



---

# City Council Report

---

City Council Meeting: September 12, 2017  
Agenda Item: 3.L

To: Mayor and City Council  
From: Rick Cole, City Manager, City Manager's Office, Administration  
Subject: Request for a Senior Advisor on Homelessness

## **Recommended Action**

Staff recommends that the City Council approve the addition of a full-time employee to the City Manager's Office to act as Senior Advisor for Homelessness, and authorize the budget changes as outlined in the Financial Impacts & Budget Actions section of this report.

## **Executive Summary**

Homelessness is one of our society's most pernicious and stubborn challenges. Los Angeles County is experiencing a mounting crisis with this year's annual Homeless Count showing a 23% increase countywide and a 26% increase in Santa Monica (after five years of no increases following a significant decline).

Santa Monica will not accept that homelessness is inevitable. While the regional homeless crisis can't be "solved" within our borders, our City is determined to invest additional local resources, stand with neighboring communities and take a leadership role in regional solutions. We will gather and share timely data to track and analyze both overall progress and individual cases and share the models that prove effective; we will relentlessly and compassionately engage people experiencing homelessness in order to make appropriate referrals to local and regional programs; we will mobilize a community-wide effort to augment and target public, non-profit, civic and business resources; we will work with LA County, LA City and other regional partners to continually innovate, pursuing effective and compassionate approaches wherever they can be found. City staff believe this comprehensive approach can make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people and support health, safety and equity in our local community.

Such a comprehensive and sustained community-wide approach will require a significant increase in the level of resources devoted to staff training, outreach efforts, social services, housing placement and retention, law enforcement, public information and education, data collection, analysis, and sharing. Naming a Senior Advisor for Homelessness to focus exclusively on the issue out of the City Manager's Office would locate policy, program, and resource development in the executive office, create new capacity for intergovernmental and community relations to better leverage and coordinate our partnerships with regional agencies, Los Angeles County and nearby cities, as well as enlist residents, businesses, civic organizations, houses of worship and local non-profits in collaborative action.

## **Background**

Over the course of 40 years, Santa Monica's local investment in permanent solutions to address homelessness has produced a sophisticated, collaborative approach effective in transitioning highly vulnerable individuals off the streets and into housing. The City's homeless policies, like its service system, have evolved over many years to be a reflection of the priorities and needs of this community. Homelessness, however, is not an isolated local concern. Santa Monica is but one of 88 cities in LA County, which is home to the second largest homeless population in the country. Over 57,000 homeless individuals were identified through the 2017 LA County Homeless Count. Unlike other urban centers where the majority of homeless people are in shelters, 74% of LA County's population is literally on the streets and in public spaces. The scale of the regional homeless crisis has pushed Santa Monica's local homeless system beyond its capacity to meet growing demand.

The plight of homelessness has taken on a higher profile and priority nationwide in the past year as local and state governments are becoming increasingly overwhelmed by the depth and breadth of this growing problem. The County of Los Angeles has adopted a set of 47 strategies (Attachment A) that encompass services, shelters, employment, benefits, outreach, jail diversion and system coordination and a funding plan for three

years of projected Measure H revenue. The City of Los Angeles has begun awarding funding generated through Proposition HHH, a \$1.2 billion bond measure passed in November 2016 to fund supportive and other types of housing for homeless people. Locally, Santa Monica residents voted to enact Measure GSH, a local transaction and use tax, a portion of which will fund affordable housing.

On August 23, 2015, City Council established *taking a leadership role in regional efforts to address homelessness* as one of the City's top five strategic priorities (Attachment B). The Council instructed staff to do more on a regional level, especially by engaging with LA City and County partners to address these local impacts, and to continue to innovate and invest locally. The Community and Cultural Services Department (CCS) convenes the Chronic Homeless Project (CHP) which brings local and county services together to share resources and collaborate on case plans for homeless individuals. In addition, the Santa Monica Police Department's Homeless Liaison Program (HLP) team hosts an interdepartmental meeting to track progress and coordinate efforts to house chronic offenders. CCS also leads the Senior Housing Task Force, which brings together city departments and non-profit providers to identify and support low-income seniors at risk of homelessness, and partners with the City Attorney's Office to administer the Homeless Community Court. The Housing and Economic Development Department is dedicated to preserving existing affordable housing in Santa Monica and creating new housing opportunities for residents with low and moderate incomes. The Housing Division administers federal Continuum of Care vouchers, Section 8 housing vouchers, and Housing Trust funds for this purpose.

In June 2017, CCS and the City Manager initiated a community homelessness steering committee comprised of representatives from the business community, City commissions, faith partners, non-profit agencies, LA County services as well as state and county elected offices. Local organizations such as the Westside Coalition, Downtown Santa Monica, Inc., Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce and Santa Monica Travel and Tourism frequently invite CCS staff to provide updates on local and regional homeless issues. Regionally, the City participates in a range of planning meetings hosted by LA County's Chief Executive Office, the Los Angeles Homeless Services

Authority and the United Way of Greater LA, and represents the Westside Cities Council of Governments on the Regional Homeless Advisory Council. The City also meets regularly with other Westside jurisdictions and state and county elected offices to coordinate regional efforts and leverage local resources.

The City is also pursuing a range of responses to safety in public spaces – funding Ambassadors into Tongva and Palisades Park, heavily programming Reed Park with activities and focusing law enforcement on Chess Park. All have had some success, but all require a level of resources that are currently difficult to scale and sustain citywide.

