

Homeless Resource Center Discussion

October 30, 2019

Key Messages – Homeless Resource Center System Capacity (Provided by the Lt. Governor’s Office and is in line with the video tape)

Background:

- Homelessness is a challenge that every state and every metropolitan city in the country is facing. Just this last weekend there were national headlines about Texas, New York City, and California’s homeless challenges. No one has the “silver bullet” and we are all working on strategies that are individualized to our states and cities.
- Utah is no different. We’ve utilized multiple strategies over the years with chronic homelessness, housing first, and more recently, Operation Rio Grande.
- When you look at how we got to this point today, the work began five years ago when the Site Selection Committee did the research and determined it was better to have smaller scattered sites rather than one large downtown shelter.
- The first plan was presented in 2016 with four sites in Salt Lake City and a total capacity of 550.
- In 2017, this plan was revised to what we have in place today with three new sites and a total capacity of 700.
- The plan has never been about increasing capacity for emergency shelter. From the beginning of this plan, state, county and city leaders have worked to increase housing options, improving case management and implementing a coordinated intake system, as the new homeless resource centers are being built.

Start of Transcript

Lt. Governor Spencer Cox:

... It is important to note that as we talk today, there will be a place for everyone. We will never allow anyone to go out into the cold and spend the night without some sort of shelter.

Housing first is the priority, though. We are announcing today a four-week push to get as many of our homeless friends in the system housed as possible ... to decrease the emergency shelter demand.

Salt Lake City Housing Authority is taking the lead on this with support from the State, service providers and other partners.

This will require landlords stepping up and being part of the solution. We are announcing a call to action for every landlord to review their inventory and determine if their units can be part of the community’s plan.

There are tools and resources available to assist landlords, both with the County and the City. We made this same call in April and were able to get 134 more people housed from April to August. Our landlords stepped up. We’re grateful for that and we’re asking them to step up again.

In addition to the housing push, we will also will be doing a push for residential treatment placement in the 78 new beds at Odyssey House. We appreciate the partnership with Odyssey House and their willingness to be partners in filling these beds with the right individuals.

No additional overflow options will be announced at this time. The plan is to decrease the demand with housing, residential treatment beds, and diversion, and then utilize current overflow at St. Vincent DePaul dining hall, and the use of hotel and motel vouchers where needed.

If these fill up, and there is an apparent need for more space, then we have options with the Weigand Center. These details are still being finalized, and worked at on the City level.

The question has been asked whether to keep the downtown shelter open for this winter season in order to meet the current demand, and give the new model time to be fully implemented.

Keeping the downtown shelter open is not a good option for several reasons:

- First of all, it's too large. The large building has space for hundreds of people when the potential overflow need is roughly one hundred.
- There are also safety concerns. The building has too many hallways, open rooms both large and small that present safety and security concerns.
- And then there's the staffing issue and staffing costs. Increased staffing and security costs to manage the size of the building will be a concern as the staff from The Road Home moves into the new shelter in South Salt Lake.
- Also, State law requires the closure. We would need an action by the Legislature in order to keep that open.

In order for the new model to be successful, we need to transition from the old system. Keeping the downtown shelter open would be a step backwards, and a step away from the new system, keeping our feet in the old system, which has proven not to be effective in our state and states across the country.

The sooner we do this. The sooner we focus on the new model. The sooner the focus will truly be on housing first.

We are going to spend the next four weeks focusing on housing and diversion to reduce the demand on the system so this option will be off the table.

We believe strongly that keeping the focus on housing and diversion will always be the best option. We will have a better chance of truly helping homeless individuals if we get them into housing first. Now, we would like to share with you some of those numbers, and I think Jonathan Hardy is going to do that for us.

We have a handout for you. We'll talk through those numbers to see how we can meet the heavy demand we're seeing right now.

Jonathan Hardy:

We are seeing increased demand. Typically a hundred more than we would normally see, but what you'll see in the top left-hand box are the planning capacity options ... for this big housing push.

We are planning to do sixty (Planned Capacity option in handout), and ideally more. We have the capacity for women of 240, and men, 460. That's under the new model. That adds up to the 700 beds. We have an overflow capacity for a single population of 58 at St. Vincent DePaul. We would employ the hotel-motel vouchers up to 50. This is a nice scalable option depending on the night of demand. We don't see the same demand every night, so it's nice to have some flexibility to scale up and down on that option.

The treatment beds with our partnership with Odyssey House, they have 78 beds currently available. So, making those connections will be key. The total 808 to 946 that we can scale up or down to meet the current demand.

What you'll see in the right-hand box is the year-over-year demand – What we saw in 2018. We didn't have a single night where we had more than 844 people in the downtown shelter and the overflow options.

Two nights ago we had 884 in the system.

What you'll see on the bottom is kind of the why behind that. Right now we do have a little bit of stagnation where people are exiting quickly to housing. This is really where the housing push comes in is to help get that flow going again.

So, what was originally projected when we set up this model three years ago was to have a 10 percent diversion rate, and create more subsidized housing units a big strategy over the years, reduce the average length of stay by 10 percent, and reduce the overflow shelter capacity.

