

CITY OF BETHLEHEM STRATEGIC PLAN TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

September 2023

Prepared by Michael Baker International for the City of Bethlehem



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Plan Development

In early 2022, Mayor J. William Reynolds' administration and Bethlehem City Council initiated the City of Bethlehem's Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness. The study was spurred by the anticipated need for a new Bethlehem Emergency Shelter (BES) site paired with the Lehigh Valley's alarming rise in housing instability and homelessness.

The City sought to explore the feasibility of creating a privately-operated, year-round permanent homeless shelter as part of a multi-site, regional approach to address these dual crises while also building resiliency in the region's homelessness and housing services.

The resulting plan aims to highlight the systemic causes of homelessness and determine the most effective ways for the City to play an active and ongoing role in addressing homelessness within the City and the region.

The plan was developed over the past year by the Michael Baker consultant team and their subconsultant, Dr. Sherri Brokopp Binder of Ripple Community Inc. in Allentown. The plan's approach focused on identifying a 'built solution' such as a shelter, transitional housing, and/or supportive housing and evaluated the City of Bethlehem's potential role within the scope of the built solution. The analysis found the City is best suited to bookend both ends of the homelessness services pipeline: emergency sheltering and affordable housing.

This plan has been developed in tandem with the

City's ongoing Comprehensive Housing Strategy. The City recognizes the Lehigh Valley's affordable housing crisis is putting more people at-risk of homelessness and making it harder for those experiencing homelessness to find permanent housing. These two issues and their potential solutions are inextricably linked.

From the start of the planning process, we recognized and emphasized that the built solution identified through this plan must be part of a multi-site solution across the Lehigh Valley, which will require regional collaboration, funding, policies, and programming.

This plan and its recommendations align with nationally-recognized best practices supported by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Not only does the plan leverage and align with national best practices, but its findings and recommendations are rooted in months of interviews and surveying of local practitioners serving those experiencing homelessness as well as those with lived experience.

The City of Bethlehem's Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness, presented in this document, offers the City and its partners, both local and regional, a blueprint for collaboration, partnership, sustained action and investment to ensure our neighbors are sheltered and supported.

Recommendations

The planning process resulted in the development of recommendations and associated strategies that, together, will support the City of Bethlehem's goals of addressing homelessness. They include

recommended actions for the City, as well as recommendations for regional partnerships to address these issues—an approach recognized as vital by all stakeholders. These recommendations and strategies all build on the good work of organizations that currently provide services for

our neighbors experiencing homelessness and housing instability, including New Bethany and Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering.

Recommendations for the City of Bethlehem

RECOMMENDATION 1

Provide year-round, low-barrier emergency sheltering as part of a comprehensive housing services approach.

STRATEGIES

- Establish a low-barrier, year-round, permanent emergency shelter that follows the HUD best practices of providing non-congregant sheltering (individual sleeping and toilet/ wash facilities).
- Utilize the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) best practices to inform emergency shelter operations including alignment of shelter eligibility criteria, policies, and practices with a Housing First approach; provide initial diversion services such as problem-solving conversations and community supports to find safe housing alternatives; immediate and low-barrier 24/7 access to shelter; services focused on assisting people to access permanent housing as quickly as possible; and data measurement and tracking to evaluate performance.¹
- Identify and select an operator(s) for the emergency shelter. Require selected operator to apply for other funding sources to leverage City funding and expand the components of the Emergency Shelter’s system of services and housing resources.
- Support the establishment and/or expansion of facilities targeted to special populations including the LGBTQIA+ community, who experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates.
- Support the expansion of facilities for emergency sheltering that can accommodate families.

¹ <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/keys-to-emergency-shelter-naeh.png>

RECOMMENDATION 2

Support the development of a regional systems-oriented approach to address homelessness.

STRATEGIES

- Support the adoption and implementation of a regional data-sharing system that tracks available resources, level of need, and the status of individuals and households receiving services.
- Align City policy to federal, state, counties, and Continuum of Care homeless policy and funding initiatives to position the City for funding and partnership opportunities and to support the development of a system of services and housing within the Lehigh Valley.
- Encourage regional initiatives that link outreach/engagement, emergency shelter, supportive services, and permanent housing as part of a continuum of built solutions for those experiencing homelessness.
- Encourage coordination between public/private agencies serving those experiencing homelessness to reduce fragmentation and duplication of services and to leverage limited resources.
- Develop regional initiatives that promote coordination among municipalities, counties, and multi-disciplinary service providers to improve wrap-around services to those experiencing homelessness and to streamline placement in transitional housing and permanent housing.
- Encourage the counties and continuum of care to offer technical assistance/planning grants for communities to build capacity to develop a systems-oriented approach to addressing homelessness.
- Continue 3 City Coalition collaboration amongst the mayors and staff of Bethlehem, Allentown and Easton.

Recommendations for the City of Bethlehem - Continued

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop permanent supportive and affordable housing solutions.

STRATEGIES

- Regional issues require a regional solution. All communities and counties need to collaborate to address the housing crisis.
- Closely follow and connect the recommendations from the City of Bethlehem Comprehensive Housing Strategy to the recommendations and solutions in the Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness – they go hand in hand.

Recommendations for Regional Collaboration

RECOMMENDATION 4

Develop public/private partnerships to support regional initiatives on homelessness.

STRATEGIES

- Establish partnerships with the healthcare community to expand services for those experiencing homelessness and identify collaborative funding opportunities.
- Establish partnerships with area foundations, nonprofits, institutions, and faith-based organizations to leverage resources such as volunteers, donations, financial donations, facilitating connections to services, etc.
- Establish partnerships with the business community.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Strengthen partnerships with the counties to support a regional approach to addressing homelessness.

STRATEGIES

- Partner with Human Services in Lehigh and Northampton counties on behavioral health, mental health and substance abuse treatment.
- Partner with Lehigh and Northampton counties on access to social services such as EBT/ SNAP, Medicaid, etc.
- Partner with Probation Services in Lehigh and Northampton counties for re-entry services, including coordination for health, behavioral health and social services..
- Partner with Veteran Affairs.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Intent

In early 2022, the City of Bethlehem initiated its Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness. The City wished to understand how it could play an active and ongoing role in initiatives, programs, and policies to address homelessness within the City of Bethlehem and the region, recognizing the importance of regional collaboration in addressing this complex issue. The timing and urgency of the plan was spurred by the anticipated need for a new Bethlehem Emergency Shelter site. Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering (BES) is a cold-weather emergency shelter operated by a volunteer, faith-based nonprofit in the City of Bethlehem. The 70-bed shelter attracts clients from all over the Lehigh Valley from mid-November until mid-April. In 2021, the shelter's future at its current location became uncertain due a potential church consolidation. If the shelter closes it will leave a major void in the Lehigh Valley's emergency sheltering network.

The plan was structured to develop a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the key issues and core needs of Bethlehem's unsheltered neighbors, the service provider landscape in the City and region, and potential areas of unmet needs and/or service gaps. Ultimately, the plan sought to identify an appropriate 'built solution' that could be facilitated by the City of Bethlehem given their current access to funding, resources, and the role of municipal government within the landscape of regionally based solutions.

Recognizing that homelessness is a systemic problem with no regard for geographic boundaries, the City of Bethlehem is prioritizing a long-term holistic approach to support the unsheltered population. Historically, the City's response

has been primarily reactive, focused more on immediate, short-term solutions to problems as they arise.

Mayor J. William Reynolds' administration has prioritized understanding the systemic causes of homelessness and how the City's policy and programmatic response can reflect a more proactive approach, employing a regional, comprehensive and long-term strategy. This policy shift is reflected in the overall process of the Bethlehem Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness. The City sought to understand the feasibility of a built solution or series of built solutions supported via a collaborative regional approach that will enhance the resilience of the Lehigh Valley's services to support those experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

In developing this Plan, the City and consultant team engaged in the following five primary tasks:

- 1 Key Informant Interviews to Assess Existing Services and Conditions:** The consultant team conducted a total of 21 interviews with both internal City leadership and departments and external service providers and partners to gain a baseline understanding of existing city and regional services.
- 2 Survey of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness:** The consultant team conducted a multi-site in-person survey of the Lehigh Valley's unsheltered and housing-insecure populations to gain insight into sheltering options in the Lehigh Valley and their experiences accessing shelter. Overall, 107 individuals were surveyed.

3 Collaborative Roundtable Discussion with Regional Leaders:

Mayor Reynolds convened a regional roundtable with the cities of Allentown and Easton, counties of Lehigh and Northampton, elected officials, institutions, and service providers in July 2022 to share regional perspectives and take initial steps towards collaborative, regional solutions.

4 Detailed Analyses of Potential Built Solutions:

The consultant team evaluated ‘built solutions’ that address homelessness, such as emergency sheltering, transitional housing, and rapid re-housing, and considered where and how in that pipeline of housing solutions the City’s resources would be best directed. The team provided cost projections for each built solution option and offered financial analyses of specific sites the City considered acquiring. Their work also included cost estimates for shelter operations, potential funding sources, and recommended project phases.

5 Site Suitability Analysis:

The consultant team utilized Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping and modeling to evaluate general locations for siting an emergency shelter within the City of Bethlehem. The suitability model analyzed and weighted key geographic factors that would be most supportive of a year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter including proximity to transit, general walkability/accessibility, access to existing services, and availability of medical/healthcare.



UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS IN THE LEHIGH VALLEY

The major data sources for understanding homelessness in the Lehigh Valley are:

1. The annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count conducted every January;
2. Data from the Coordinated Entry System (CES) a standardized assessment tool to determine a household's vulnerability and prioritization for appropriate housing interventions; and,
3. Data from the By Name List (BNL) that is a real-time prioritization list of households experiencing homelessness who are currently awaiting a housing resource through the Coordinated Entry System.

This plan analyzes PIT data from 2020, 2022, and 2023 (note that no PIT Count was done in 2021

due to COVID-19) and CES and BNL data from the Eastern PA CoC Gap Analysis from 2022 and 2023, authored by DMA (Diana T. Myers and Associates).

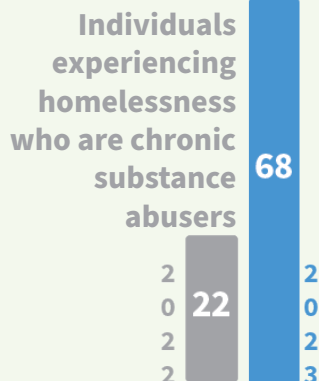
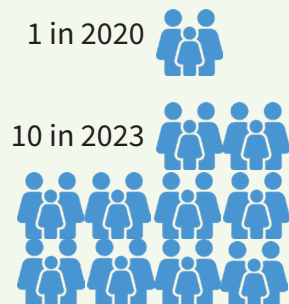
The number of individuals and households experiencing homelessness in the Lehigh Valley has increased since 2020, according to data from the 2023 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, LVRHAB, and 2023 Gap Analysis of the Eastern PA Continuum of Care.

These findings were corroborated by the consultant team through interviews with City staff and external service providers in Bethlehem and the Lehigh Valley.

Point in Time Count

465 households made up of **686** people experiencing homelessness in 2023. This represents an overall decrease from 2022 of 15% in the number of households and 26% in number of people experiencing homelessness. However, there were noted increases in:

Chronically homeless families



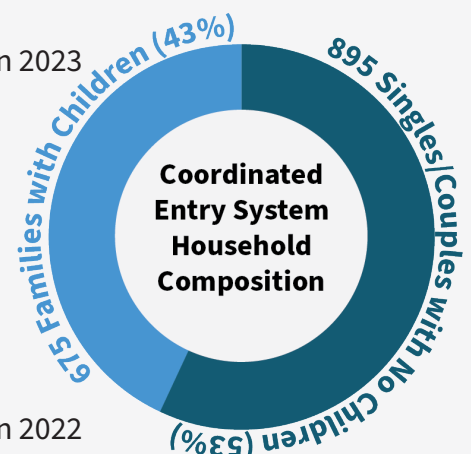
Coordinated Entry System Registrations

Of the 33-county Eastern PA CoC, the Lehigh Valley (Northampton and Lehigh counties) made up **25% of the total CES registrations** in 2023.

1,570 registrations in 2023



1,086 registrations in 2022



To add context to these data, the City and consultant team developed a series of flow charts to illustrate the spectrum of built solutions to address homelessness. These flow charts are intended to be illustrative of current systems and best practices. However, while the flow charts are linear, it must be acknowledged that homelessness and housing instability are often cyclical. Systemic issues like access to affordable housing, stagnant wages and rising costs can all be significant obstacles to obtaining permanent, safe, and affordable shelter.

Figure 1: Overview of Built Solutions and Homelessness Services

Figure 1 provides an overview of the spectrum of built solutions along with key characteristics aligned with nationally-recognized best practices. It illustrates the pathways to obtain shelter once someone is experiencing homelessness and provides an overview of each type of built solution. These characteristics reflect an idealized process, not the current reality in the Lehigh Valley. In general, key components of a homelessness services system include prevention services, emergency sheltering services, intake processes, and housing services ranging from transitional to permanent, with permanent housing being the ultimate goal. Many individuals who experience homelessness return to housing with minimal or no additional services.

