



AGENDA SUMMARY PAGE
CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 21, 2016

DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES
DIRECTOR: STEPHEN HARSIN

☐ Consent ☒ Discussion

SUBJECT:

Report by the Office of Community Services staff regarding an update on the City of Las Vegas homeless strategies and activities that include efforts associated with the master planning of the Corridor of Hope near the intersections of Las Vegas Boulevard and Owens Avenue and Foremaster Lane, Las Vegas, and the intersection of Las Vegas Boulevard and 5 (Barlow).

Fiscal Impact

☐ No Impact ☐ Augmentation Required
☐ Budget Funds Available

Amount:

Funding Source:

Dept./Division:

PURPOSE/BACKGROUND:

Homelessness inflicts significant social and economic harm on individuals, families, neighborhoods and government. Las Vegas has one of the nations highest concentrations of urban homelessness. The city of Las Vegas is working diligently with governments, homeless providers nonprofits, businesses, and civic leaders to develop and implement impactful and sustainable solutions that address unmet needs and make effective use of public resources. The Office of Community Services assembled a 31 member of community stakeholders to for the Citys Homeless Advisory Committee to discuss and address homeless issues impacting our community.

RECOMMENDATION:

Report only, no action required.

BACKUP DOCUMENTATION:

Submitted at Meeting - PowerPoint Presentation

Minutes:

Using the attached PowerPoint, STEPHEN HARSIN, Director of Community Services, provided an updated overview of homeless strategies occurring in the city. He introduced RICK VAN DIEPEN, principal of GreenView Global, architect and leader of the workshops, ARNOLD STALK, 840 South Rancho Drive, and SERGEANT BRET FICKLIN, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (Metro).

MR. HARSIN reported that Las Vegas ranked fifth for the rate of unsheltered homeless; a few years ago, it ranked third; he qualified that every city in the country has homeless issues, but many were working together and sharing ideas.

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In 2015, he reported that approximately 34,400 persons experienced homelessness in all of Southern Nevada, which translated into about 7,500 homeless people on any given day. A further breakdown of these statistics into the subcategories victims of domestic violence, families with children, children, veterans and seniors was provided. The various reasons an individual could become homeless were named, and the challenges and barriers reviewed.

MR. HARSIN stated there was a 31member Homeless Advisory Committee that had been working and meeting with staff to work through these issues. Guiding principles included looking at more effective uses of City resources to address homelessness, addressing unmet needs, addressing service-resistant populations, reflecting best practices and implementing a bold, visionary and pioneering plan.

The mission of the group was to connect street homeless in the urban core to housing and services that improve safety, health and wellness. The five key strategies identified by the community stakeholders were reviewed. Proactive outreach was a huge component which involved individuals walking the streets, identifying the homeless and talking to them.

MR. HARSIN stated that there were 150,000 Help Cards distributed on the street which were a great resource to direct people where to go. The Wet Shelter, Housing First, Veterans Housing and the Shannon West Youth Center were all mentioned.

He noted that the City had partnered with CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc.), which provided communal mailboxes, coat check and a drop-in/resource center. The City also partnered with Caridad which was focusing on Fremont Street. Because of this, the Fremont Street Experience also partnered with Caridad to help fund the outreach occurring downtown. Additionally, the contract with the Downtown Rangers was just expanded for Downtown East.

With regard to accountability, MR. HARSIN stated that in just over one year, Caridad reported 1,755 homeless contacts downtown, with 766 accepting services. He provided the percentages and the types of services accepted which helped identify the movement, where an impact was being made and the reasons for declining assistance. COUNCILMAN BEERS wondered if the contacts made were controlled to account for duplicate contacts. MR. HARSIN indicated that the statistics provided related to unduplicated contacts. COUNCILMAN BARLOW stated he had worked on the homeless issue downtown his entire career at the City and asked MR. HARSIN if those individuals that fell under these categories were considered service resistant, to which MR. HARSIN confirmed. MR. HARSIN shared a success story where a woman had lived on the streets for 40 years before accepting help, and it was interesting to hear her reasons for not accepting help earlier. He referenced a survey that was being done to obtain information to see if there was something that could be done to correct the system.

COUNCILMAN BARLOW noted the difficulty involved when trying to redevelop and attract new business in an area where a homeless problem existed. Even with all the money spent and resources put towards this issue, it remained. He thought something needed to be done to

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address those individuals that throw trash and food on the city streets, utilize the streets as a restroom and then leave the area. He stressed the importance of looking out for the businesses already in the area and how vital it was to get a handle on this issue. He thought new ideas and strategic approaches had to be brought to the table to make a visible difference in the community. He indicated that this was a regional problem, not just a Ward 5 problem; the region as a whole had to help.

COUNCILMAN COFFIN agreed that there should be treatment options in all Wards, not just Ward 5, and he was in support of all of the solutions being proposed. MAYOR GOODMAN stated this issue was pervasive around the country, and it was a long-standing, recurring problem. MR. HARSIN explained that was why the community and businesses were involved in this process. Referencing the costs involved with law enforcement picking someone up with mental health issues, that person being housed for a couple days, possibly medicated and counseled, MAYOR GOODMAN stressed involving the Governor to open up care facilities so those with mental health issues could be treated.

