



Department Source: Public Health and Human Services

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: February 7, 2022

Re: Report on City Homelessness

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to outline the City of Columbia's role in addressing the issue of homelessness in our community and to provide information about the City's overnight warming center program. For detailed information about the issue of homelessness, please see the following attachment to this report:

- Overview of Homelessness in Columbia/Boone County (Attachment 1)
- Division of Human Services Presentation on Homelessness in Columbia/Boone County (Attachment 2)
- City Council Report REP52-16 Chronic Homelessness (Attachment 3)

## Report

### The City of Columbia's Role in Addressing Homelessness

The City of Columbia has long played a leadership role in addressing homelessness in our community. The City's efforts can be categorized as follows:

- Contracting with local providers for human, healthcare, and housing assistance services
- The provision of direct human, healthcare, and housing assistance services and programs
- Coordination, leadership, and support for community providers and collaborations
- Leverage and Coordinate state, federal, and local resources

### Contracts

For decades, the City of Columbia has contracted with community base providers for human, health, and housing services. Funding for these contracts is primarily from City general revenue social services funding and federal CDBG/HOME funding received by the City. Current contracts for homeless services and housing assistance are outlined in the charts below.

Homeless Services					
Provider	Program	Service	Amount	Funding Source	Contract Period
Columbia Interfaith Resource Center	Room at the Inn	overnight emergency shelter	\$75,017.50	General Revenue-Social Services Funding	2022-2023



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Columbia Interfaith Resource Center	Room at the Inn	24-hour emergency shelter (isolation/quarantine capacity)	\$75,000.00	General Revenue-Social Services Funding	2022-2023
Phoenix Programs, Inc.	Project Bridge	case management	\$27,497.82	General Revenue-Social Services Funding	2022-2023
The Salvation Army	Harbor House Emergency Shelter	24-hour emergency shelter	\$44,968.91	General Revenue-Social Services Funding	2022-2023
		overnight emergency shelter	\$14,970.20		
		emergency shelter assistance	\$50,000.00	CDBG CARES Round 3	2022
		transitional shelter	\$44,708.59	General Revenue-Public Assistance	2022
Wilkes Boulevard United Methodist Church	Turning Point	homeless drop-in center	\$89,991.76	General Revenue-Social Services Funding	2022-2023

**Total** \$422,154.78

Housing Assistance Services					
ORGANIZATION	PROGRAM NAME	SERVICE	SERVICE AMOUNT	Funding Source	
Columbia Housing Authority	Tenant Based Rental Assistance	rental assistance	\$300,000.00	2020 HOME	2021-2022
			\$110,000.00	2021 HOME	2021-2022
Central Missouri Community Action	Rent and Mortgage Assistance Program	rental assistance	\$46,500.00	General Revenue-Public Assistance	July 1, 2021 – June



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					30, 2022
Love Columbia	Path Forward	rental assistance	\$110,000.00	General Revenue-Public Assistance	July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022
Rock the Community	Rock the Resources	rental assistance	\$115,500.00	General Revenue-Public Assistance	July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022
Voluntary Action Center	Housing Program	case management	\$38,930.10	General Revenue-Social Services Funding	2022-2023
		service coordination	\$11,070.00		
			\$220,000.00	CDBG CARES Round3	2021-2022
			\$10,000.00	General Revenue-Public Assistance	2021-2022

**Total** \$962,000.10

In addition, the Housing and Community Development Commission has recommended \$2,000,000.00 in HOME-ARP funding for the Columbia Housing Authority Kinney Point project (24 public housing units), which is pending a public hearing and Council approval.

It is important to note that a significant portion of the funding indicated above is from one time sources, including the City Council's allocation of City reserves for public assistance funding for the pandemic response in FY2021. One time funds also include the federal CDBG CARES and HOME-ARP funding received by the City. The City's ongoing investment in social services was reduced from \$903,743 in FY2009 to \$893,556 in FY2010 (a reduction of 1.1% or \$10,187) and has been held flat since that time.

In support of the community's goal to achieve a functional zero level of homelessness, which was established at the Homelessness Summit hosted by the City in 2016, an increasing amount of the City's social services funding has been allocated to homeless services. In 2016, the City was investing \$68,200.00 in homeless services. The FY2022 social services contracts include \$302,446.29 for homeless services. To do so, we have had to unfortunately, but strategically,



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reduce the number and amounts of contracts for children, youth, and family services and mental health services. These service sectors were chosen due to the passage of the Boone County Children's Services Tax and Medicaid expansion.