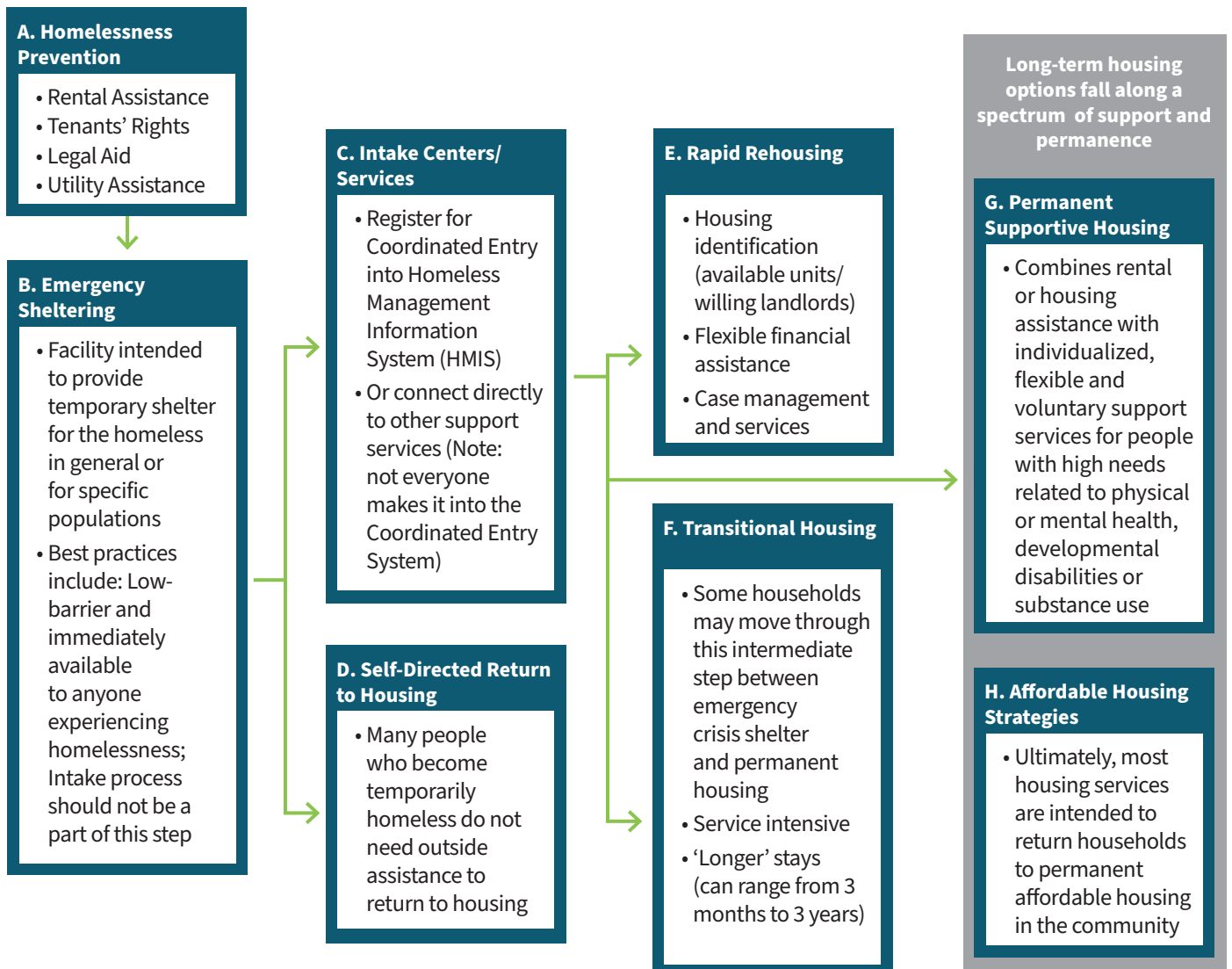
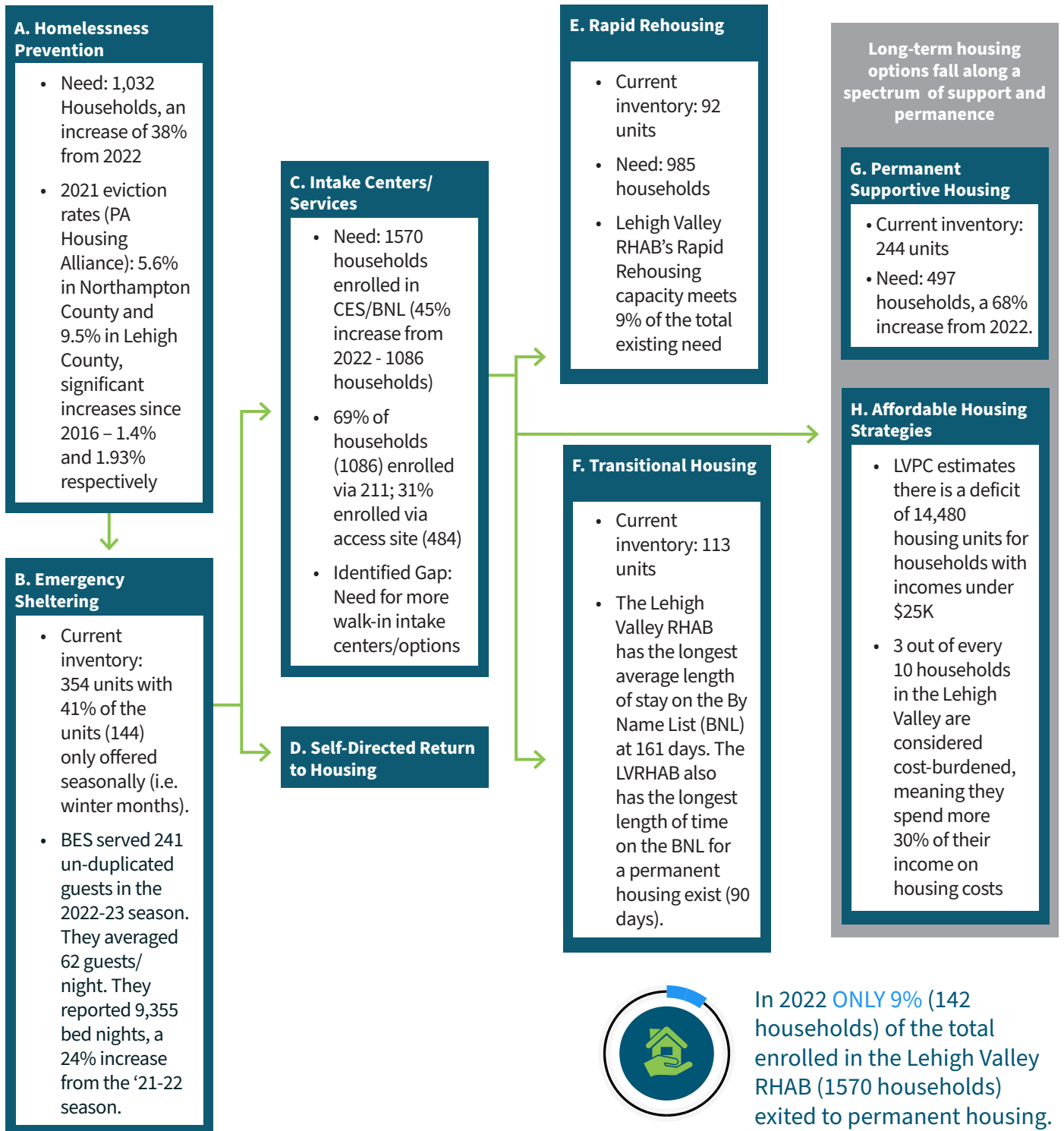


Figure 2: Estimated Needs in the Lehigh Valley

Figure 2 highlights the current level of need (based on data from the Eastern PA CoC 2023 Gaps Analysis, Lehigh Valley Regional Homeless Advisory Board by DMA (Diana T. Myers and Associates) for different types of built solutions within the Lehigh Valley. Where data is available, the existing inventory of types of homeless-dedicated housing inventory are provided. The time period for data is January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022.



DATA GATHERING & ANALYSIS

To inform the plan, the consultant team gathered data from key informant interviews, surveys of individuals who have experienced homelessness, and a roundtable discussion with leaders from Lehigh Valley municipalities and counties. Here, we review each of these components of the process.

Key Informant Interviews to Assess Existing Services and Conditions

From May to June 2022, a total of 21 interviews with City of Bethlehem staff and leadership and local services providers were conducted. These interviews contributed to the City’s understanding of existing conditions for service providers and our unsheltered neighbors, identified major considerations in determining potential built solutions within the City of Bethlehem and regionally, and solicited opinions on ways to improve existing sheltering options. Interviews were supplemented by a desktop analysis of City and regional programs and services for the unsheltered population in the Lehigh Valley.

For detailed findings from these interviews, see **Appendix A: Themes and Findings from Internal Interviews** and **Appendix B: Themes and Findings from External Interviews**. Here, we highlight four key points regarding service provision that emerged as themes in the internal and external interviews.

- The majority of Lehigh Valley service providers adhere to a ‘Housing First’ model, which prioritizes providing permanent housing

to people experiencing homelessness. This approach relies on a pipeline of affordable housing that is accessible to people exiting homelessness. As a formal housing model, Housing First does not mandate participation in services including behavioral health to obtain housing, though in practice programs may adhere strictly or loosely to the model.¹ This approach has historically functioned well in the Lehigh Valley. But, currently, rising rents and a lack of affordable housing stock are preventing that transition into more permanent, affordable housing. Service providers report much longer shelter stays and significant waitlists since there is little turnover due to the shortage of housing options. Many shelters also have waived limits on stays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing affordable housing crisis.

- There is an overall need for more emergency shelter beds and demand for year-round facilities. The demand is particularly acute for families, transitional youth (aged 18 to 24), single women, and the LGBTQ+ population. There are very few shelter options for families—particularly two-parent families with children—often forcing families to either split up or remain unhoused. The prevalence of congregant living in Lehigh Valley shelters discourages certain populations from seeking shelter. Service providers referenced that transitional youth (ages 18-24) and the LGBTQ+ community may prefer to seek alternatives to shelters (i.e., sleeping in a car, sleeping outside) due to a perceived lack of safety and discomfort with current sheltering options.

¹ <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first/>

- Services to support the area’s chronically homeless population, defined by HUD as being homeless for one or more consecutive years, are generally viewed as inadequate or inappropriate. Service providers acknowledged that there are not long-term solutions and/or specific programs to assist this population. It was observed that many of the chronically homeless population live in encampments, though they may access emergency shelters in the winter months.
- Providing similar services is not viewed as a ‘duplication of services,’ rather it’s seen as a way to make the service provision landscape more resilient. Providers emphasized that overlaps among efforts in Bethlehem and the greater Lehigh Valley enhance the resiliency of the system to respond to the growing need. Generally, service providers work together and provide cross-organization referrals if needed.

Survey of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

A survey of individuals with first-hand experiences of homelessness was viewed as an essential component of developing this plan, as the City is committed to identifying strategies that value the expertise of those with lived experiences and local knowledge. The survey was conducted in Bethlehem and Allentown, with the recognition that homelessness respects no municipal boundaries. For example, many people experiencing homelessness may utilize a day shelter in Allentown and then spend the night in Bethlehem or vice versa.

Over the course of two weeks in July and August 2022, the Michael Baker team conducted a multi-site in-person survey of 107 individuals currently experiencing or having experienced homelessness

and/or housing instability. With the help of city’s service provider partners, surveying took place at five locations in Bethlehem and Allentown. Survey locations included: Ripple Community Inc., New Bethany, Daybreak Center at Lehigh Conference of Churches, free laundry night with St. Luke’s Parish Nursing, and Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering Weekend Lunch. Survey questions focused on accessing shelter services in the Lehigh Valley and experiences staying in the local shelters. Questions also focused on the last time an individual felt securely housed as well as what may be preventing them from obtaining housing.

For detailed findings from the survey, see **Appendix C: Themes and Findings from Survey of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness**. Here, we provide an overview of Survey Questions and a brief summary of the most common responses and aggregated statistics:

This past winter, what shelter services did you use?

- The most frequently visited shelters were the Bethlehem Emergency Shelter and Allentown Warming Station.

Have you ever chosen to not stay at a shelter?

- 45% of respondents have chosen to not stay in a shelter, citing reasons such as: Feeling unsafe, feeling unwelcome, no option to stay with partner/spouse/family, and no accommodation for pet(s).

Have you ever been turned away from a shelter?

- 76% of respondents have never been turned away when seeking shelter.
- The 24% of respondents who have been turned away cited reasons including: shelter was too full, they arrived late, lack of ID, and/or a shelter protocol violation.

The last time you were securely housed in a place you considered to be your home, why did you leave that home?

- 20% of respondents were evicted and/or forced to leave due to crowding, condemnation, or landlord issues.

- 14% of respondents left due to relationship conflict.
- 11% of respondents were kicked out or ran away.

What is keeping you from finding housing?

- 42% of respondents cannot find a place they can afford.
- 10% of respondents are on a waiting list for housing.
- 9% of respondents have a physical disability and can't find an accessible apartment.
- 6% of respondents lack an ID/proper identification.

Where do you spend time during the day when the shelters are closed?

- 50% of respondents spend time at day program like Daybreak, Ripple Community Inc., etc.
- 18% of respondents spend time outside.
- 11% of respondents spend time at a family member or friend's house.
- 8% of respondents spend time at the library.

Collaborative Roundtable Discussion with Regional Leaders

In July 2022, Bethlehem Mayor J. William Reynolds convened a Regional Roundtable on Homelessness in the Lehigh Valley to bring together elected officials, local government, service providers, institutions, and private sector partners to share information, ideas, goals, opportunities, and challenges to begin to lay the groundwork to support systemic change and real solutions for those experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

Participants at the Regional Roundtable were asked their perspectives on some of the main drivers of homelessness in the Lehigh Valley.