So, you'll have our original projections. What you'll see next to that is what has actually happened in those categories, and in the far-right box how that has impacted our current system. The plus is good. The plus means we've saved 37 beds necessary for capacity through diversion strategies that are at 31 percent.

Through our housing strategies we're a little behind on them. We have some units coming on line. As we make this push, this will make a real difference.

The average length of stay is the thing that has us concerned. In getting to that housing-focused system, both clients accessing services, providers providing the services, getting that churn going again, we need to see that time reduced and people connected to housing quicker. That's causing that 90-bed problem right there in that particular measure, and then, where we have less overflow because they remodeled the space at St. Vincent DePaul, and there is only capacity for 58 there. So, that kind of gives the sense of the why behind it. With these options on the table we feel we can overcome those things, and put forward good options for things we set out to do three years ago.

Questions:

The men's resource center is on schedule to open in mid-November.

Jenny Wilson: I just want to quickly make the point that there is an army behind the effort, and it's a coordinated effort. We have the City represented. South Salt Lake participated in the meeting. The State certainly. Salt Lake County. Community partners. And. This is a daily initiative for many people on our various teams. People here. People working behind the scenes, and I think in this transition, that's not

always communicated. I want to emphasize. You know there's a daily call among people who are on top of this issue, assessing the challenge in the community, and I equate this with being settled in your home for a very long time and moving to a new opportunity ... You're packing and unpacking those boxes to settle in. **Today's meeting was only a regroup to make sure that because work has been done by various cities, the county as a whole, the state, that we came together to compare notes.** I appreciated that Senate leadership, House leadership attended. The Lt. Governor certainly and others ...

We want to make clear that we are committed to this. That we have solutions. That we are driving toward those solutions, but we recognize it will be bumps along the way. There will be some challenges because as we open up those boxes in the new facilities, we welcome people in, we see the safety of the women who that been relocated – that makes us excited, so hopeful for the future. We're going to see that with the new men's shelter. Along the way, we are well-equipped to join together in a very unique way to address the challenges that we know will come, and we'll be regrouping as we move forward.

Downtown shelter to close in four weeks?

Spencer Cox: **We'll get back together in four weeks and see where we are. The plan right now is to close the shelter.** We think that is the best plan for everyone. The service providers would prefer that. The county would prefer that. The City would prefer that. The state would prefer that. That's where we are, and that's what we're pushing towards. We fully expect that that will happen in four weeks.

Was this increase in demand not anticipated?

Before I answer that, let me just say that on behalf of David Litvack. Mayor Biskupski is in Washington today. We had a wonderful conversation on the phone last night. They've been very engaged, and they are leading the coordinated housing push. So, I just want to make sure that's clear on her behalf. I failed to mention her at the beginning.

So, what was not anticipated, and as Jonathan went through those numbers, was the increased length of stay. That's what's kind of led to these higher numbers. It's not that we're getting a big influx of people from other states who've heard about our new resource centers. It's none of that. It's people are staying longer. Now some of that is good news, especially on the women's side. It's because there are some people who didn't feel safe in the downtown shelter or were in a terrible situation who are now coming and getting services. We see that actually as a positive. It's more than we expected, but it's an emergency shelter for a reason. Sometimes we forget that. Emergency shelter is supposed to be brief, and rare, and hopefully not reoccurring. So, our focus is to get them into housing. To get them into a better situation as soon as we possibly can, or prevent them from coming into the emergency shelter in the first place.

Who are the landlords you're talking about? Is this like an apartment building?

Yes. Yes. Yes. **Apartment buildings across the county.** We have people now who have vouchers who would qualify to get into subsidized housing, but we haven't been able to locate units for them right now. We know they're out there. We just need to coordinate and talk to people, and that's really going to be the push by the City.

Residential treatment as well. Those 78 beds will be important. We're (also) going to be focusing on diversion. So, one of the problems in the new model is in the transition, everyone's been focusing on

getting these new resource centers done, getting everyone moved in. ... The purpose of diversion is to get to know the individual. Do they have friends? Do they have family members they can stay with?... It's really putting that focus back on there. If we don't have this hard cap and this cut-off, there's no emergency in getting that done. We can just say, "Ah, we've got plenty of room. We can get to that later." Our message is, no, we're going to focus on that (housing, diversion) because that is the new model, and so it is about finding out with every single person: What do you have available? What are you prepared for? Because some people aren't ready for housing. They need additional services. They need a treatment bed. They may have a drug addiction. They have mental health issues they have to work through. So, it's finding out where every single person is, and then getting them into the situation that's best for them.

David Litvack:

Maybe I'll just add a little bit more on the housing response to your question. We have individuals with vouchers in hand, with case managers, who just need the unit. So we need individual landlords to come be a part of this, and they've answered the call before. So, we'll put out another call. But we're also targeting individuals that are our highest shelter utilizers ... that have some of the longest stays currently in the downtown shelter, in the new resources centers, and we really want to tailor the housing solution to them at a very individual level. Understand, these are individuals that we've been working with sometime for many years to get into housing.