



Wallace Stegner Center
for Land, Resources and the Environment
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH S.J. QUINNEY COLLEGE OF LAW

Situation Assessment

Homeless Issues in Downtown Salt Lake City

January 2014

Conducted for Salt Lake City Mayor's Office
and Community & Economic Development

Report Authors: Michele Straube, Jason Steiert

Researchers/Editors: Haley Carmer, Jamie Pleune, Jason Steiert

Interviewers: Michele Straube
Haley Carmer, Melissa Reynolds, Jason Steiert, Shane Stroud

Environmental Dispute Resolution Program

<http://www.law.utah.edu/stegner/environmental-dispute-resolution/>

Michele Straube, Director – michele.straube@law.utah.edu

Environmental Clinic

<http://www.law.utah.edu/clinic/clinic-list/the-environmental-clinic/>

Jamie Pleune, Director – jamie.pleune@law.utah.edu

Table of Contents

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Situation Assessment Process
- III. Current Situation and Major Issues of Concern
 - A. Introduction
 - B. Livability & Quality of Life Downtown
 - 1. Mass of People
 - 2. Camping
 - 3. Cleanliness (trash/litter/poop)
 - 4. Crime and Drugs
 - 5. Panhandling
 - C. The Face of the Homeless Population
 - D. Daytime Facilities for Homeless Individuals
 - E. Connecting Homeless with Services and Coordinating Services
 - F. Housing First
 - G. Opportunities for Transformative Redevelopment
- IV. Conceptual Framework
- V. Opportunities for the Future
 - A. Introduction
 - B. Services for the Homeless
 - 1. Strategic Planning
 - 2. Expanding Services
 - 3. Outreach / Coordination of Services
 - 4. Charitable Groups / Volunteers
 - C. Redevelopment

- D. Quality of Life Downtown
 - 1. Enforcement / Deterrence
 - 2. Specific Activities to Enhance Quality of Life Downtown
 - 3. Neighborhood / Community Building
- E. Strategic Support for Others' Efforts
- F. Public Education / Awareness Raising

Appendices

- A. List of Interviewees
- B. Interview Questions
- C. Comparison Cities (Calgary, Houston and Phoenix)
- D. Summary of SLC Homeless Resources
- E. SLC Homelessness Workshop (2009) – Comment Summary
- F. Pioneer Park Public Workshop Final Report, February 2009
- G. SLC Police Department Data

I. Executive Summary

To effectively address homelessness and related issues affecting downtown Salt Lake City, the Mayor's Office determined that a comprehensive understanding of the situation was essential. The Wallace Stegner Center Environmental Dispute Resolution Program was brought in to conduct a Situation Assessment exploring public perceptions and existing efforts, and identifying opportunities for collaboration and increased coordination with particular focus on the City's role. This Assessment Report reflects a snapshot in time about an extremely dynamic situation.

The Assessment Team conducted 60 interviews across stakeholder categories: residents, businesses, all levels of government, law enforcement, homeless service providers, homeless individuals and other knowledgeable community members. The Team took stock of existing homeless-related resources in the Salt Lake community and researched the approaches taken by three other cities facing similar issues (Calgary, Houston and Phoenix). The Team also reviewed empirical data from existing reports, as well as documents offered by interviewees. Members of the Team supplemented interview perceptions through visits to the downtown areas most affected by homelessness and related issues.

Current Situation and Major Issues of Concern

After compiling the information gathered from this plethora of sources, the Team distilled the major issues of concern into six overarching topics:

Livability and quality of downtown life: The livability and quality of downtown life affects downtown residents and businesses, downtown visitors, individuals and developers aspiring to locate downtown, service providers' ability to reach the homeless population effectively, and the homeless population itself. The perceptions that livability and quality of downtown life is being negatively affected are based on these conditions:

Mass of people. Virtually all of the individuals we interviewed expressed some level of concern regarding the massive amount of people who congregate downtown, particularly in the four-block area bounded by 500 West, 200 South, 300 West and 400 South. Individuals' concerns across stakeholder categories involved personal safety and aesthetics, while businesses described an impact on profitability.