It is worth noting that many of the social services contracted by the City are utilized by persons experiencing homelessness, even if they are not necessarily the target population for the services. Examples include the Food Bank Central Pantry food pantry, True North domestic violence shelter, and Compass Health mental health services.

## **Direct Services**

The City provides a wide variety of human, health, and housing services and programs, some of which are targeted specifically to address the issue of homelessness, such as the Warming/Cooling Center and Overnight Warming Center programs.

Like the social services contracted by the City, many of the human, health, and housing services provided by the City are utilized by persons experiencing homelessness, even if they are not necessarily the target population for the services. Examples include the utility assistance, medication assistance, and pregnancy support services.

## **Coordination, Leadership, and Support for Community Providers and Collaborations**

The City of Columbia has provided structural support and led many of the community's collaborative efforts to address the issue of homelessness including:

- Served as the lead agency for the Boone County continuum of care, prior to the community joining the Missouri Balance of State Continuum of Care.
- Staff served on the Governor's Committee to End Homelessness and on the charter board of directors to form the Missouri Balance of State Continuum of Care.
- Assisted with the development and implementation of the Room at the Inn winter emergency shelter.
- Led and coordinated the relocation and expansion of homeless drop-in center
- Hosted and coordinated the community Homelessness Summit in 2016.
- Initiated and coordinated the development of the Columbia Homeless Outreach Team.
- Provide foundational support for the Functional Zero Task Force and the coordinated entry process.
- Chair and provide support for the Emergency Food and Shelter Program local board.
- Lead and coordinate the annual Point in Time Count of persons experiencing homelessness in our community.
- Assist with the coordination of our community's bi-annual Project Homeless Connect event.
- Coordinate the humane response to homeless camp cleanups on public property.
- Coordinate homeless services and housing assistance partners to streamline processes, implement best practices, reduce barriers for consumers, and prevent the duplication of services.

City staff also provide ongoing technical support and consultation for our community based homeless services providers. This includes intensive supports provided throughout the



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pandemic to ensure that our homeless services and housing assistance partners and their program consumers were well equipped and informed so that operations could be maintained safely. We are very proud that none of our shelters ceased operations or stopped accepting new guests throughout the pandemic.

## **Leverage and Coordinate State, Federal, and Local Resources**

As with most health, human, housing, and education services, funding for programming to address homelessness is provided by a complex combination of local, state, and federal funding sources, private foundations and support organizations (e.g., United Way), faith-based organizations, and direct support for nonprofit providers. Volunteers are also a key resource.

City staff play a key role in ensuring the City and our community partners are aware of and access available resources. As a result, our community has done an excellent job of accessing state, federal resources, and philanthropic resources. For example, Boone County is the largest recipient of Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions grant funding among counties in the Missouri Balance of State Continuum of Care.

In Columbia/Boone County, local funders collaborate as the Boone Impact Group to coordinate and provide funding for health, human, and housing services. This includes the City of Columbia, Boone County, the Heart of Missouri United Way, and the Veterans United Foundation. Through this partnership we are able to collectively tackle issues and target resources. For example, at the request of the City, the Veterans United Foundation recently awarded funding for a coordinated entry specialist position, which fills a longstanding gap in our capacity to coordinate our collaborative community efforts to address and end homelessness.

## City of Columbia Overnight Warming Center

### **Background**

*January, 2019*

In January 2019, City staff were made aware that both the Salvation Army and Room at the Inn (RATI) had reached capacity and were having to turn unsheltered individuals away overnight. In response to the projected temperatures at or below 0 degrees, the City opened an overnight emergency warming shelter at the Regional Economic Development Inc. hub on January 29, 2019 to offer a safe and warm facility to those unable to seek shelter. Other community partners stepped in to fill gaps including Turning Point, who remained open during the daytime hours, and the VA hospital which opened their lobby overnight as an additional warming center. The Wabash Transit Station was opened on January 30, 2019 due to continuing extreme weather conditions. The Boone County Office of Emergency Management provided pillows, blankets, and water for use at Wabash.