Participants in the July 18th Regional Roundtable

<p>Local Government & School District Partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Bethlehem • City of Allentown • City of Easton • Northampton County • Lehigh County • Bethlehem Area School District
<p>Community Organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic Bethlehem Museum & Sites • New Bethany • Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering • Lehigh Valley Regional Homeless Advisory Board
<p>Institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lehigh University • Moravian University • St. Luke's University Health Network • Lehigh Valley Health Network
<p>State & Federal Elected Officials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PA Representative Steve Samuelson • PA Senator Lisa Boscola • PA Representative Jeanne McNeill • Congresswoman Susan Wild

Their responses are synthesized in the word cloud in Figure 3.

While these challenges are distinct, the systems they are part of – the housing market, education, social services – need to be connected. A key focus of the Regional Roundtable was to identify points

of connection and collaboration. The July 18th Roundtable was envisioned as the beginning of a series of discussions, workshops, and ultimately the launch of programming and policies to support unsheltered community members across the Lehigh Valley. Some of the initial ideas around collective regional work include:

- Identifying physical locations for intake to the 211 System as the phone lines are incredibly overwhelmed and wait times can be upwards of two hours.

- Collaboration to pursue existing and new resources from state and federal government, including the Housing Options funding coming from the State.
- Identify a permanent shelter so we can address needs when they happen.
- Consider purchasing a hotel to rehab into a shelter.
- Engage all municipalities, not just the major cities.

Figure 3: Responses from Regional Roundtable Participants on Drivers of Homelessness in the Lehigh Valley (Collected July 18, 2022)



RECOMMENDATIONS

The City and consultant team utilized the information collected through the data analysis to assess the City's role and evaluate where a municipal entity could best engage in supporting a long-term solution for those experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Based on these analyses, the team determined that the City is uniquely positioned to serve at the bookends of the built solutions spectrum—emergency sheltering and affordable housing—due to its access to funding and its policymaking role. As highlighted in Figures 1 and 2 identifying the spectrum of built solutions, the ultimate goal and outcome is long-term affordable and stable housing; however, that goal needs to be supported by a range of built solutions that will provide safe sheltering options such as a year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter, as any affordable housing solution takes time and people need to be safely sheltered in the meantime.

Since the City is uniquely positioned to serve as the bookends of the built solutions spectrum, the consultant team identified three primary recommendations for the City of Bethlehem to achieve their stated goals. These recommendations recognize that the Lehigh Valley's homelessness crisis is exacerbated by an affordable housing crisis, and that it is imperative to address both at the municipal and regional levels.

Increasing housing supply and programs to encourage and support affordable housing are a key part of the path forward, in 2020 the US Government Accountability Office (US GAO) found that every \$100 increase in median rent is associated with a 9% increase in the estimated homelessness rate.¹

The median rent in the City of Bethlehem has risen by almost \$400 from March 2020 to October 2022, according to Zillow's ZORI database.

The City is not operating in a vacuum. It cannot achieve these recommendations without the support of a larger regional, systemic approach. To that end, the final two recommendations aim to facilitate and encourage regional collaboration to address these issues—an approach recognized as vital by all stakeholders engaged in the develop of this plan.

These recommendations and strategies all build on the good work of organizations that currently provide services for our neighbors experiencing homelessness and housing instability, including those based in the City of Bethlehem such as New Bethany and Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering and regional partners such as the Lehigh Valley's Regional Housing Advisory Board and the Continuum of Care.

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-433>

Recommendations for the City of Bethlehem

RECOMMENDATION 1
Provide year-round, low-barrier emergency sheltering as part of a comprehensive housing services approach.

STRATEGIES

- Establish a low-barrier, year-round, permanent emergency shelter that follows the HUD best practices of providing non-congregant sheltering (individual sleeping and toilet/wash facilities).
- Utilize the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) best practices to inform emergency shelter operations including alignment of shelter eligibility criteria, policies, and practices with a Housing First approach; provide initial diversion services such as problem-solving conversations and community supports to find safe housing alternatives; immediate and low-barrier 24/7 access to shelter; services focused on assisting people to access permanent housing as quickly as possible; and data measurement and tracking to evaluate performance.
- Identify and select an operator(s) for the emergency shelter. Require selected operator to apply for other funding sources to leverage City funding and expand the components of the Emergency Shelter’s system of services and housing resources.
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- Support the expansion of facilities for emergency sheltering that can accommodate families.

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RECOMMENDATION 2
Support the development of a regional systems-oriented approach to address homelessness.

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- Support the adoption and implementation of a regional data-sharing system that tracks available resources, level of need, and the status of individuals and households receiving services.
- Align City policy to federal, state, counties, and Continuum of Care homeless policy and funding initiatives to position the City for funding and partnership opportunities and to support the development of a system of services and housing within the Lehigh Valley.
- Encourage regional initiatives that link outreach/engagement, emergency shelter, supportive services, and permanent housing as part of a continuum of built solutions for those experiencing homelessness.
- Encourage coordination between public/private agencies serving those experiencing homelessness to reduce fragmentation and duplication of services and to leverage limited resources.
- Develop regional initiatives that promote coordination among municipalities, counties, and multi-disciplinary service providers to improve wrap-around services to those experiencing homelessness and to streamline placement in transitional housing and permanent housing.
- Encourage the counties and continuum of care to offer technical assistance/planning grants for communities to build capacity to develop a systems-oriented approach to addressing homelessness.
- Continue 3 City Coalition collaboration amongst the mayors and staff of Bethlehem, Allentown and Easton.

RECOMMENDATION 3
Develop permanent supportive and affordable housing solutions.

STRATEGIES

- Regional issues require a regional solution. All communities and counties need to collaborate to address the housing crisis.
- Closely follow and connect the recommendations from the City of Bethlehem Comprehensive Housing Strategy to the recommendations and solutions in the Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness – they go hand in hand.

Recommendations for Regional Collaboration

RECOMMENDATION 4

Develop public/private partnerships to support regional initiatives on homelessness.

STRATEGIES

- Establish partnerships with the healthcare community to expand services for those experiencing homelessness and identify collaborative funding opportunities.
- Establish partnerships with area foundations, nonprofits, institutions, and faith-based organizations to leverage resources such as volunteers, donations, financial donations, facilitating connections to services, etc.
- Establish partnerships with the business community.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Strengthen partnerships with the counties to support a regional approach to addressing homelessness.

STRATEGIES

- Partner with Human Services in Lehigh and Northampton counties on behavioral health, mental health and substance abuse treatment.
- Partner with Lehigh and Northampton counties on access to social services such as EBT/ SNAP, Medicaid, etc.
- Partner with Probation Services in Lehigh and Northampton counties for re-entry services, including coordination for health, behavioral and social services.
- Partner with Veteran Affairs.



MOVING FORWARD

IMPROVING SERVICES THROUGH THE REGION'S FIRST PERMANENT YEAR-ROUND, LOW-BARRIER EMERGENCY SHELTER

To address a critical gap in homelessness services, the first recommendation from this plan is for the City to pursue and support the establishment of a year-round low-barrier emergency shelter, in conjunction with affordable housing policies and programs. To this end, the City intends to support the acquisition, rehabilitation, and/or construction of the shelter and the long-term operations and maintenance. A year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter will enhance the flexibility and resiliency of the region's resources to support and immediately respond to the needs of those experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

A Year-Round, Low-Barrier Emergency Shelter for our Neighbors in Crisis

Utilizing the expertise and insights from existing local service providers and best practices in emergency sheltering the plan outlines the following vision for a year-round, low barrier emergency shelter. It is important to note and emphasize that any built solution, including this proposed approach to emergency sheltering, will be part of a regional multi-site solution.

A Year-Round, Low-Barrier Emergency Shelter Solution should include:

- At least 50 non-congregant rooms: Single beds with a toilet and sink in the room
- Ten (10) family-sized units

- 25 congregant emergency shelter beds¹
- Single-stall showers
- Laundry facilities
- Commercial kitchen
- Full-sized lockers
- Day-time drop-in center
- Satellite office space for service providers of medical and mental health services, drug and alcohol counseling, and case management, and a physical location for Coordinated Entry System Intake

The vision for the year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter is rooted in national best practices and learnings from communities that have successfully implemented comparable programs. The National Alliance to End Homelessness ("NAEH") provides a framework that identifies five keys to effective emergency shelter:

- 1 Housing First Approach:** Align shelter eligibility criteria, policies, and practices with a Housing First approach so that anyone experiencing homelessness can access shelter without prerequisites, make services voluntary, and assist people to access permanent housing options as quickly as possible.

¹ Due to requirements of certain federal funding sources (i.e., HOME-ARP), which the City intends to use for the project, any congregant emergency beds will need to be located in a different building than the non-congregant rooms. As part of the emergency sheltering solution, it has been recognized that there is a definite need for these emergency congregant beds in addition to the non-congregant facilities, and any proposed emergency shelter will account for the inclusion of these beds via a multi-site solution.

- 2 **Safe and Appropriate Diversion:** Provide diversion services to find safe and appropriate housing alternatives to entering shelter through problem-solving conversations, identifying community supports, and offering lighter touch solutions.
- 3 **Immediate and low-barrier access:** Ensure immediate and easy access to shelter by lowering barriers to entry and staying open 24/7. Eliminate sobriety and income requirements and other policies that make it difficult to enter shelter, stay in shelter, or access housing and income opportunities.
- 4 **Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit Services:** Focus services in shelter on assisting people to access permanent housing options as quickly as possible.
- 5 **Data to measure performance:** Measure data on percentage of exits to housing, average length of stay in shelter, and returns to homelessness to evaluate the effectiveness of shelter and improve outcomes.¹

This plan recommends that the future operator of the emergency shelter reference and utilize the NAEH best practices.

Considerations for Siting of Facility

In the process of developing this Plan and analyzing built solutions, the consultant team and City conducted an assessment of potential sites within the City of Bethlehem that could support a year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter. Key siting considerations for suitable locations included access to public transit routes, close proximity to supportive services, and access to a grocery store, pharmacy, and other everyday necessities. The consultant team also reviewed the City's zoning districts to determine where existing zoning would be most amenable to the envisioned facility.

¹ https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Infographic_KeystoEffectiveShelter_NAEH.jpg

Cost Estimates: Capital Construction

The team from Michael Baker International utilized comparable market cost estimates to approximate the costs for the acquisition, demolition, and construction of a year-round emergency shelter. As the City of Bethlehem has not identified the final location for the shelter, the estimates are approximate and will be refined when a site is identified.

Figure 4 provides a high-level summary of the costs per square foot for each building typology. The detailed cost estimates for each building typology are included in **Appendix D: Cost Estimates Comparisons for Site Acquisition, Demolition, Capital Construction, and Rehabilitation.**

Having reviewed these options in the context of the City of Bethlehem's built environment and building typologies, the most viable built solution in this area is the rehab of a building originally designed for an alternative purpose. While other options are theoretically more cost effective, there are currently no available empty hotels, vacant land for new construction is limited, and the local real estate market makes property acquisitions highly competitive.

Cost Estimates: Operations & Maintenance

In addition to understanding the capital construction costs associated with a year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter, the City sought to understand the ongoing costs associated with the operations and maintenance of the facility. Operations and maintenance costs are inclusive of staffing, administrative costs, utilities, and general maintenance. As an operator has not yet been identified for the facility, all costs estimates use local data provided by existing service providers who have collaborated with the City on this analysis and development of the Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness.

A 2017 Report from the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) states that people experiencing chronic homelessness consume a disproportional amount – an additional \$35,000/year, on average – in public funds for emergency medical services, psychiatric treatment, shelters, law enforcement, and related services.¹ Establishing a permanent, low-barrier emergency shelter that aligns shelter eligibility criteria, policies, and practices with a Housing First

¹ “Ending Chronic Homelessness Saves Taxpayers Money,” National Alliance to End Homelessness, <http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Cost-Savings-from-PSH.pdf>

approach can lay the foundation for future cost savings by integrating medical and mental health services, housing navigation, and case management at a single point of entry into the spectrum of built solutions.

It should be noted that the current estimates for operations and maintenance only include the costs associated with operating and maintaining the 50 to 70 non-congregant beds and associated staffing, service, and maintenance needs. These estimates do not include the costs to operate and maintain the envisioned on-site day center..

Figure 4: Costs by Structural Type for a 24/7 Year-Round Emergency Shelter

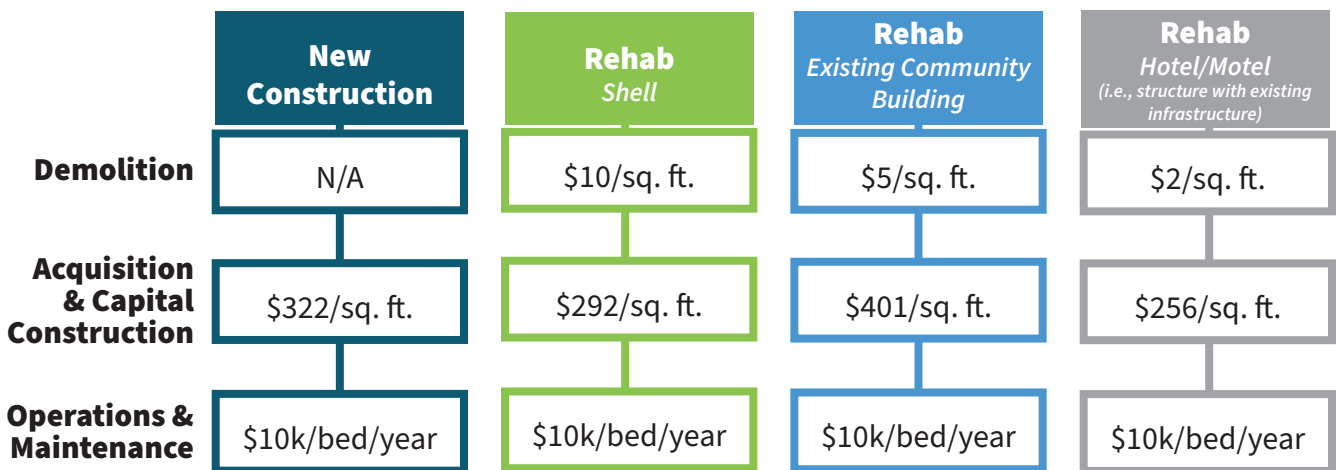


Figure 5: Cost Estimates for Operations & Maintenance

Expense Description	Cost Estimate Range (\$/Year)
Staffing (Salaries; benefits; training; taxes)	\$305,500 to \$427,700
Administrative Costs	\$106,700 to \$149,380
Utilities	\$41,700 to \$58,380
Maintenance	\$46,200 to \$64,680
Total	\$500,100 to \$700,140

FUNDING SOURCES

The City will need to utilize and leverage a variety of public and private funding streams and community partnerships to support a built solution and long-term operations and sustainability.