Camping. Residents living immediately next to Pioneer Park expressed aesthetic concerns regarding camping in their neighborhood. Other interviewees stated that homeless camps are dispersed throughout the city and nearby canyons and can present health and safety concerns.

Cleanliness. A majority of interviewees expressed concern about cleanliness related to the homeless population's activities downtown. Generally, cleanliness refers to trash, litter, and urine/feces. The primary areas of downtown that experience problems with cleanliness are generally the same as described previously, although some interviewees also noted cleanliness issues in and around the Gateway Mall.

Crime and drugs. Virtually all interviewees expressed concern regarding crime and drug use, primarily in the same geographic area affected by cleanliness issues, with many individuals having personally witnessed drug deals on a daily basis. There were differing opinions, however, about the relationship between crime and the homeless population, with many interviewees suggesting that drug dealers prey on the homeless population and use the mass of people as a cover for illegal activity. Many interviewees observed that police presence makes an aesthetic difference, causing drug dealers to move their activity to avoid arrest.

Panhandling. Interviewees identified panhandling as a significant issue in downtown Salt Lake, but also indicated that the practice of panhandling is expanding rapidly throughout the Salt Lake valley. Perceptions of the nature of the panhandling community vary, but many interviewees suggested that a large percentage of panhandlers are not actually homeless, but rather running a profitable business pretending to be homeless. Many interviewees believed that panhandlers' success in downtown and elsewhere is directly attributable to the generous nature of the Utah community.

The face of the homeless population: Many interviewees suggested that the face of the homeless population has changed over the past few years, making the strategic plans developed ten years ago to "end chronic homelessness" no longer comprehensive. Annual data collected to count the homeless population supports this conclusion. In addition to the chronic homeless (a large percentage of whom have now been successfully housed), Salt Lake City's homeless population includes the following sub-populations, with each group benefitting from a unique suite of services: families with children, women with children (often victims of domestic violence), youth, veterans, and individuals who resist transcending homelessness (referred to by some as "homeless-by-choice").

Daytime facilities for homeless individuals: Interviewees from various stakeholder groups consistently agreed that there are an inadequate number of places or facilities for homeless people to go during the day, and that essential services for the activities of daily living are inadequate. Needed daytime facilities and services include bathrooms, laundry, safe storage for their life's belongings, mail receipt, and an indoor area to "hang out".

Connecting the homeless with services and coordination of services: Formerly homeless individuals confirmed the opinion of many other interviewees that personalized one-on-one outreach to homeless individuals providing information about the specific services that individual needs (e.g., housing, mental health treatment, a hot meal) is the most effective approach. Generally, interviewees agreed that there are a number of outreach efforts to connect homeless individuals with needed services, but that the various entities providing outreach can collaborate more effectively to track homeless individuals and coordinate services.

Housing first: Starting with the Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, most efforts to deal with homelessness in Utah rely on the Housing First model. The premise of Housing First is that once homeless individuals have housing, they are more likely to seek and continue receiving services and can search for employment. The interview results support the effectiveness of the Housing First model, although the type of housing required for different homeless sub-populations may differ. In addition, interviewees stated that the homeless housing market could benefit from additional permanent housing, transitional housing, and housing located near services.

Opportunities for transformative redevelopment: The issue of redevelopment in the area of downtown SLC housing Pioneer Park, homeless service providers and related facilities was a hot topic among many interviewees, especially residents and businesses. Interviewees shared many dreams and creative ideas about what redevelopment could look like, but no consensus emerged. Similarly, there is no consensus about the appropriate role that homeless facilities might play in transformative redevelopment of the area. Despite the lack of a common vision, many interviewees suggested that the time is right to move forward with redevelopment plans.

