$61,000 - \$89,000 per year	Do not outsource to maintain objectives of City. Provide quarterly performance reports on O&E efforts, shelter dynamics, and pallet shelter utilization and service acceptance.
Create Task Force	Develop community consensus and monitor and report on impacts of homelessness on community	Negligible	City created public/private initiative. Must receive input from diverse group of citizens and cover wide range of issues.
Incentivize detox facility, board and cares, and adult residential facilities	Increase places for people needed treatment to reside and receive treatment	Depends on incentives	Make distinction between low-barrier shelters and treatment-oriented residences to reduce NIMBYism.
Advocate at the state and federal levels	Protect integrity of local initiatives and fight against state and federal burdens.	Staff Time	Set legislative agenda items based on analysis of data collection and recommendations of task force and convey to state and local representatives.