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## *February, 2019*

On February 26, 2019 Councilmembers Trapp and Thomas made a request of the City Manager to re-open Wabash on March 2, 2019 due to extreme weather conditions forecasted. Security for the REDI and Wabash sites was provided by Airport Security Officers.

## *March, 2019*

City staff from Public Health and Human Services, Columbia Police Department, Columbia Fire Department, Parks & Recreation, Public Works, and Community Relations along with representatives from the Office of Emergency Management and the National Weather Service - St. Louis met in March of 2019 to develop criteria for opening the overnight emergency warming center. The team reviewed practices from other communities in the United States and found no one set criteria that was standard. In correspondence received from Councilmembers Trapp and Thomas, it was suggested that the overnight warming center should be used for extreme situations and suggested a threshold of below 10 degrees would be beneficial. Staff also reviewed the overnight capacity of both Salvation Army and RATI to assess when they had overflow numbers and correlated that with weather conditions. Staff determined that the suggested temperature threshold of below 10 degrees did correlate with overflow at both facilities.

## *October, 2019*

A protocol for opening the overnight emergency warming center was submitted to the City Council for review on October 7, 2019. The Council minutes for October 7, 2019 can be found here:

[https://gocolumbiamo.legistar1.com/gocolumbiamo/meetings/2019/10/3294\\_M\\_City\\_Council\\_19-10-07\\_Meeting\\_Minutes.pdf](https://gocolumbiamo.legistar1.com/gocolumbiamo/meetings/2019/10/3294_M_City_Council_19-10-07_Meeting_Minutes.pdf)

## *January, 2020*

In January 2020, Transit staff communicated with the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) to assure that Wabash could be used as an overnight emergency warming center. The FTA confirmed that their concerns were addressed if Transit revised the hours of the shelter so as not to conflict with transit operations; that safety concerns were addressed by providing safety personnel on site at all times; that any possible liability issues would be managed through the City and General Liability insurance coverage; and that maintenance and janitorial staff will be utilized to prepare the facility for operations the following day.

## *January, 2022*

On January 21, 2022, City Manager Seewood requested that the temperature threshold to open up Wabash be increased to 15 degrees for the remainder of the 2021/2022 season due to the continued lower capacity of RATI as a result of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

## Activation and Utilization

The following charts summarize the overnight warming center activation and utilization to date.



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<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>Date</b>
	1/29/2019
	1/30/2019
	2/12/2019
	2/13/2019

Total Nights **4**

<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>Date</b>
	1/19/2020
	1/20/2020
	2/12/2020
	2/13/2020

Total Nights **4**

Staff did not begin formally collecting information on operating nights and people in attendance until the winter of 2020-2021.

<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Overnight Warming Center Number of Guests</b>	<b>Temperature Threshold</b>	<b>Actual Temp</b>
	2/6/2021	4	<= 9	6
2/7/2021	10	3		
2/8/2021	8	11		
2/9/2021	13	9		
2/10/2021	16	11		
2/11/2021	15	11		
2/12/2021	10	4		
2/13/2021	14	0		
2/14/2021	16	-3		
2/15/2021	13	-4		
2/16/2021	17	-8		
2/17/2021	17	5		
2/18/2021	19	2		

Total Nights **13** Avg. **13.2**

Staff are now tracking dates of operation, number of guests, capacity and empty beds at RATI and Salvation Army.

<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Overnight Warming Center Number of Guests</b>	<b>RATI</b>		<b>Salvation Army Harbor House</b>		<b>Temperature Threshold</b>	<b>Actual Temp</b>
		<b>Capacity</b>	<b>Empty Beds</b>	<b>Capacity</b>	<b>Empty Beds</b>			
	1/1/2022	15	46	6	76	5	<= 9	10
	1/2/2022	16	50	6	76	6		10



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	1/5/2022	15	50	1	76	4		9
	1/6/2022	24	50	5	76	3		7
	1/19/2022	21	58	0	76	13		11
	1/20/2022	18	58	0	76	4		4
	1/21/2022	23	58	0	76	7	<= 15	1
	1/24/2022	25	58	8	76	5		10
	1/25/2022	26	58	3	76	8		12
	1/27/2022	17	58	3	76	11		24
	1/28/2022	27	58	6	76	7		13

Total Nights **11**      Avg. **20.6**

## Analysis

The City of Columbia overnight warming center is intended to serve as a refuge of last resort for persons unwilling or unable to access local emergency shelter services, during periods of extreme cold weather.