Allocated Funds

City of Bethlehem 2023 Budget

The City of Bethlehem is committed to addressing homelessness with a comprehensive and systemic approach and intends to use this plan's recommendations as a roadmap for funding policies, programs, and projects within the City and region.

Bethlehem City Council in December of 2022 approved Mayor Reynolds' first budget, which includes the allocation of \$2 million towards anti-homeless initiatives and \$5 million toward affordable housing investments. These 2023 budget allocations demonstrate the City's commitment to being a bookend within the Lehigh Valley's pipeline of care, focusing on emergency sheltering and affordable housing policies, programs, and funding strategies.

Additionally, the City has proposed the use of \$1.4M in HOME-ARP funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to support the development of a permanent, year-round low-barrier emergency shelter. The City's approved HUD-approved HOME-ARP Allocation Plan makes the funds available for the acquisition and capital construction of the facility.

Additional & Future Funding Sources

The cost estimates for capital construction as well as long-term operations and maintenance presented in this plan indicate that significant funding will be required to realize the vision of the Lehigh Valley's first permanent, year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter. The City's commitment of HOME-ARP and budget funds will provide a strong foundation to move their vision forward, but the City recognizes that additional and future funding sources need to be identified, pursued, and leveraged to fully implement this plan.

Fully funding and implementing a permanent, low-barrier emergency shelter will require a multi-year, phased funding strategy that leverages current and future federal, state and local/regional funding as well as private/philanthropic sources. Understanding the landscape and availability of these resources is a key part of the City's Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness.

Federal Funding

HUD funding offers options for sustainable, long-term funding. Key HUD programs are outlined below as well as the status of this funding in the City of Bethlehem:

- **Community Development Block Grant:** It supports community development activities to build strong and more resilient communities. As an entitlement community, Bethlehem can use its funding to benefit low -and-moderate income people in a variety of ways, including assisting with housing improvements,

expanding economic opportunities and improving critical community health and welfare infrastructure.

- These funds could be leveraged for acquisition of an existing property and ongoing operations and maintenance.
 - The City currently receives an allocation of CDBG funds each year.
- **Continuum of Care:** A HUD program to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation of homelessness.
 - These funds would be most applicable towards the operations and maintenance of the emergency shelter facility, if the City made a successful application to the Eastern PA Continuum of Care that distributes funds for the 33-county region.
 - Currently, funds within the Eastern PA Continuum of Care principally are prioritized for rapid rehousing and supportive housing services, with much smaller portions going to sheltering services and operations.

- **Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program:** This program provides communities with a source of low-cost, long-term financing for economic and community development projects. Section 108 financing provides an avenue for communities to undertake larger, more costly projects, where they may have limited resources to invest upfront. Section 108 can fund economic development, housing, public facilities, infrastructure, and other physical development projects, such as an emergency shelter. Assistance can be deployed in two ways: 1) Directly to the community or its governmental or non-profit partner to carry out an eligible project, or, 2) Indirectly with a community or its partnering re-lending (or, in limited circumstances, granting) the funds to a developer or business to undertake an eligible project.¹

- A Section 108 loan could be utilized for acquisition and capital construction costs.
- The City of Bethlehem would have direct access to the Section 108 program since the City receives a yearly CDBG allocation. The City will be required to secure the loan by pledging current and future CDBG allocations to repay and secure the loan.

State Funding

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania offers a range of programs that can support capital construction as well as operations and maintenance for emergency shelters. Key programs are outlined below along with the status of these programs within the City of Bethlehem and greater Lehigh Valley region.

- **PA Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement Fund (PHARE):** The PHARE fund was established by Act 105 of 2010 (the “PHARE Act”) to provide the mechanism by which certain allocated state or federal funds, as well as funds from other outside sources, would be used to assist with the creation, rehabilitation, and support of affordable housing throughout the Commonwealth. The RFP to apply for PHARE funds is expected to be issued in September 2023 with applications due in November 2023. Funding awards are anticipated to be announced June/July 2024.²
 - These funds are likely most appropriate for operations and maintenance of the future emergency shelter facility.
 - In 2022, Lehigh County received a total of \$704,451 for:
 - Preventing Homeless for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care (\$65,000 – Recipient: Merakey Pennsylvania)

¹ <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/section-108/section-108-program-eligibility-requirements/#overview>

² https://www.phfa.org/forms/phare_program_phare_fund/2023_phare_draft_plan_final.pdf

- AHA Homeownership Rehabilitation Project (\$400,000 – Recipient: Allentown Housing Authority)
- Lehigh Valley Regional Homeless Advisory Board Eviction Defense Services Program (\$239,451 – Recipient: United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley)
- In 2022, Lehigh and Northampton counties received a total of \$516,800 for:
 - Community Action Better Homes: Housing Rehabilitation to Increase Energy Efficiency and Mobility (\$411,800 – Recipient: Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, Inc.)
 - Housing Counseling Program (\$40,000 – Recipient: Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, Inc.)
 - Catalyst4 (\$65,000 – Recipient: Catalyst4)
- In 2022, Northampton County received a total of \$700,000 for:
 - Northampton County Lead Hazard Reduction Program – Locke Heights Neighborhood (\$500,000 – Recipient: County of Northampton)
 - Dutchtown Commons (\$200,000 – Recipient: PA Days Restart LLC)¹

• **Home4Good:** This is a program developed by the Federal Home Loan Bank Pittsburgh and the PA Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) to address unmet and critical needs in the existing Continuums of Care across the Commonwealth. The initiative provides a flexible source of funding for organizations working to address homelessness in Pennsylvania with the primary objective of ensuring that if an individual is faced with homelessness, it is brief and non-

reoccurring.²

- These funds are most likely appropriate for operations and maintenance of the emergency shelter facility.
- In 2022, the Eastern PA Continuum of Care received \$204,000. The United Way of Pennsylvania and the Eastern PA Continuum of Care Diversion Project received a total of \$193,800. The remaining \$10,200 went to administration of the Eastern PA Continuum of Care.³

Private, Institutional, and Philanthropic

The Lehigh Valley has a robust landscape of private foundations and philanthropic funding entities associated with area health networks, educational institutions, and nonprofits. As the dual crises of homelessness and affordable housing shortage grow within our region, it is imperative that our institutional and philanthropic partners participate in the efforts to identify and fund comprehensive and holistic regional solutions. Many of these organizations have been at the table as Bethlehem, Allentown, Easton, and our many municipal and regional partners have discussed pathways to action and substantive change.

While the City agrees that Housing First is the best practice to address homelessness, it is not able to function to the fullest in the Lehigh Valley given our affordable housing crisis. Adding housing units takes time, often years, and many of our neighbors do not have the luxury of time. Someone who has just been evicted with their three children needs shelter now. This is why the region has an emergent need for sheltering options for individuals and families who find themselves without a roof over their heads for a multitude of reasons. Simultaneously we must make long-term investments into affordable housing as a region

1 https://www.phfa.org/forms/phare_program_phare_fund/funding_announcements/2022_reservation_of_funds.pdf

2 <https://www.fhlp-pgh.com/home4good>

3 <https://www.phfa.org/forms/home4good/2022home4goodawards.pdf>

and community that cares for our neighbors.

While an operator has not yet been identified for the new facility, the City assumes in this plan that the selected operator(s) will support a portion of the operating costs through existing and/or new funding sources. Given that the private, institutional, and philanthropic funding is most appropriate for ongoing operations and maintenance, the plan strongly recommends that these partners consider funding the permanent, low-barrier emergency shelter and the selected operator. Utilizing funding from health networks, foundations, and institutions has been successfully utilized in the development, construction, and ongoing operations of shelters across the country, and is highlighted in both case studies in this plan.

Project Phasing & Potential Funding

The City has not yet secured a site for the year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter. When it does, this high-level phasing plan in Figure 6 lays out the steps from site acquisition to construction to facility launch. The potential funding sources outlined in the previous section are listed in the matrix below and aligned with the applicable phase(s). All funding sources indicated for Phase 5 are assumed to be viable funding sources for long-term operations and facility maintenance

Figure 6: Phasing and Potential Funding Sources

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
PHASE DESCRIPTION	Acquisition	Bids for Design, Engineering, Construction & Formalize Operator Agreement	Rehabilitation & Construction	Operator Ramp Up	Launch All Operations
ARPA Funds (2023 Budget)	●				
HOME-ARP Funds (2023 Budget)	●	●	●		
CDBG (inclusive of future CDBG, HOME allocations)		●	●		●
Section 108 Loan (HUD)	●	●	●		
Continuum of Care Funds				●	●
PHARE				●	●
Home4Good				●	●
Private Funding (inclusive of health networks, institutions, local philanthropy)				●	●
Operator Funding				●	●



CASE STUDY

City & County Supported Low-Barrier Shelter Model

GRACE Emergency Shelter Gainesville, FL

WHAT IT IS

A low-barrier shelter that gives clients access to services without having to meet requirements, such as producing identification, demonstrating adherence to a mental health or substance abuse treatment plan, or providing evidence of passing a police clearance. Low-barrier shelters design policies to ‘screen people in’ to ensure they can serve the greatest number of people possible, while still providing an atmosphere of safety and security for staff, guests, and volunteers.¹ It has 103 beds across four programs – men, women, couples, and veterans. Fully low-barrier since 2016, seen a 25% jump in housing placements (from 2016 to 2019).

HISTORY

Initiative began in 2005 when the City of Gainesville and the County of Alachua collaborated on a 10-year plan to end homelessness – Project GRACE: The Gainesville/Alachua County 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. The plan addressed the root causes of homelessness – lack of affordable housing or a living wage. It laid out detailed strategies and a multi-pronged approach to getting people off the streets and back into housing as quickly as possible as well as offering preventative services to keep at-risk individuals and families from becoming homeless.²

CITY & COUNTY ROLES

The City of Gainesville and Alachua County provided the seed funding for the GRACE Sheltering Program, including the selection and ultimate acquisition of the shelter’s location – the former Gainesville Correctional Institution site. The GRACE shelter opened in 2014, and the City and County have served as ongoing funders for operations and key services such as street outreach, mental health services, and housing navigation. Over time, both the City and County have been able to gradually decrease their funding as funding is sourced from state and federal sources and private contributions.³

CLIENT APPROACH

Campus Expectations: Respect the rights, peace, and property of everyone; work on a housing plan to the best of your ability, and no sex, drugs, weapons, or gambling on campus.

IMPACT

During the first seven months of operations, the program housed 88 people and reduced downtown homelessness by 25% in the City of Gainesville. Since opening in 2014, there has been a 47% drop in homelessness in Alachua County.⁴

SAFETY OF STAFF, GUESTS, & VOLUNTEERS

One major incident in 5 years, equates to: .0075% (1 in 13,300 people served), .0001% (1 in 819,000) service interactions.⁵

SOURCES: 1. <https://www.gracemarketplace.org/emergency-shelter>, 2. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/grace/pages/86/attachments/original/1565214562/_pp.1-58_GRACECOMPLETE.pdf?1565214562, 3. <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/2022/04/13/gainesville-homeless-shelter-says-needs-more-money-house-people/7291420001/>, 4. <https://www.gracemarketplace.org/our-history>, 5. <http://fchonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Making-the-Case-for-a-Low-Barrier-Shelter-1.pdf> PHOTO CREDIT: Gainesville Sun.

CASE STUDY

Leveraging Partners to Establish Low-Barrier Shelter with Wraparound Services

Second Avenue Commons Pittsburgh, PA

BACKGROUND The Second Avenue Commons (“The Commons”) is the culmination of a multi-year community planning process by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services in partnership with PNC Bank, Highmark and UPMC, as well as other government agencies including the City of Pittsburgh, business, and community-based organizations. The Commons is a low-barrier, multipurpose space where anyone over the age of 18 can receive immediate access to shelter and housing assistance. People experiencing homelessness are empowered and supported to quickly obtain stable, permanent housing, and individuals who have experienced homelessness are engaged as leaders and decisionmakers. The low-barrier approach means meeting individuals where they are. Access to services/shelter at The Commons is not contingent on sobriety, income requirements, criminal records or program demands.

ROLE OF THE CITY In August 2020, the City of Pittsburgh and the Urban Redevelopment Authority donated the property (a former .68 acre parking lot) located at 700 Second Avenue to advance the project. The property was identified for the location of the low-barrier shelter as it is situated within a walkable distance to many providers who can provide food, clothes, and other services needed by people experiencing homelessness. With this location in Pittsburgh’s Uptown neighborhood mobility will not be an issue to access services.¹

CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION COSTS Estimated annual budget for the Shelter and Drop-in Center is approximately \$2M. The annual budget includes: staff costs; cleaning and maintenance; office, personal care and light refreshment supplies; transportation assistance for clients; and annual rent of \$250K of three floors, includes utilities.

OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE BUDGET \$22M project, funded by a \$10M contribution from the PNC Foundation, \$6.75M from Highmark Health and Allegheny Health Network, \$1.75M from UPMC and grants from various foundations and the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (Grant of \$700,000 to Action Housing, Inc. through the Keystone Communities Program for program management and administrative functions). The City of Pittsburgh and the Urban Redevelopment Authority donated the land.

OPERATOR Pittsburgh Mercy a person-centered, population-based, trauma-informed, community health and wellness provider was selected to be the operator of Second Avenue Commons via a competitive RFP process by the county’s Department of Human Services in April 2021.

FACILITY The Commons is a 45,000-square-foot, five-floor facility located on Second Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh.

CORE SERVICE COMPONENTS

- 1 Diversion services: front-door services including mediation and resource referrals.
- 2 Housing-focused case management, where each client creates a housing plan. Rapid-exit services and housing-centered resource connections offered.
- 3 Collaboration with DHS Coordinated Entry (connect clients to Allegheny Link within 3 days of entering shelter; Collaborate with DHS Field Unit staff co-located within shelter).
- 4 Meal Service: third-aprty serves on-site breakfast and dinner daily.

PROGRAMMING The Commons houses four complementary programs:

- 1 24/7, 95-bed Low-Barrier Shelter: beds are in six pet-friendly congregate sleeping rooms with bathrooms/showers and storage for personal items. Space to add 40 additional beds when needed;
- 2 Daytime Drop-in Center
- 3 Clinic staffed and operated by UPMC that provides routine physical and behavioral health services.
- 4 43 Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units, which are a type of permanent housing that offers small, private, furnished rooms along with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities.

SOURCES: 1. <https://www.wesa.fm/identity-community/2021-06-10/new-pittsburgh-homeless-shelter-to-accept-any-adult-and-their-pet-to-open-in-2022>
PHOTO CREDIT: Pittsburgh Business Times

SITE SUITABILITY ANALYSIS

LOCATING A YEAR-ROUND, LOW-BARRIER EMERGENCY SHELTER IN THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM, PA

The site suitability analysis used location-based factors to evaluate the areas of Bethlehem that may be best suited for a year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter and drop-in a day center. Plans call for a non-congregant shelter (i.e. private rooms) offering daily essentials like meals, laundry and supportive services.

It also took into account accessibility and walkability as such individuals often don't own a car and are carrying all of their earthly possessions. The analysis considered sidewalk conditions, ADA ramps, Bethlehem's hilly topography as well as proximity to LANTA's Bethlehem Transportation Center and bus stops.

Points of Interest

The analysis identified the key services and amenities someone experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability might need on a regular

basis. Service provider input helped identify the critical daily services and amenities most needed by someone experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Mapping these key points of interest was the first step in the site suitability analysis.

Figure 7: Points of Interest Map

- LANTA Bus Routes
- Food Centers
- Services
- Local Amenities
- 🚌 Bethlehem Transportation Center

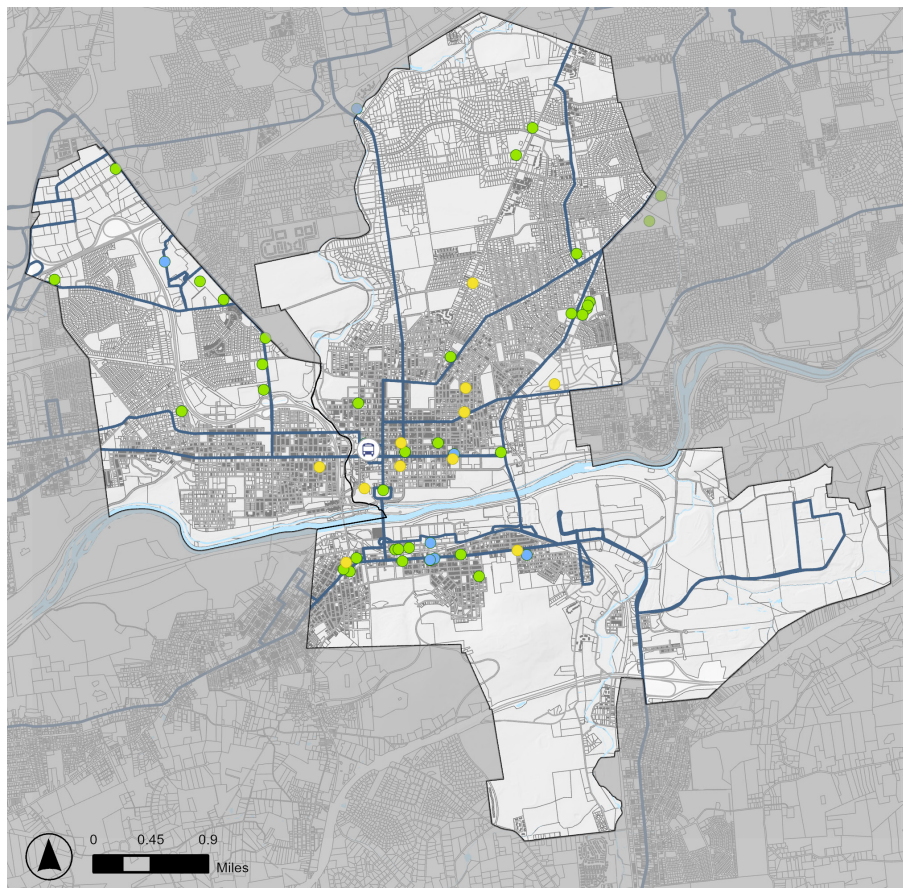


Figure 7 includes the following points of interest:

Transportation

Access to public transportation is critical for unsheltered individuals to come and go from shelters and services as desired and provide accessibility to job opportunities.

Transit Lines: Easy access to public transit is critical for unsheltered individuals to access services and job opportunities. Bus lines connecting Bethlehem, Easton and Allentown are the most heavily utilized.

Bethlehem Transportation Center (BTC): LANTA's Bethlehem Transportation Center (BTC), steps from Main Street, offers access to 16 bus routes, including two Enhanced Bus Service (EBS) routes that run more frequently between the Valley's three cities.

Local Amenities

Grocery Stores: Grocery stores offer a diverse array of fresh and pre-packaged foods as well as medical and hygiene items. They offer long hours of operation as well as public restrooms.

Convenience Stores: Convenience stores such as Wawa or Sheetz typically operate on a 24/7 basis offering access to public restrooms, freshly made and pre-packaged foods, and seating areas.

Libraries: Libraries often serve as de facto day shelters for the homeless in many communities as they are open when overnight shelters may be closed. They typically offer public bathrooms, places to sit, free internet and/or wifi, and a way to charge electronic devices.

The City of Bethlehem has two public libraries – the main branch on Payrow Plaza on the northside of Bethlehem and the Southside Branch on Webster Street.

Pharmacies: Pharmacies may not be needed on

a daily basis, but access to one is key when filling weekly or monthly prescriptions.

Laundromats: The depicted laundromats offer extended hours or 24/7 operations. Laundromats typically provide customers with bathrooms, outlets and seating.

Services

Day Programs: Day programs operate outside of overnight shelter hours to give those experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability a safe space during the day. Most operate on a Monday to Friday schedule, although some offer weekend hours.

Some day programs connect clients with supportive services, like Coordinated Entry System registration, housing navigation services, counseling and medical care. Some go further and provide meals and/or snacks, showers and lockers. Day programs can overlap with substance abuse recovery services.

Social Services: Many social services accessed by those experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability are located outside of the City of Bethlehem. Within the City limits, there are resources and programming available at a few locations, including the Hispanic Center, YMCA, and Salvation Army.

Medical Services: Emergency rooms offer essential and necessary medical care. The only 24/7 Emergency Room located within the City of Bethlehem is the ER at the LVHN Muhlenberg Campus. There are community health centers at the Hispanic Center and at the Northampton Community College building on the Southside; however, they are open more limited hours and typically require appointments.

Recovery Centers: The recovery services mapped are all outpatient centers that offer drop-in services and meetings.

Meal Centers & Food Pantries

Meal Centers: Meal Centers are designated sites where free hot and/or cold meals are offered, no questions asked. In the City of Bethlehem, there are multiple meal center sites; although operating days and hours vary between sites. Across all of the mapped meal center locations, it is possible for someone in need to receive three free meals a day, seven days a week.

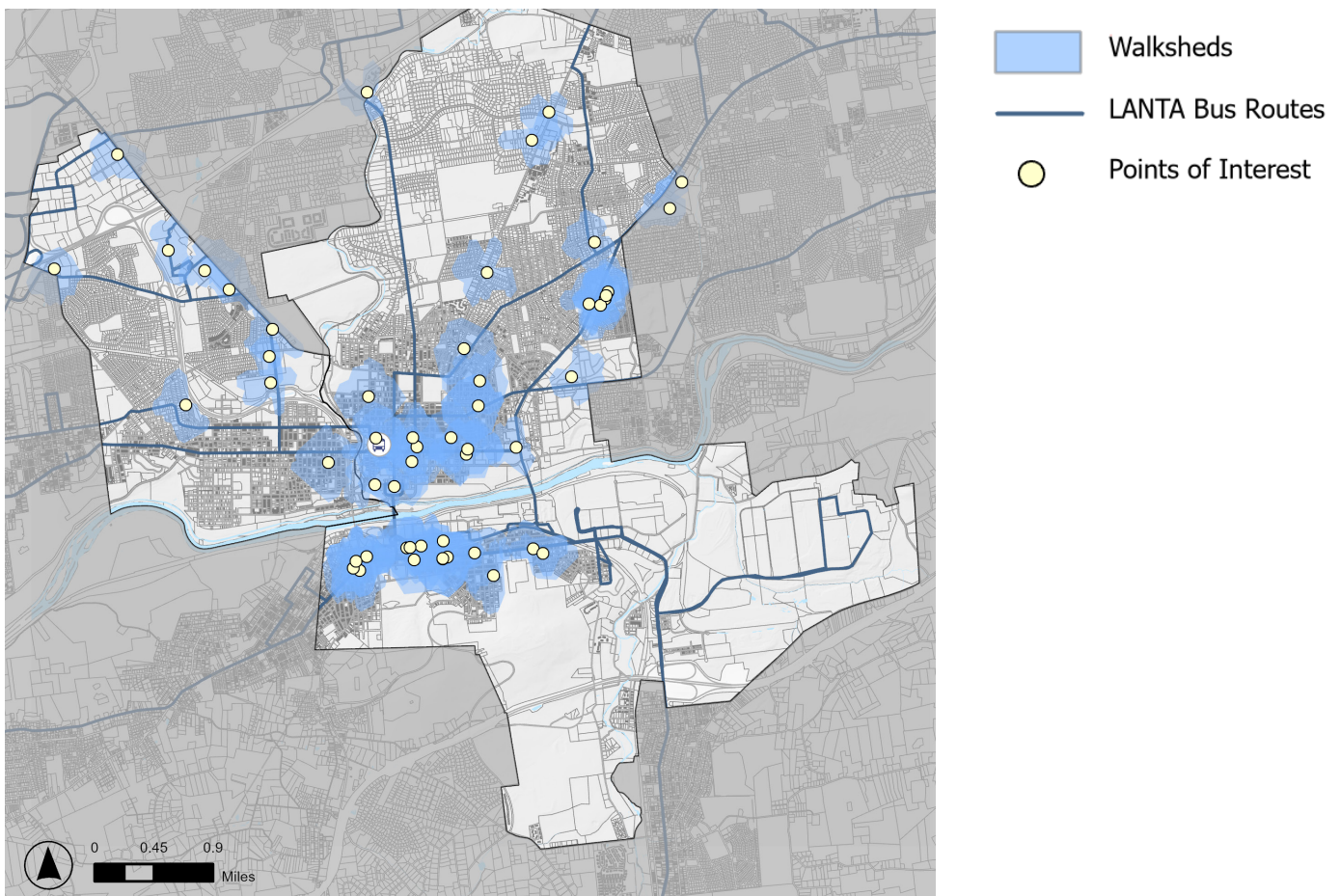
Food Pantries: Food pantries operate during designated hours/days providing clients with food choices intended to meet their nutritional daily needs. Food pantries typically do not provide prepared foods and the majority require participants to register before or onsite to access the service.

Walkshed Analysis

We built upon the points of interest analysis with a five-minute walkshed analysis, looking at what is reachable on foot for an individual experiencing homelessness. These individuals primarily rely on walking and public transit to access services and job opportunities, while carrying all of their belongings.

Knowing this, a walkshed analysis was used to assess site suitability. A walkshed is the land area within a defined walking distance from a specific location. For this analysis, a five-minute walkshed was used in relation to the points of interests. The walksheds show a five-minute walk from each of the points of interest, taking into account street and block networks and elevation changes. A general buffer would only show the distance from a point as the crow flies without taking into account true walking conditions.