Conceptual Framework

The interview results highlight the complexity of the issues, the multiplicity of players, and the great potential for duplication of effort, confusion, and overlooking or omitting stakeholders and solutions. The Assessment Team has found the following conceptual framework helpful to think about homelessness issues and needed facilities and services.

The non-uniform nature of the current homeless population must be taken into consideration. Each sub-population of homeless individuals has unique needs, although there is also great overlap in the services and facilities that can benefit each group.

Much of the strategic focus nationally and within Utah has been on *ending* homelessness, with initial successful efforts devoted to housing the chronic and veteran homeless populations. The interview results suggest that housing alone will not be

adequate to end homelessness for all sub-populations, and that providing housing and supportive services is itself an ongoing (possibly never-ending) solution. In addition, exclusive focus on providing housing can reduce the attention and funding provided to needed services and facilities for the indeterminate amount of time while homeless individuals are still homeless (i.e., before they are connected to long-term housing).

We suggest that to be successful in “ending homelessness”, efforts in Utah need to address four stages of homelessness:

- Preventing homelessness – broad strategies that could significantly reduce the numbers of individual falling into homelessness;
- Homelessness – daily life while an individual is experiencing homelessness;
- Transcending homelessness – taking steps to find housing, employment and other needed services; and
- Preventing recurrence of homelessness – providing supportive services as needed after housing has been secured to prevent individuals from going through multiple rounds of homelessness.

The facilities and services needed in each of the four stages may overlap, but analysis of the best strategies to end homelessness for all sub-populations should be done separately for each stage.

Opportunities for the Future

The Situation Assessment Report includes suggestions for increased collaboration and coordination on the various issues and concerns heard in the interviews. The Team does not intend to suggest specific solutions, but rather suggests ways of structuring the right conversation so that the necessary stakeholders can find effective solutions that everyone will be willing to implement. While some of the suggestions cannot be implemented without co-leadership across multiple levels of government, the report focuses primarily on ways in which Salt Lake City is uniquely positioned to add value and exercise leadership on issues related to homelessness in its downtown.

Services for the homeless: Many of the immediate issues of concern to the majority of interviewees (e.g., a mass of people, cleanliness, crime and drugs, panhandling) may not improve substantially until our community grapples with homelessness and redevelopment. The report discusses these two issues in their appropriate order – a community vision of how best to provide for our homeless population will inform the opportunities for and parameters of redevelopment in the affected area of downtown.

Strategic Planning. We suggest three ways in which the City can promote and support the needed strategic planning conversations to address homelessness:

- Co-convene an action-oriented two-day Homeless Solutions Retreat with Salt Lake County, State of Utah (Workforce Services) and the Salt Lake Chamber.

Day 1 of the Solutions Retreat would result in a snapshot of current and desired facilities and services for each homeless sub-population at each of the four stages of homelessness, to help inform the future development of a strategic vision and action plans. Day 2 would result in a set of principles that can guide future decisions about locating homeless facilities and services, as well as a prioritization of immediate needs to address livability and quality of life issues and development of relevant action plans.

- Continue to host the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness.
- Provide active City representation in other ongoing conversations about homelessness, including at a minimum the state and county level homeless coordinating committees.

Outreach. Existing outreach efforts may benefit from increased coordination. Face-to-face outreach efforts could easily be expanded in number and reach if someone (possibly the City) identifies ongoing instances of contact with currently and potentially homeless individuals that provide an easy opportunity for outreach. Finally, printed outreach materials should be available in any and all locations where homeless individuals are likely to spend time.

Charitable groups and volunteers. There is an opportunity to coordinate the numerous charitable efforts to "help the homeless" and channel the enormous community goodwill to improve the overall impact and effectiveness of each individual effort. The coordination can be provided by the City or possibly by a particular charitable organization itself. Coordination as to time and place can ensure that the food and clothing drops are distributed geographically throughout the City or valley and throughout the week. Consideration should also be given to developing a list of specific actions that community volunteers and charitable organizations can take to help the homeless population beyond food and clothing drops.