The community's current total emergency shelter capacity is at least 204 beds, not including the City's overnight warming center. This also does not include the motel vouchers provided by Voluntary Action Center, Love Columbia, and Phoenix Programs, which are technically considered shelter beds. Nor does this include the beds at True North of Columbia, which is our local domestic violence shelter.

Columbia emergency shelters and their current capacity are as follows:

Shelter	Capacity	Notes
Salvation Army	76	61 beds/15 cold weather cots
Room at the Inn	30-90	dependent on location (currently 58)
Phoenix Programs	14	
Rainbow House (children)	14	
Welcome Home (veterans)	36	
St. Francis House (men)	3	
Flourish (youth)	6	

The Salvation Army Harbor House serves as the primary year-round general population shelter for Columbia and Boone County. Room at the Inn provides a critical secondary level of



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overnight shelter during the winter months. The City of Columbia provides funding to both entities to support these important operations.

The program in Lawrence, KS, which community members have referenced, is a winter emergency shelter. Which is to say, it is Lawrence's version of our RATI winter emergency shelter. It is important to note that the Lawrence winter emergency shelter is only opened if the temperature is below 35 degrees, whereas RATI is open 7 days/week from mid-December through mid-March, regardless of temperature. In addition to our community's winter emergency shelter, we operate an overnight warming center, which is a service Lawrence does not provide.

In previous years prior to the pandemic, even on the coldest winter nights, we typically have enough shelter capacity for those seeking shelter. While our staff have worked hard to keep our shelters open throughout the pandemic, things have certainly been challenging. Our winter shelter capacity is lower than normal as RATI has had to limit capacity to provide adequate distancing. At its current location, in a normal winter (i.e. no pandemic), RATI would have a capacity of at least 75, but the current capacity is 55.

There are always a handful of people who are banned from RATI (usually temporarily) and Salvation Army. These are folks for which the overnight warming center is their only option. However, the majority of people utilizing the overnight warming center forgo available shelter beds.

Using the night of Wednesday 1/19/22 as an example, RATI was full at 55, there were 12 open cots at Salvation Army Harbor House, and 21 people utilized the overnight warming center. Therefore, on that night, the community lacked 8 emergency beds for unsheltered individuals. This is due to the pandemic, which has caused RATI to limit capacity. Had RATI been operating at their normal capacity, there would have had more than enough emergency shelter bed capacity that night.

The following charts indicate the monthly number of nights at six temperature thresholds, for the current and previous four winters.

	Temperature Threshold	Nov 2017	Dec 2017	Jan 2018	Feb 2018	Mar 2018	Total
<b>2017-2018</b>	</= 9	0	5	8	1	0	14
	</= 15	0	5	14	7	0	26
	</= 20	0	10	15	10	0	35
	</= 25	2	14	18	13	2	49
	</= 32	11	22	24	21	10	88
	</= 35	13	22	26	21	17	99



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2018-2019	Temperature Threshold	Nov 2018	Dec 2018	Jan 2019	Feb 2019	Mar 2019	Total
	</= 9	0	0	5	1	3	9
	</= 15	3	1	9	4	4	21
	</= 20	6	6	10	7	4	33
	</= 25	8	8	16	17	6	55
	</= 32	17	20	27	25	11	100
	</= 35	21	25	29	27	16	118

2019-2020	Temperature Threshold	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020	Total
	</= 9	1	0	0	2	0	3
	</= 15	2	1	4	3	0	10
	</= 20	5	3	4	5	0	17
	</= 25	7	8	10	13	0	38
	</= 32	14	26	26	22	4	92
	</= 35	19	32	28	24	8	111

2020-2021	Temperature Threshold	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Total
	</= 9	0	1	0	13	0	14
	</= 15	0	2	1	14	0	17
	</= 20	0	4	2	15	0	21
	</= 25	1	12	8	17	0	38
	</= 32	8	26	25	24	3	86
	</= 35	11	26	20	27	7	91

2021-2022	Temperature Threshold	Nov 2021	Dec 2021	Jan 2022	Total to Date
	</= 9	0	0	5	5
	</= 15	0	0	10	10
	</= 20	0	1	19	20
	</= 25	1	6	27	34
	</= 32	9	14	45	68
	</= 35	14	16	56	86

## Discussion



As we discuss the temperature threshold for the City's overnight warming center, the following issues should be carefully considered:

- The intent of the program
- City resources
- The wellbeing of our unsheltered population
- The impact of the program on our community partners

The City's overnight warming center was conceived as a harm reduction strategy to ensure a warm place for unsheltered individuals who cannot access emergency shelter when our community's emergency shelter capacity is reached during periods of extreme winter weather. It was not intended to serve as an emergency shelter.