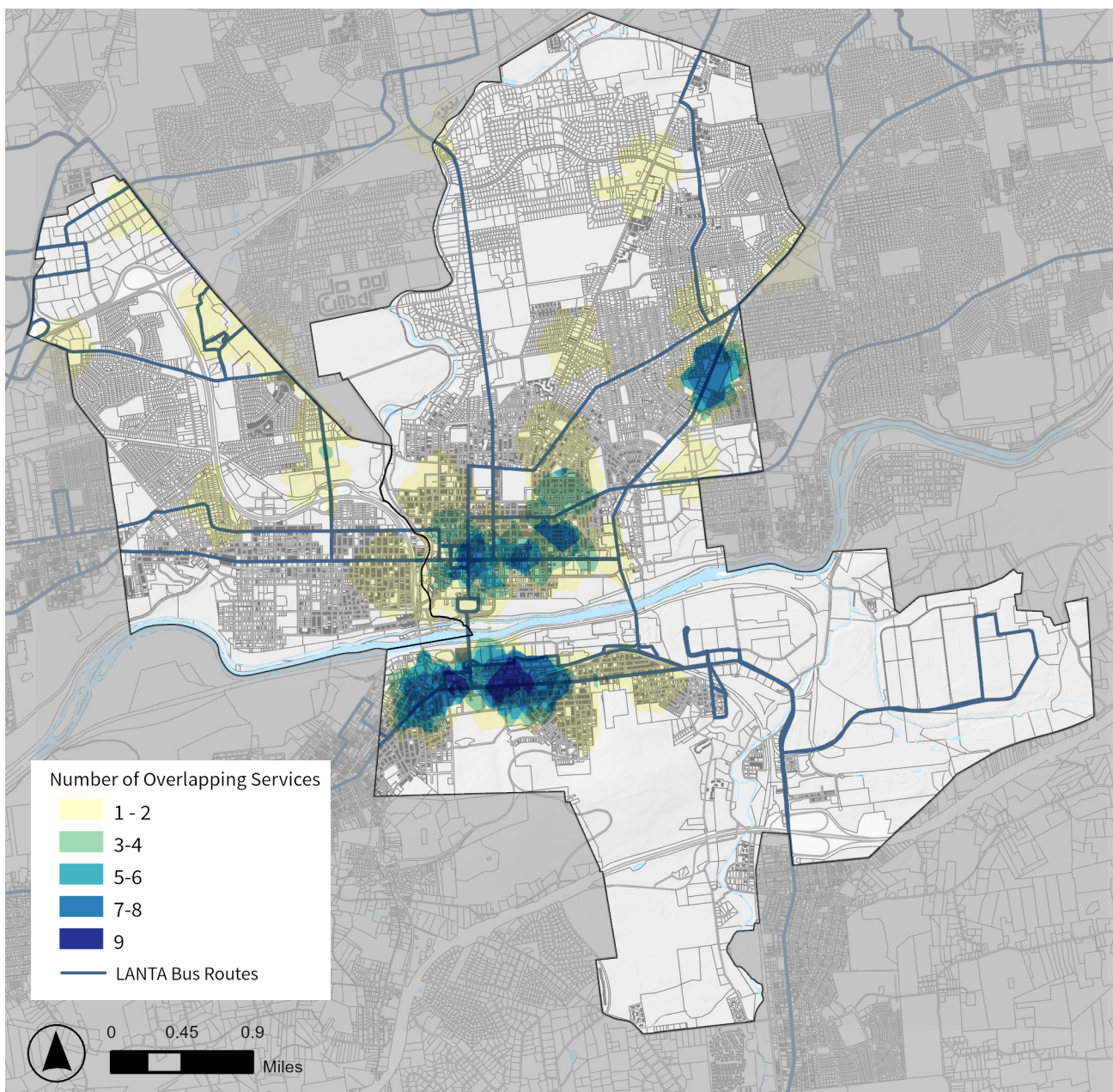
Figure 8: Walkshed Analysis Map



Overlap Area Map

Next, the number of overlapping walksheds – areas within a five-minute walking distance of a point of interest – were assigned levels of suitability demonstrated by dark blue for the highest concentration of services, in this case nine points, to light blue for one to two points of interest.

Figure 9: Overlap Area Map

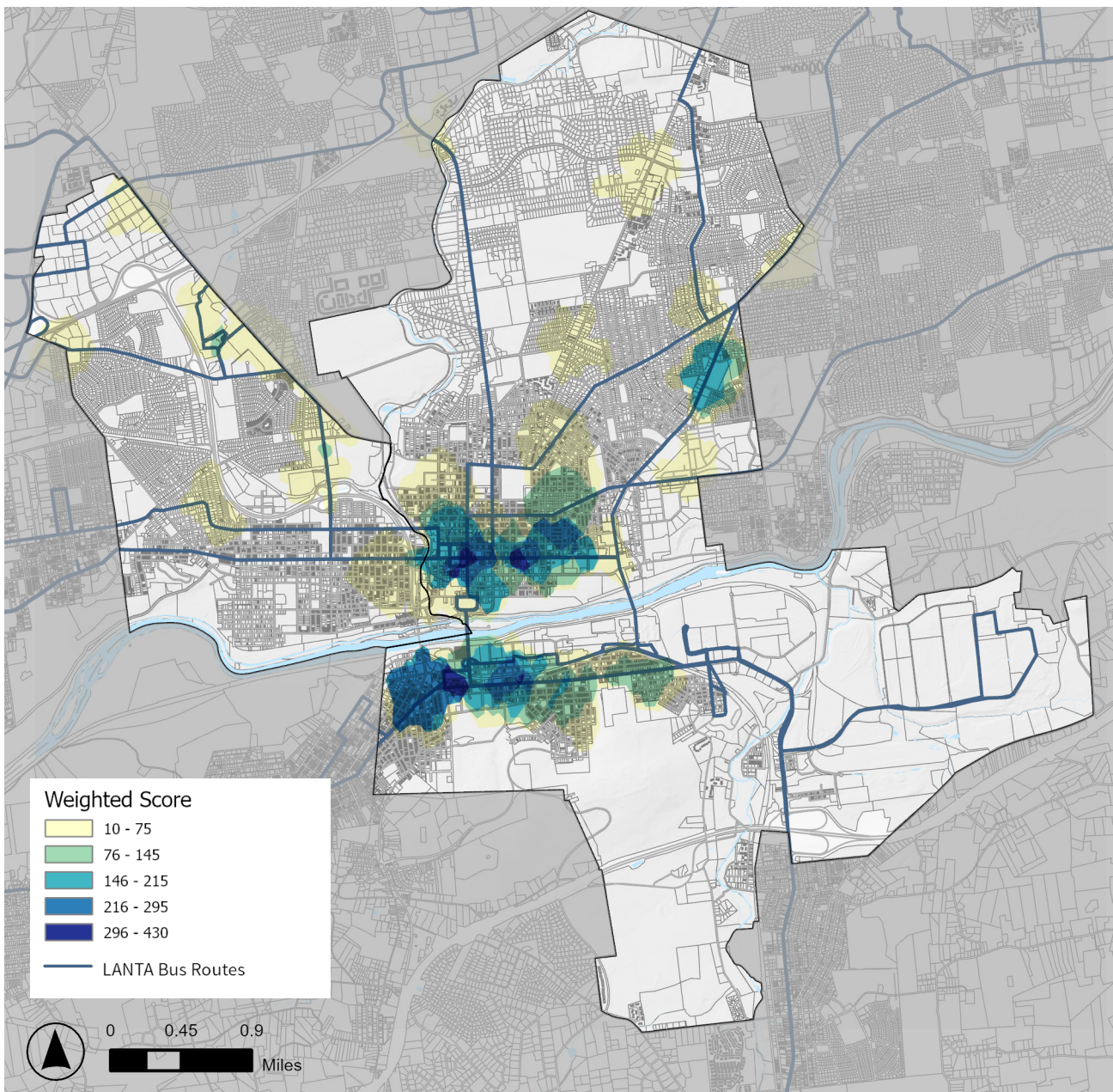


Site Suitability Map

To strengthen the analysis, points of interest and their associated walksheds were weighted, taking into account that certain points of interest offer more essential services for a person experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability. When someone does not have a kitchen, a food pantry is less critical than a meal center that offers free, prepared meals.

The weighted analysis integrates the expertise of local service providers, information gathered in the lived experience survey of those experiencing or who have experienced homelessness, and the perspective of the plan’s subject matter expert Dr. Sherri Brokopp Binder, the executive director of Allentown’s Ripple Community Inc., an organization serving those experiencing homelessness and housing instability across the Lehigh Valley.

Figure 10: Site Suitability Map



Weighting Explanation

Below is a summary of the points of interest and their assigned weights used in the suitability analysis. The graphics indicated the weighted importance.

Bethlehem Transit Center



The most heavily weighted point of interest due to the access it provides to shelter, support services, medical care, and other necessities/daily activities.

Meal Center



Meal centers are often the main access point for daily meals and may offer additional food to go.

Day Programs



Day programs provide a safe space while an overnight shelter is closed. Additionally, many of the day programs in Bethlehem offer access to meals, showers, laundry, and support services, including medical.

Recovery Center



These programs are essential for individuals in recovery. They are weighted slightly less than a day program as they cater to a smaller population.

Medical Services (Emergency Room)



Good access to an emergency room is essential as that is often where both routine and life saving medical care is received.

Libraries



Day-time operating hours offer a place to go when overnight shelters are closed. Seating, outlets, and internet/wifi are typically available. Libraries may have policies that limit the number of bags or personal possessions that patrons can bring in with them, which can be a barrier to access for our unsheltered neighbors.

Medical Services (Community Health Centers)



Community health centers can serve specific populations (i.e., expectant mothers, those living with HIV/AIDS, etc.) and be a resource for routine care; however, more limited hours and the requirement to make appointments can make them more difficult to access.

Laundromats



Many laundromats are 24/7 making them accessible and open at any time of day. While utilizing the machines is expensive, they also provide an indoor location, seating, and outlets.

Convenience Store



Includes locations such as Wawa and Sheetz that typically operate 24/7. Provide access to a public restroom, food for purchase, and sometimes have seating areas.

Pharmacies



While not needed every day, it is essential to have access to a pharmacy when ill or managing medical conditions.

Social Services



There are limited direct social service providers in Bethlehem. Those that are located within the City limits provide limited services at limited hours.

Grocery Stores



Grocery stores offer public restrooms, longer hours of operation, and sometimes outlets to charge electronic devices. They're of less importance because those experiencing homelessness often lack consistent access to a kitchen and/or cooking instruments.

Food Pantry



Most food pantries operate with very limited hours. State and federal rules mean pantries must regulate how often clients can utilize their services. Additionally, the lack of consistent access to a kitchen and/or cooking instruments makes them less useful on a daily basis.



Next Steps

The site suitability analysis provides a data-driven approach to understanding future opportunities to advance built solutions to address homelessness and housing instability. It is fully expected that these solutions will be phased and multi-site while also requiring strong, regional collaboration and partnerships.

The City can use this analytical tool to evaluate potential emergency shelter sites based on what's now available and comes onto the market.

Areas of overlap may change over time as new services and points of interest are established and others may consolidate or close. The City will maintain this work as a living document, allowing information and mapping to be updated as changes occur.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The plan was structured to develop a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the key issues and core needs of Bethlehem’s unsheltered neighbors, the service provider landscape in the City and region, and potential areas of unmet needs and/or service gaps. Ultimately, the plan was tasked to identify an appropriate ‘built solution’ that could be facilitated by the City of Bethlehem given their current access to funding, resources, and the role of municipal government within the landscape of regionally-based solutions.

The Michael Baker consultant team supported by Dr. Sherri Brokopp Binder of Ripple Community Inc., conducted interviews with internal (City Departments) and external (community service providers, organizations, partners) to understand the current context of service provision and community visions around a potential year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter. The consultant team also conducted a survey focused on the lived experiences of those experiencing or those who have experienced homelessness and/or housing instability – there was a total of 107 respondents to the survey. The interview and survey findings led to the determination that the City is uniquely positioned to serve as the bookends along the spectrum of built solutions to address homelessness – with a role to help in the establishment of a year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter and an ongoing commitment of policies, programs, and legislation that supports and increases housing affordability in the City and region.

The determination of the City’s role as the bookends along the spectrum of built solutions to address homelessness led to the three proposed recommendations:

- 1 Recommendation 1: Provide year-round, low-barrier emergency sheltering as part of a comprehensive housing services approach.
- 2 Recommendation 2: Support the development of a regional systems-oriented approach to address homelessness.
- 3 Recommendation 3: Develop permanent supportive and affordable housing solutions.

The key next steps identified for the City in support of these recommendations are:

- Support the acquisition, rehabilitation, and construction of a year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter within the City of Bethlehem that will be a component of multi-site built solutions to address homelessness.
- Continue to pursue and leverage funding sources from regional, state, and federal entities, and align funding sources to support the multiple phases of acquisition, construction, and ongoing operations and maintenance of the emergency shelter facility.
- Align the recommendations from the City’s Comprehensive Housing Strategy with the Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness.
- Leverage and continue to build upon the 3 City Coalition to address regional concerns, challenges, and opportunities.

Regional collaboration is core to the entirety of the work outlined in this plan. Recommendations four and five of the plan highlight the need to:

- 4 Develop public-private partnerships to support regional initiatives and regional action on homelessness.

- 5 Strengthen partnerships with the counties to support a regional approach to addressing homelessness.

While the City agrees that Housing First is the best practice to address homelessness, it is not able to function to the fullest in the Lehigh Valley given our affordable housing crisis. Adding housing units takes time, often years, and many of our neighbors do not have the luxury of time. Someone who

has just been evicted with their three children needs shelter now. This is why the region has an emergent need for sheltering options for individuals and families who find themselves without a roof over their heads for a multitude of reasons. Simultaneously we must make long-term investments into affordable housing as a region and community that cares for our neighbors.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THEMES & FINDINGS FROM INTERNAL INTERVIEWS

The consultant team conducted interviews with staff and leadership from six City departments, including: police, fire, emergency management, the health bureau, the mayor's office and the office of equity and inclusion.

The interview findings, organized by key themes, are summarized below.