## **Discussion**

An increase in homelessness between 2016 and 2017 locally (26%) and regionally (23%) have strained the City's existing strategies and resources. The County of Los Angeles is at an inflection point – the decisions made today both locally and regionally on policy and implementation of new programs will decide if the curve of homelessness continues to climb or whether strategic investments and collaborative efforts can turn the tide. Many cities are declaring a state of emergency to signal the importance of addressing this issue. Santa Monica has taken a more pragmatic approach, redeploying resources to service the homeless, engaging the business and resident communities, and serving as a regional partner with neighboring cities and the County. In response to Council naming homelessness as a strategic goal, staff formed an interdepartmental Homeless Strategic Goal team. This group worked across department lines to develop an action plan with seven desired outcomes (below) and associated goals and metrics which relate to the City's outcomes regarding place and planet, economic opportunity, and community.

1. Smart deployment of local resources
2. Prove the efficacy of models that connect people to housing
3. Increase availability of housing and services in other communities
4. Ensure effective, safe, respectful use of the Library
5. Active internal and external stakeholders

6. Analyze the interventions that help people retain housing, and retain landlords
7. Prevent homelessness among low-income SM residents

As the surge in homeless individuals on our streets, in our parks and in our libraries is visible and disturbing, staff is testing new interventions in public spaces. A team of Human Services Division staff and two police officers recently engaged people experiencing homelessness at two parks in Santa Monica. They relied on Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data during the interaction to connect homeless individuals to resources that correspond to their needs and tested the usefulness of using such data in the field. Regular and pop-up social services connections are happening at the Main Library, a model of bringing services to people where they already are.

As the team continues to implement its Action Plan, strategies will evolve and emerge, focusing on the most effective ways to address homelessness in Santa Monica. The City's Action Plan is embedded in a larger strategic framework for dealing with the local impacts of the regional homelessness crisis. The four elements of this effort (which goes well beyond the scope and resources of City government) include:

- 1) To address the increase in homeless individuals in our community, we will relentlessly, humanely, compassionately, constitutionally and effectively engage people in distress. This effort will encompass not only our front-line emergency response staff in Police and Fire. We will also provide scalable training and information that can be used by other City staff, non-profit service providers, Downtown Santa Monica Ambassadors and volunteer community members and businesspeople, as appropriate.
- 2) To maximize the City's resources, we will coordinate planning, communication and collaborative action across numerous city departments, community-based organizations, the business community and regional partners, working with a new Homeless Steering Committee that is being organized by these stakeholders.

- 3) To leverage available data, we will share useful information to provide appropriate assistance and to make allocation of resources and evaluation of interventions more accurate, timely and effective.
- 4) Recognizing the regional nature of this challenge, we will actively work in support of the evolution and funding of the regional homeless services system that provides critical outreach, mental health, housing, health care and other services to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people and support health, safety and equity in our local community.

In addition, the City will deal firmly and effectively with criminal and anti-social behavior that is often mistakenly conflated with the problem of homelessness. Homeless people are more likely to be the victims of crime than perpetrators. There also exists, however, an increasingly estranged and alienated element of transient individuals whose drug and alcohol use, as well as criminal and/or chronic anti-social behaviors have made them menaces to public safety. This is a particularly difficult challenge to which law enforcement alone is an insufficient answer. We will work creatively and consistently to ensure the safety and enjoyment of Santa Monica's public spaces are not threatened by this small, but deeply troubled segment of our population. We will continue to treat people as individuals, not stigmatize all homeless people with the behaviors of a small fraction who constitute a threat to others.

A Senior Advisor for Homelessness would focus exclusively on the overall approach to the homelessness issue out of the City Manager's Office, further develop the four-pronged strategy and its implementation plans and long-term funding strategies, represent the City's interests to intergovernmental and other partners, and engage the community on this issue. This approach is not new. In 2005 and 2006, Los Angeles County Supervisor Ed Edelman served the City in a somewhat similar role, advancing the City's policies and priorities regarding regional collaboration and fair share allocation of resources. In addition, for many years City Manager's Office senior staff members devoted significant time to local, state, and federal intergovernmental relations. Staffing patterns in the Manager's Office have changed and capacity for this work has

diminished, increasing the need for this position, which would bear primary responsibility for homelessness-related intergovernmental and community relations.

Given the increasing gravity of the regional homelessness crisis and its local impact, having a Senior Advisor for Homelessness as a member of the City Manager's Office could further our progress profoundly and meaningfully. Establishing such a position would locate policy, program, and funding development in the executive office, increase intergovernmental and community relations capacity, and provide community and regional stakeholders with a single point of contact with direct access to the City Manager and Council. Departments would continue to offer, evaluate, and improve the numerous services dedicated to addressing homelessness and implement the strategic goal team's action plan.

Therefore, the City Manager requests the addition of one Senior Advisor on Homeless to be added to the City Manager's Office for a two-year limited term basis, through June 2019. This position would be funded by the General Fund with an impact of \$135,875 (\$181,166 prorated to nine months for FY 2017-18) and \$184,284 for FY 2018-19.

### **Fiscal Impacts and Budget Actions**

The addition of a Senior Advisor for Homelessness requires a net increase of 1.0 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions in the City Manager's Office during the remainder of FY 2017-18. This requires an appropriation of \$135,874 for nine months of staffing in FY 2017-18 and \$186,732 for FY 2018-19 in the City Manager's Office. These changes are funded through the General Fund. Staff also expects to request some additional allocation of resources during the Year End Budget presentation in October.

**Prepared By:** Christopher Smith, Assistant to the City Manager

**Approved**

---

**Forwarded to Council**

---

  
Rick Cole, City Manager 9/8/2017

**Attachments:**

- A. LA County Strategies
- B. Strategic Goals and SMART Metrics Staff Report 1408
- C. Resolution
- D. Written Comments