MR. HARSIN indicated the work being done with the Salvation Army, who does an outdoor campaign and partners with the Regional Transportation Commission on bus shelters and trash cans, resulted in increased meals served and in day and night shelter use. These were the types of partnerships the City wanted to continue.

Two Public Service Announcements (PSAs) were played; one that showed the best way an individual could help and one with a focus on Veteran homelessness. MR. HARSIN stated these were examples of what the City was doing right. The City of San Diego was so impressed with these PSAs that they replicated them almost verbatim for their community.

He reminded everyone of the Project Homeless Connect event November 15, 2016. He said the City was a leader on surveying the street homeless, the service resistant, not those in shelters. He named those elements that appeared to be working.

MR. HARSIN reviewed what to expect next: the public bathroom concept, which turned out to be much harder than first thought, business awareness and engagement, the Corridor of Hope Charrette on October 27, 2016, continued coordinated outreach for other areas of the City, mental health services and collaboration, traffic circulation around the Corridor of Hope, immediate housing program with landlords and a homeless court program with the municipal courts.

With regard to the master plan for the Corridor of Hope, part of the design would be determining how to repurpose the two properties acquired at 1401 North Las Vegas Boulevard and 1425 North Main Street. A map was displayed outlining the Corridor of Hope and a map showing where services were available. MR. HARSIN reminded the Council that what was presented were just preliminary ideas that the community had relayed and nothing was final. MAYOR GOODMAN acknowledged that this issue was an enormous undertaking and appreciated everything staff was doing.

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MR. STALK commended the City, Mayor, Council and staff for taking the problem seriously; the good news was that there were a lot of business, community and homeless people interested in helping solve the problem.

MR. STALK commented that the City of Las Vegas had taken the lead in Southern Nevada in creating a master plan and foundation for solving the problem of chronic homelessness which seemed to be centered in downtown Las Vegas. The design charrette process was an intensive, open to the public planning session where collaboration took place to resolve this visible and difficult problem through a democratic and transparent process. The charrette provided a forum for sharing ideas and offered the unique advantage of giving immediate feedback to the designers, but more importantly, it allowed everyone in the community who participated to be a mutual author of the plan. He noted the hundreds of hours put in by volunteers and the many nonprofits that were very closely involved in the process.

MR. VAN DIEPEN expressed his excitement to report on the progress, specifically, the focus on physical progress, which was what the Committee was tasked with doing. He echoed MR. STALKS comments in that this was a fantastic and very important challenge that the City was undertaking and as a Council, recognizing this problem as part of the strategic plan to make the city better. This was about making businesses more profitable, increasing land values and making downtown a better place to live and work. There were 31 people on the committee and a huge amount of momentum, which he thought was due to the private sector coming into the process and helping to guide it. The overall theme of physical improvements was to address safety and improve outreach opportunities, affordable housing and health and hygiene. He shared a personal story of how his family stayed with several families at a church being housed by Family Promise.

MR. VAN DIEPEN commended Metro and Anderson Dairy for their innovative input. He reviewed the current challenges, which included no 24-hour public restrooms outside of service providers, limited trash containers, no place for respite between meals, street feeding, no storage for carts or personal belongings, no bridge housing options to shelters and no mental health clinic within walking distance. He noted that other communities had done great things with bridge housing; there was a prototype at Veterans Village which was a recycled shipping container and a portable and affordable way to provide temporary housing.

Photos of coat check storage, bridge micro housing and mobile public restrooms and showers were displayed. He explained how coat check storage worked and that bridge micro housing had a secured perimeter with on-site services and was intended as temporary housing before cycling into permanent housing.

The first charrette was mostly a brainstorming session. One of the concepts discussed at that meeting was creating a semi-pedestrian street on Foremaster Lane, using the area for outreach and as the front door to the Corridor of Hope.

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The second charrette was focused on creating an area where everything, such as an on-site donation center, kitchen, computers, recreation, informational kiosks and navigation center that connected all services could be centralized; an outreach park scheme was also discussed. The other idea was to treat the area as if it were a neighborhood. It could be safer, more attractive and create a sense of pride for the area. Things considered were reducing the speed limit on Main Street, providing more pedestrian access and sidewalks and additional lighting and cameras for Metro to monitor. He described several other ideas that came out of these sessions; the goal was to figure out how to get services to the people on the street and then transition them to other services and expand that to job training opportunities within the Corridor of Hope.

MAYOR GOODMAN appreciated the comprehensive report. She asked anyone from the public with ideas to call MR. HARSIN, who invited the public to become involved and attend some of the charrettes.

SERGEANT FICKLIN commented that one of the issues was that the other area commands dealt with their homeless problem by just getting them out of the area. This could include arresting them or taking them to one of the services. He noted that there was one officer who was assigned strictly to homeless issues, and he was afraid that officer would get burned out. With Metro's goal being to make downtown a better place to live, work and visit, it gets involved in the charrettes, the government, community leaders and every group possible, including outreach groups. It has established various giving projects to promote responsible giving in a controlled environment. The quality of life of people living downtown should be the same as that of those living in other parts of the city. MAYOR GOODMAN recognized that the effort to end homelessness was ongoing.

COUNCILMAN COFFIN truly appreciated Metro's efforts but expressed concern with the ongoing homeless problem in the parks.