General Findings

Overall, the City's interactions with the unsheltered population are viewed as more reactive than proactive. However, the City, especially its Executive Leadership, is prioritizing a more proactive approach.

In describing their interactions with the City's unsheltered population, departments such as police, fire, health, and emergency management are mainly providing support when service calls are placed (i.e., an altercation in an encampment, COVID positive individuals, unpermitted burning, etc.). Under Mayor Reynolds' administration, executive leadership has prioritized a proactive approach in service provisions to those experiencing homelessness. Examples include: interdepartmental visits to encampments to provide services and support; coordinated interdepartmental meetings led by the Mayor's Office to identify shared needs and response; and greater collaboration between City departments as well as their regional counterparts within the counties and neighboring municipalities.

The City's unsheltered population has grown and originates from more varied geographies.

Bethlehem and the Lehigh Valley's unsheltered population was growing prior to the pandemic, which exacerbated the trend. This, paired with the Valley's surging housing market and limited affordable housing choices, means more individuals and families are experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability.

Homelessness knows no geographic boundaries. Individuals from all over the region come to Bethlehem for services and sheltering as well as go to other communities, like Allentown for drop-in centers.

The City is prioritizing a long-term holistic approach to supporting the unsheltered population. It recognizes the systemic nature of homelessness and the importance of regional cooperation and collaboration.

Historically, the City's response has focused on immediate, short-term solutions. The new administration has emphasized understanding the systemic nature of homelessness and how the City's policy and programs can reflect a more regional, holistic and long-term approach. This policy shift is most evident in the City's Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness, in which the City sought to understand the feasibility of a built solution or series of built solutions supported via a collaborative regional approach.

Context & Current Situation

Community perspectives range from concerns regarding the safety and sanitation of public places, such as trails and parks where encampments are located, to a desire to provide support in the form of food donations and other help.

Residents routinely share concerns about the safety, sanitation and code compliance of encampments located on trails and in City parks, according to City Departments interviewed.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the City's encampments have grown in size and visibility at the same time more residents took to City parks and trails, increasing tensions.

Some community members oppose the encampments and notify City authorities, while others are willing to help or leave food.

For those City departments and staff who work with the unsheltered population on a regular basis, there is recognition that there are distinct populations within the unsheltered community.

From the departmental perspective, there are clear delineations among the unsheltered population that are residing in and receiving services within the City of Bethlehem. Many of the "chronically homeless" reside in encampments, although some utilize the Bethlehem Emergency Shelter when weather conditions deteriorate. Another portion of the unsheltered population experiences homelessness on a more temporary, situational basis due to factors like housing instability, job loss, domestic violence, addiction and other issues.

Current Service Provision Landscape

The City's current engagement with the homeless population focuses on operational solutions versus policy-based approaches.

Departments such as police, fire, health bureau, and emergency management play a largely operational role, which was highlighted by the Covid-19 Pandemic. They distributed vaccines, personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as providing hotel vouchers and proper isolation to quell community transmissions of the virus. City staff wish to take a more proactive role when addressing homelessness and its unique causes and factors. This includes implementing a policy-based approach to homelessness to address systemic causes, lead community discussions, responses and problem-solving.

City Departments are taking more nuanced and context specific approaches to engaging with the unsheltered population.

Staff observed that in the past few years City departments and leadership are doing a much better job of seeing the bigger picture and taking a more systemic approach. There is better collaboration internally as well as with key service provider partners such as Street Medicine. The Reynolds administration is making a sustained effort and providing strong direction to hopefully become more proactive.

Sheltering options are not always immediately available.

When a City department interacts with an unsheltered individual seeking immediate sheltering, there is not always a clear option or supportive service to refer them to, especially with families and single women. Outside of the seasonal drop-in shelters, virtually all shelter beds are managed through the regional 'By

Name' list accessed by calling 2-11, and most regional shelters have a waitlist. The shortage of attainable housing results in few new openings. Walk-in emergency sheltering in Bethlehem is available only on a seasonal basis, and there is no year-round drop-in emergency shelter that is open to anyone in need.

There are ongoing challenges to sheltering unhoused individuals who do not fit within the traditional sheltering system (i.e. separation by biological sex; congregant living; etc.).

City departments noted that the majority of sheltering options in the City and region still subscribe to a fairly 'traditional' sheltering model and layout, including separation of populations by biological sex, congregant/shared sleeping spaces, and rules prohibiting pets. Service providers echoed concerns about the limitations of the traditional sheltering model, particularly for those who may identify as LGBTQ+, families, and those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

More service coordination and regional support is needed.

More collaboration between the City and service providers is needed to create a better understanding of service options and availability. In interactions with unsheltered individuals, City departments often lack access to necessary background information and files as well as a clear and coordinated system of who to contact in different types of situations. There is a shared sentiment that the City is operating in isolation from other municipal and regional partners. More support and coordination are desired between City staff and Lehigh and Northampton counties, as the city straddles both counties.

Improving Sheltering Options

Any built solution needs to be geographically accessible to public transportation and key supportive services.

Access to public transportation and walkability are critical for unsheltered individuals to come and go from shelters and services as desired and provide accessibility to job opportunities.

Additionally, onsite services or proximity to surrounding, existing services is important to facilitate wrap-around support for different unsheltered populations.

APPENDIX B

THEMES & FINDINGS FROM EXTERNAL INTERVIEWS

The consultant team conducted 15 interviews with service providers representing the following organizations and entities: New Bethany, Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering, Lehigh Conference of Churches, Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living, Valley Youth House, Turning Point – Lehigh Valley, Valley Health Partners Street Medicine, Bethlehem City Council, Lehigh Valley Regional Homeless Advisory Board, Third Street Alliance, St. Luke’s University Health Network, Bethlehem Area School District, Eastern Pennsylvania Continuum of Care, Battle Borne, Bethlehem Housing Authority.

The interview findings, organized by key themes, are summarized below.

General Findings

For those with sheltering services, the majority of providers follow the ‘Housing First’ model; however, there is the recognition the Lehigh Valley’s current housing affordability crisis challenges the model.

All current Lehigh Valley sheltering service providers follow the ‘Housing First’ model, which is an approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus, ending their homelessness and serving as a platform for them to pursue their personal goals. Housing First does not require people experiencing homelessness to address all potential challenges, such as behavioral health issues, or to graduate through a series of programs before they can access housing. Housing First also does not mandate participation in services before

obtaining housing or in order to retain housing.

The Housing First model requires a pipeline of permanent, affordable housing to move people from shelters into more long-term housing solutions. This model has historically functioned well in the Lehigh Valley. But rising rents and limited affordable housing stock currently prevent individuals from moving from emergency shelters into permanent housing.

Many service providers have waived time limits due to the pandemic and housing crisis. This results in much longer shelter stays and significant waitlists as shelter operators have few to no options to move folks into permanent, affordable housing.

All interviewed service providers, including those who do not operate sheltering services, emphasized the complete lack of affordable housing options in the Lehigh Valley. This lack of affordable housing has prevented the ‘Housing First’ model from being truly successful at this time.

While it is acknowledged that there is an overall need for more shelter beds, it is particularly acute for families, transitional youth (ages 18–24), single women, and the LGBTQ+ population.

There are currently no emergency sheltering options available for families (other than hotel vouchers) in the Lehigh Valley. This lack of emergency sheltering for families is a significant and immediate need within the Lehigh Valley. Without this option, families often do not seek needed shelter to avoid splitting up their family unit.

Service providers also highlighted the lack of sheltering solutions for single women, referencing such options exist for single men (i.e., Allentown Rescue Mission, Victory House, etc.) but not for single women.

Certain populations may be deterred from seeking shelter based on the prevalence of congregant living in many Lehigh Valley shelters. Service providers noted that transitional youth (ages 18-24) and the LGBTQ+ community may prefer to seek alternatives to shelters (i.e. sleeping in car, sleeping outside) due to a perceived lack of safety and discomfort with current sheltering options.

There is a lack of concrete solutions to support the area’s chronically homeless population.

Service providers acknowledged that there are no long-term solutions and/or specific programs to assist the population identified as ‘chronically homeless’ (being homeless for one or more years as defined by HUD). It was observed that much of the chronically homeless population lives in encampments, though they may access emergency shelters during the winter months.

There is currently no long-term sheltering and/or housing solution identified for this population. There are strong programming/ services available to serve the chronically homeless, such as Street Medicine. Certain service providers support the “tiny homes” concept as a potential solution for the chronically homeless population. There is support for a multi-site solution across the Lehigh Valley, which will require regional collaboration, funding, policies, and programming.

Context & Current Situation

Lack of affordable housing and the affordability crisis was referenced as the most significant issue facing the unsheltered population.

The Lehigh Valley lacks sufficient affordable housing and rents have been rising aggressively in recent years. Between 2019 and 2022, the average median rent for a one-bedroom apartment rose by 57%, and the rental vacancy rate in Bethlehem is dire, sitting at about 2%. Insufficient affordable housing presents an obstacle to the Housing First pipeline, which is intended to move those experiencing homelessness from shelter to permanent housing. Shelter wait times are compounded by the region’s lack of an established affordable housing pipeline and limited affordable housing options.

Faced with limited affordable housing options, tenants put up with unsafe and substandard housing conditions. When a property is flagged by code enforcement and/or condemned, most landlords do not rehouse their tenants. This all contributes to the local rise in housing instability.

Housing Choice Vouchers which have historically helped people secure long-term affordable housing, is not keeping pace with local rising rents. Most landlords are hesitant to accept the voucher and deal with extra regulations when they can obtain much higher rents in the private rental market. HUD released their Fair Market Rents (FMRs) for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) in August 2023. In the Lehigh Valley HUD FMRs for FY24 for a two-bedroom unit in \$1,426.¹

¹ https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2024_code/2024summary.odn

Zillow data for June 2023 showed median rent for a two-bedroom unit was \$1,650 with 49 units available in the City of Bethlehem.

There is a recognized perception of the stigma of homelessness and how it affects the way people view themselves and how the community treats them.

Service providers emphasized the existing cultural ‘stigma’ of being homeless and that it greatly affects one’s perception of self and sense of dignity. The homelessness services system and negative perceptions of the public leave some unsheltered people feeling dehumanized and powerless, i.e., when they must rely on waiting lists for services/housing.

The Lehigh Valley community, service providers and institutions should prioritize treating those experiencing homelessness as neighbors in crisis as opposed to treating them as others. Experiencing homelessness can be a traumatic process that leaves people feeling voiceless and out of control.

Historically, the closing of the Allentown State Hospital increased the area’s overall unsheltered population. There’s also been an uptick in those experiencing homelessness due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the region’s affordability crisis.

Service providers and unsheltered individuals point to the 2010 closure of the Allentown State Hospital as one of the drivers of the Lehigh Valley’s increasing homeless population.

Unsheltered individuals have shared that the State Hospital was the last ‘home’ they knew.

Since the start of the pandemic, the population of those experiencing homelessness has jumped significantly, a trajectory that is expected to continue amid the region’s affordable housing crisis and lack of inventory. Service providers report larger populations

coming from wider geographic areas, as well as a rise in individuals and families experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence.

Service providers recognized the importance of their relationships with the counties (Lehigh and Northampton) to their funding and connections to resources.

The majority of service providers referenced strong connections with the counties that include established sources of funding and reimbursement as well as connectivity to ongoing resources in terms of existing and new funding/grant opportunities (i.e., COVID-19 funding streams).

Service providers characterized their relationships with the counties as positive and helpful in the administration of their programming and services. They also acknowledged that due to the counties’ role in funding and connectivity to services there is more alignment with the counties than with the cities (i.e., Bethlehem, Allentown, Easton).

Families are experiencing high rates of housing instability and homelessness. Entities like the Bethlehem Area School District are important partners working with service providers to identify families at-risk of homelessness and connect them to services.

The Bethlehem Area School District (BASD) participates in the United Way Communities in Schools Program, which focuses on helping children build their best lives by helping them overcome obstacles. Each Communities in School Program is structured to best meet the needs of the school and its student population. The majority of those interviewed expressed that currently families face enormous housing affordability challenges. Given current rental prices in the Lehigh Valley, families can find it more affordable to live in hotels, according to school officials. The rental market favors landlords, who can ask for multiple months of

rent upfront and enter into rental agreements that may be unfavorable or unfair to the tenant (i.e., not providing a standard year lease with renewal options).

School transiency rates – the percentage of students who transfer in and out of a school each year - clearly reflect the district’s rising housing instability. Donegan Elementary School has a mobility rate of 41%, Broughal Middle School a rate of 33%, and Fountain Hill Elementary is close to 50%. Most parents want to keep their children in their home school and are willing to pursue a variety of options, like hotels, doubling up with other families and/or family members, or accepting substandard rental properties, interviewees emphasized.

Within the last two years, BASD has partnered with New Bethany and the United Way to bring on a housing navigator who works in the schools to help families navigate housing programs, rental assistance, and tenants’ rights. This program has been immensely helpful in establishing a clear pathway to housing services and supporting families at risk of homelessness or who are currently experiencing homelessness.

BASD reported a 53% increase in homeless families from 2020 to 2022, with 414 homeless children registered in the district.

Accessibility issues within the existing sheltering options make it difficult to support individuals with mobility challenges and aging populations.

Service providers highlighted a clear deficiency in the accessibility of the Lehigh Valley’s current sheltering options and how it poses challenges to providing care to all who need assistance. Client advocates, such as the Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living, noted that shelters cannot accommodate mobility devices resulting in some seeking shelter being turned away or temporarily housed. Many of the Lehigh Valley’s sheltering options are in

retrofitted buildings or, in the example of the emergency sheltering options, in spaces that are not traditionally used as shelters (such as churches, community centers, etc.). Most do not meet current ADA accessibility standards and pose long-term challenges for service providers. In the case of New Bethany, their Single Residency Occupancy (SRO) units can only be accessed via stairs. As these tenants begin to age and potentially exhibit mobility challenges, there is not a clear or direct solution to enhancing accessibility to the units.