The overnight warming center program has been implemented and operated with existing staff and facility resources. No additional funding has been allocated for City operational expenses or for contracted services for the overnight warming center program.

The program has proven to be a labor intensive. City staffing and partner agency requirements for the overnight warming center program are as follows:

- Public Health and Human Services staff constantly monitor temperatures, seven days/week, throughout each winter.
- Public Health and Human Services staff provide notification of activation of the overnight warming center internally and to external partners.
- Columbia Police Department provides security for the site. This entails pulling an on-duty officer from other assignments to staff the overnight warming center.
- Public Health and Human Services staff coordinate intensively with street outreach and shelter provider partners from 7-9 p.m. each night the overnight warming center is opened. Staff receive ongoing updates on shelter bed availability from emergency shelter providers and relay that information to the street outreach staff on the ground, at the overnight warming center. Street outreach staff then try to convince overnight warming center guests to utilize available emergency shelter beds and arrange or provide transportation for those that chose to do so.
- Phoenix Programs, RATI, and Turning Point staff assist voluntarily with street outreach at the overnight warming center.
- RATI and Salvation Army staff voluntarily coordinate with City staff to monitor and communicate emergency shelter bed availability.
- Transit custodial staff clean the facility at 6:00 a.m. so that the FTA requirement that the warming center not interfere with transit operations is met. The cleaning needs are extensive. There are no custodial services at Wabash on the weekends.

The Wabash facility is not an ideal location for an emergency overnight warming center in any year, and it is especially unsuitable during a pandemic. The Columbia Fire Department established the capacity for Wabash at 13 people prior to the onset of the pandemic. Even at a limit of 13, which is being exceeded regularly, there is no feasible way to maintain social distancing to mitigate the spread of disease in this environment.



The safest environment for our unsheltered community is in emergency shelters where protocols are in place for COVID-19 safety. When faced with extreme conditions where capacity has been exceeded in the shelters, or for those who are banned from using the existing shelter, the Public Health and Human Services Department prioritizes protection from extreme temperatures over disease risk.

It is critical that those unsheltered persons who cannot utilize emergency shelter services due to prior issues at the shelters, or because the shelters are full, have a warm, overnight refuge of last resort. However, it is important to understand that those who utilize the overnight warming center do not receive the wrap-around services provided by our emergency shelter provider partners.

It is also worth noting that the City's overnight warming center does have a financial impact on our shelter provider partners, which are primarily compensated (including under City contracts) based on shelter bed utilization. It also requires the community to use its precious few street outreach resources to staff the overnight warming center to simply try to convince people to use the shelter beds available to them.

## Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

### Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Safe Neighborhoods, Secondary Impact: Resilient Economy, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

### Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities, Secondary Impact: Not applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

## Suggested Council Action

It has been clear for some time that Columbia needs a long term, permanent solution to the complex issue of homelessness. We are hopeful that, with the support of the City, the collaboration of community partners will soon result in the development of a comprehensive homeless services center, which will negate the need for an overnight warming center.

Until a that time, based on our experience operating the City's overnight warming center to date, the current City and community capacity and resources, and the current needs of people experiencing homelessness in our community, staff recommends entering into a contract with a community provider to provide the overnight warming center program. This is in keeping with our more typical approach of partnering with community based partners



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to provide large scale social service programs. These public/private partnerships allow programming to be provided by organizations with expertise in the service delivery area and maximize other direct support resources such as donations and volunteers, which are more challenging for the City to acquire.

If the City is to continue operating the overnight warming center program as an internal City program, staff recommends:

- Purchase private security services in lieu of Columbia Police Department staffing.
- Coordinate with the Office of Neighborhood Services to identify a volunteer pool to assist with the clean-up of Wabash.
- Maintain an opening threshold of 15 degrees for this winter season during the pandemic and transition back to the 9 degree threshold for the 2022-2023 winter season.