Redevelopment. Past and current discussions about redevelopment in the area have gotten stuck on the question of whether and where to relocate existing homeless facilities and services. The principled outcomes from the Homeless Solutions Retreat can inform the community's conversations about how to meet the vision for serving the homeless population in conjunction with redevelopment of the western side of downtown. Decisions about where and how best to provide needed services for the homeless population can be decided proactively with everyone's best interests in mind.

Quality of life downtown. The report identifies several opportunities to address the immediate symptoms or consequences flowing from the current situation, while also creating a social infrastructure to reduce the likelihood of their reoccurrence.

Enforcement / deterrence. Strategic conversations that include a cross-section of relevant law enforcement personnel (police, prosecution, judiciary) can develop an enforcement approach that will have the greatest likelihood of successful convictions and deterrence value. This will likely involve a review of existing ordinances, statutes and available data, followed by an analysis of desired outcomes and strategies to best accomplish those outcomes. Since the issues and players are somewhat different, the report suggests separate strategic conversations for panhandling, camping/loitering/trespassing, and drugs.

Specific activities to enhance quality of life downtown. The City should continue to be involved actively in efforts to address cleanliness concerns downtown and help to improve coordination of existing efforts.

Neighborhood / community building. City and community leaders can work with existing neighborhood groups (or build a new group if necessary) to encourage the perception and use of downtown areas as a neighborhood. Neighborhood-building activities will not be successful over the long-term, however, unless the responsibility for inventing ideas, facilitating their implementation and ensuring their continued availability is institutionalized within one viable neighborhood-based organization. Finally, the City can signal that neighborhood-building in the Pioneer Park / Rio Grande portions of downtown is a municipal priority by instituting proactive neighborhood-wide communication methods.

Strategic support for others' efforts. While the full weight of planning and taking action to address homelessness does not and cannot rest on Salt Lake City, the City must be a key player in all aspects of the effort to address homelessness. The City's perspective must be heard and considered in strategic planning at all geographic levels (county, state, regional). The City plays an important role by providing strategic funding for the valuable efforts undertaken by other stakeholders, and at times filling in gaps in essential services. The City can also lend its voice and political weight to lobby for changes in policy, regulation and statutes as needed to facilitate a comprehensive and effective approach to addressing homelessness and related issues.

Public education and awareness-raising. The totality of interviews reflected that many community members have no knowledge about homelessness and related issues beyond what they see in Pioneer Park and the Rio Grande area (and the visceral feeling of discomfort that follows). The report suggests several opportunities for the City to help provide accurate information that can help dispel rumors and raise awareness among community members.

Model how we as a community talk about the issues. City and community leaders can and should model how we as a community talk about homelessness and

related issues. If done well, all levels of City government (Mayor, police, city staff, City Council), as well as business and other community leaders, would communicate a consistent message. The topics where community opinion and individual decisions are easily influenced by the content and tone that community leaders model include the nature of our homeless population, the approach this community is taking to provide for the homeless population and to address related issues (crime, panhandling, etc.), and a vision for the future of this part of downtown.

Facilitate information-sharing about homelessness and related issues. The City can and does play a significant role in facilitating information-sharing between the various stakeholders working on and interested in homelessness and related issues.

Provide information that informs effective generosity. The interviews suggest that a wider range of information than currently available, provided to the broadest possible audience, may help generous individuals and organizations direct their financial and volunteer contributions in the most constructive way.

Conclusion

Homelessness and the societal issues that follow are not unique to a particular city, state, region, or nation. These issues transcend generations and political boundaries. Their causes are as numerous and nuanced as their solutions. It is unlikely that these issues will ever disappear, but Salt Lake City has the resources and wherewithal to make great strides towards eliminating, or at least reducing, homelessness in this community.