Additionally, it was observed that existing sheltering options do not have accommodations for service animals and lack facilities for those who may require an attendant for assistance. Service providers and client advocates acknowledged these ongoing challenges in serving unsheltered populations. Any future sheltering options must prioritize accessibility.

Within the City of Bethlehem a portion of the unsheltered population does not cross the bridges for services, making service provision on both the North and South sides essential.

The City is bisected by the Lehigh River and has three bridges traversing it. A Bethlehem-based service provider shared that while the majority (around 60%) of the unsheltered population in the city will utilize services on both sides of the bridges, about 40% will only access services where they are based (either North or South sides). This highlights the need for services on both the North and South sides to ensure adequate service provision for those seeking assistance and support.

Improving Sheltering Options

Spaces should integrate trauma-informed design.

Service providers acknowledged that many unsheltered individuals have experienced trauma and may be living with the effects of trauma. Congregant and open space living/sleeping areas can be triggering and may deter someone from seeking shelter if it is their only option. Private sleeping areas are seen as a strong start to more trauma-informed sheltering. Ideally, the Housing First model assists with mitigating the potential triggers for trauma by placing an individual directly in housing. The Valley's lack of an affordable housing pipeline and long-term shelter stays mean it is important to prioritize trauma-informed design in existing and future shelters.

Non-congregant living and sleeping spaces are the priority in any new facility and/or in any retrofits of existing facilities.

All service providers acknowledged that non-congregant living and sleeping spaces are the preferred layout for any sheltering option (emergency or transitional). Non-congregant shelters provide a sense of home and build a sense of security. They prioritize the dignity and sense of belonging of those accessing shelter. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many congregant shelters to identify non-congregant solutions – which in the short-term often meant hotels supported by COVID relief funds. Hotels are still heavily utilized; however, they are not a sustainable option as the funding for hotels is drying up.

A multisite built solution that includes wraparound services is seen as the most viable.

Service providers interviewed recommended

a multi-site, built solution as the best option to respond to current and future needs. Such a solution offers the most flexibility in terms of the type of housing (emergency, transition and affordable housing) offered and pairs well with a network of wraparound services for the unsheltered population. There are already potential hubs around existing service providers, like New Bethany's campus and the Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering drop-in center at St. John's Windish Church, which neighbors the Hispanic Center. A multisite solution could also support more coordinated intake processes to create a pipeline to services.

While the Southside has more existing services and resources, there is a potential community concern about locating additional sheltering options and/or services.

Multiple interviewees spoke to the strengths of the Southside as an existing service hub, pointing to the New Bethany campus and Hispanic Center. Overall, the Southside seems to be more 'accepting' and 'welcoming' to our unsheltered neighbors, and that the community is more accustomed to living alongside our unsheltered neighbors, according to interviewees.

Interviewees feared there could be Southside community pushback against locating a future shelter or built solution in a community already providing so many services and sheltering options. Concerns were expressed about potential community frustration and opposition that should be mitigated in relationship to potentially locating a future shelter in this area.

The current site of Bethlehem's emergency shelter could be a viable site for a future shelter, but certain concerns remain.

Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering is currently housed in a church in the City's Northside Historic District. While the site remains viable,

there is some uncertainty about its long-term availability pending a potential sale and its structural suitability for a permanent, year-round facility.

Neighbors have previously lodged quality of life complaints related to the shelter and opposed it opening earlier than zoning allowed amid frigid temps. It was stated by one interviewee that ‘the neighborhood is against us.’

A few other sites on the Northside were considered, including: the former Bottom Dollar building, the Boys and Girls Club, and the old sewing building/vacant car wash. It was also noted that a shelter located near the border of Allentown (Market and Central Blvd) would be huge for regional coordination.

While there is a need for more shelter space, some expressed concern about the City’s emphasis on a ‘built solution.’

Some interviewees stated that while more sheltering space is needed across Bethlehem and the Lehigh Valley, the City could be better served/positioned to develop access to housing. If more shelters are opened, they will fill up and that does not address the problem of a next step into transitional or longer-term housing. Unless there is a plan to move people out of the shelter and support the shelter to affordable housing pipeline, a new shelter will not solve the systemic issues facing our unsheltered neighbors.

Any discussion around a built solution needs to consider current zoning regulations and how they can be updated to support sheltering and built solutions to address homelessness.

Interviewees questioned how the City’s current zoning code treats permanent shelters and if zoning would have to be updated to allow for permanent shelters. Additionally, zoning should be viewed as a tool to increase affordable housing, where it be incentivized or promoted in another manner.

In considering additional stakeholders, the City should connect with local developers and the Bethlehem Housing Authority.

Ensure that developers and the Housing Authority are involved in these discussions, particularly around access to affordable housing and increasing the supply. These stakeholders should be engaged with the City and service providers to create a multipronged solution (i.e., blight remediation, landlord engagement, etc.). Additionally, part of the discussion needs to recognize and understand how growth, economic development, revitalization, and other proposed ‘improvements’ are affecting the city overall.

APPENDIX C

THEMES & FINDINGS FROM SURVEY OF INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSSES

The Consultant team conducted 107 surveys with individuals who were currently or had previously experienced homelessness. The Survey locations were:

- Ripple Community Inc. Drop-In Day Center (Allentown) – 18 survey interviews conducted
- New Bethany Food Pantry and Community Lunch (Bethlehem) – 18 survey interviews conducted
- Daybreak Center at Lehigh Conference of Churches (Allentown) – 33 survey interviews conducted
- Free Laundry Night with St. Luke’s Parish Nursing (Allentown) – 24 survey interviews conducted
- Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering Weekend Lunch (Bethlehem) – 14 survey interviews conducted

The survey questions sought insight into sheltering options in the Lehigh Valley and individual’s experiences accessing shelter. Surveys were conducted as short interviews and participants were compensated for their time with a \$5 Wawa gift card. Most survey interviews were between 3 to 5 minutes. It should be noted that prior to beginning the survey, participants were informed they could speak or choose not to answer any of the questions asked. Surveys were anonymous (individuals did not give their names or identifying information other than their approximate age). The average age of those surveyed was 48 years old.

A review of the Lived Experience Survey responses are summarized below by survey question.

How old were you the first time you experienced homelessness?

Of the 107 individuals surveyed, 18 did not respond or could not remember, and 11 indicated that they first experienced homelessness as a minor. Five respondents said that their first experience with homelessness occurred within the last calendar year. Of those who provided an age, the average was 37 years old, ranging from 8 to 73.

This past winter, which shelter services did you use?

- Bethlehem Emergency Shelter: 19%
- Allentown Emergency Shelter (YMCA): 23%
- Safe Harbor: 4%
- Allentown Rescue Mission: 11%
- Valley Youth House: 3%
- Family Promise: 0%
- Other overnight shelter: 8%
- Did not stay in a shelter: 47% (Respondents referred to staying with family/friends, staying in their car, staying outside, or in their own home as they were not unsheltered at that time)

Can you share a good experience you had at a shelter?

Sixty respondents did not have a good experience to share. Forty-six indicated they had a positive experience at least once at a shelter. Common responses included meeting other people or making friends, helpful staff members, and having a warm place to go or a warm meal. Four respondents mentioned help

from case workers or other services. Positive responses were distributed across many of the shelters, with nothing statistically significant for one single shelter.

Can you share a bad experience you had at a shelter?

Seventy-two respondents did not have a bad experience to share. Thirty-four shared examples of a bad experience. Of these, 11 pointed to stealing, drug use, or rough cultures within the shelter that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Nine indicated negative experiences resulting from shelter rules, such as shelter requirements, curfew, shower hours, and limited accessibility. Five mentioned negative experiences with staff. Two were uncomfortable with the overall acceptance of spending a night in a shelter, which made them upset. Finally, two mentioned overcrowding.

Have you ever been turned away from a shelter?

- No: 76%
- Yes: 24%
 - If you were turned away, what happened? (Responses reflect the 24% that indicated they had been turned away)
 - Shelter was too full or there was no availability: 31%
 - Too late: 19%
 - Lack of ID or documents: 15%
 - Protocol violation (kicked out, shower misuse, Covid, pet): 15%

Have you ever chosen not to stay at a shelter for any of the following reasons? (Respondents could indicate all that apply)

- I couldn't stay with my spouse/partner/family: 13%
- I couldn't bring my pet: 2%
- I didn't have a place to store my belongings while I was at the shelter: 2%

- I felt unsafe: 8%
- I felt unwelcome or unwanted: 8%
- I didn't get along with the staff: 4%
- It was too hard to get to or from the shelter: 4%
- I was worried they would run a background check: 2%
- Other (Have another place to stay, i.e. hotel, friend/family, prefer to be alone/outside): 23%

This winter, where have you slept at night? (Respondents could indicate all that apply)

- In my own home/apartment: 13%
- In a rented room: 9%
- In a hotel: 2%
- In a shelter: 21%
- At a friend's home/at a family member's home: 19%
- In a tent or in the woods: 18%
- At the hospital/waiting room: 3%
- In a laundromat, parking garage, or other similar space: 1%
- Other (car or van; outside, streets, park, on my own): 18%

Think about the last time you were securely housed in a place that you considered to be your "home." Why did you leave that home? (Respondents could indicate all that apply)

- Kicked out: 7%
- Ran away: 7%
- Abuse at home (physical, emotional, sexual): 1%
- Drug use at home (yourself or others): 2%
- Neglect: 0%
- Self-harm: 0%
- Gang-related conflicts: 0%
- Mental health: 2%
- Criminal involvement: 3%
- Disagreeing with expectations/rules at home: 6%
- Relationship conflicts (family, friends, significant others): 13%
- Basic needs not being met (shelter, food,

- clothing, etc.): 3%
- Other:
 - Evicted: 7%
 - Crowding, condemned, landlord issue: 17%

What is keeping you from finding housing?

- I can't find a place I can afford: 56%
- I have a physical disability and can't find an accessible apartment: 10%
- I have a pet and can't find an apartment that accepts pets: 0%
- I have past evictions that make it hard to find a place to live: 2%
- I have a criminal background that makes it hard to find a place to live: 4%
- I'm more comfortable 'sleeping rough': 2%
- Other:
 - Waiting/Applied for housing: 12%
 - Lacking ID or other documentation: 7%

Where do you spend time during the day when the shelters are closed?

- At a day program like Daybreak, the Club House, Ripple Community Inc., or the Gathering Place: 57%
- At a recovery center: 0%
- At the library: 10%
- At the bus station: 1%
- At a friend or family member's house: 13%
- At a coffee shop, laundromat, or other business: 1%
- Other:
 - Outside or on my own: 21%
 - Work: 11%

APPENDIX D

COST ESTIMATE COMPARISONS FOR SITE ACQUISITION, DEMOLITION, CAPTIAL CONSTRUCTION, & REHABILITATION

Cost Estimate: New Construction

Demolition: N/A	Construction Contingency: \$430,680
Acquisition: \$277,500	Legal & Insurance: \$89,725
Site Improvements: \$80,000	Construction Management: \$53,835
Construction/Rehab: \$3,589,000	Financing: \$179,450
Permitting & Environmental: \$107,640	Architecture & Engineering Fees: \$269,175
Inspections: \$17,945	Fixtures, Furniture, & Equipment: \$425,500
General Requirements: \$269,175	Private Storage Lockers: \$37,500
Contractor Overhead: \$89,725	Utilities: \$40,000
TOTAL: \$5,956,800	

Cost Estimate: Rehab (Shell)

Demolition: \$185,000	Construction Contingency: \$288,600
Acquisition: \$1,258,000	Legal & Insurance: \$60,125
Site Improvements: \$60,000	Construction Management: \$36,075
Construction/Rehab: \$2,405,000	Financing: \$120,250
Permitting & Environmental: \$72,150	Architecture & Engineering Fees: \$180,375
Inspections: \$12,025	Fixtures, Furniture, & Equipment: \$425,500
General Requirements: \$180,375	Private Storage Lockers: \$37,500
Contractor Overhead: \$60,125	Utilities: \$30,000
TOTAL: \$5,411,100	

Cost Estimate: Rehab (Existing community building)

Demolition: \$92,500	Construction Contingency: \$277,500
Acquisition: \$1,998,00	Legal & Insurance: \$57,813
Site Improvements: \$25,000	Construction Management: \$34,688
Construction/Rehab: \$3,977,500	Financing: \$115,5625
Permitting & Environmental: \$69,375	Architecture & Engineering Fees: \$173,438
Inspections: \$11,563	Fixtures, Furniture, & Equipment: \$296,000
General Requirements: \$173,438	Private Storage Lockers: \$37,500
Contractor Overhead: \$57,813	Utilities: \$20,000
TOTAL: \$7,417,750	

Cost Estimate: Rehab (Hotel/motel)

Demolition: \$37,000	Construction Contingency: \$177,600
Acquisition: \$2,183,000	Legal & Insurance: \$37,000
Site Improvements: \$25,000	Construction Management: \$22,200
Construction/Rehab: \$1,480,000	Financing: \$74,000
Permitting & Environmental: \$44,400	Architecture & Engineering Fees: \$111,000
Inspections: \$7,400	Fixtures, Furniture, & Equipment: \$333,000
General Requirements: \$111,000	Private Storage Lockers: \$37,5000
Contractor Overhead: \$37,000	Utilities: \$20,000
TOTAL: \$4,737,100	

