



ASSEMBLY LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

ANNA BRAWLEY, DISTRICT 3 | LEGISL. COMMITTEE CHAIR

March 7, 2024

Re: Information on \$4M request for Anchorage Low Barrier Shelter and the Municipality's comprehensive plan to address homelessness

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Kaufman and Representative Mears and Anchorage Delegation members:

Thank you for your service to the people of the Municipality of Anchorage and thank you to members and your staff who made time for us during our visit last month. This memo is a follow-up to questions on the **Municipality's priority capital funding request: Anchorage Low Barrier Shelter, \$4.0M** (CAPSIS # 69194), as well as background on how this specific project is a critical piece of our coordinated local response to homelessness and the affordable housing shortage.

LOW BARRIER SHELTERING: PROVIDE STABILITY AND A REALISTIC PATH FORWARD FOR THE HOMELESS

Our funding request would **provide critical operational funding during the summer months for the emergency shelter located at 1111 West 56th Avenue** (in Midtown, District 13-G), in the repurposed administrative office building of Solid Waste Services. This shelter is currently being operated, with a capacity of 200 beds, as part of the Muni's Emergency Cold Weather Shelter (ECWS) program, which has a total of 574 beds at this property and two non-congregate locations. The Muni's three ECWS facilities, as well as other shelters under private operation, continue to be at nightly capacity, with an additional estimated 200 to 300 people living unsheltered, from young adults to elders.

The Need: Reduce the Burden of a Statewide Issue on Anchorage Taxpayers

Anchorage's homelessness issue is a direct result of many gaps in our safety nets, and lack of housing and services in communities throughout the state. **While our community is about 40% of Alaska's population, we have 60% of the people experiencing homelessness**—in our local shelters, in short-term support programs, and on our streets and in public places. This problem has gotten worse, with steep rent and housing cost increases, lack of treatment and counseling services, and for some people, no realistic way to return or remain in their home community. **Like many communities, Anchorage feels these impacts in our emergency service calls, police hours, and our hospitals' ERs.**

The Municipality, through various local sources and the last available federal relief funding, operates the 56th Avenue shelter during the winter months. The Municipality has committed to funding this shelter through May 31, 2024, with a step-down plan focused on moving current clients into housing placements or other arrangements before June 1—but the city does not have resources to sustain year-round operation of this critical facility, without making significant



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cuts to other core services. **We request that the Legislature recognize this unfair burden on Anchorage residents, and support cost-sharing of emergency shelter.**

The good news: we have a plan. Our local investments in housing, and community efforts to strengthen services are helping people out of crisis and reducing pressure on shelter.

THE BIG PICTURE: MOVING FROM CRISIS MANAGEMENT TO REAL SOLUTIONS

We cannot solve our homelessness issue in silos. While community organizations in Anchorage have provided housing, shelter, and other services to people experiencing homelessness for many years, it became clear in recent years that by operating in silos, and without a shared goal and path forward, we cannot move past managing this issue and toward reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness. At the same time, we have seen more people priced out of the housing market, more young people and vulnerable individuals left unprotected on the street, and a steeper climb out of crisis for people who are one emergency away from job loss, eviction, and service dependency.

Partners across the Municipality have come together to improve our systems. For the last few years, systems change and expansion of programs have focused on what works:

- **Preventing homelessness**, keeping people housed and avoiding eviction.
- **Rapid rehousing programs** to help families in crisis get back to independent housing.
- Programs to **help youth and young adults** exiting the foster care system, build life skills and job readiness, and protect vulnerable youth from harm, through safe housing.
- **Intensive supports** for people with medical and behavioral conditions, reducing use of emergency services and emergency room stays.
- **Better coordination and partnership** among programs with outreach, navigation, connecting people with services, and keeping people housed with case management.
- **Public-private partnerships** with providers, local and state agencies, and the community.

Anchorage has made strides toward outcomes-focused, effective programs to help people improve their lives. Since creation of the original Anchored Home Strategic Plan in 2018,¹ we have come a long way as a community:

- **Veteran homelessness is greatly reduced**, thanks to the extremely successful HUD-VASH program, pairing housing vouchers with full VA services, and other targeted programs.

¹ The Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness (ACEH) is updating Anchored Home, a targeted strategic plan to end homelessness. Read the community draft plan here: <https://www.aceh.org/anchored-home>



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- The HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project funds **housing and shelter for hundreds of youth** through multiple providers, keeping young people safe.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, federal relief funding through AHFC, United Way, and MOA **kept thousands of people from losing housing** (rental and mortgage assistance), quickly connected to affordable housing, and safely sheltered people in mass care.
- Complex Care Shelter in Midtown, the first of its kind, opened in 2022 to serve **people with medical conditions and disabilities**, providing a safe place to address care needs.
- United Way **connects people with permanent housing** through the Landlord Housing Partnership and Home for Good, a program targeting people with frequent corrections stays. So far, they've **housed 87 people, significantly reducing arrests and EMS calls**.
- In December, MOA and ACEH launched the **Next Step Pilot Project**, based on the model of Houston, TX. **Goal: house 150 homeless people in 6 months**. As of February: **65 housed**.

HOUSING IS THE REAL KEY TO SOLVING HOMELESSNESS

Anchorage, like all of Alaska, doesn't have just one housing problem; many inter-related factors have created a complex situation of many problems to solve. In addition to focusing on homelessness response and prevention, the Assembly has made housing development one of its top priorities for the past several years and in 2023, created the **Anchorage Housing Action Plan** to have a strategic, organized approach to this complex issue.

The Assembly, in coordination with the Municipal Building Services team, Anchorage Community Development Authority, housing advocates, utilities, residents and developers, will use the plan to develop a range of solutions, from streamlining regulatory processes and cutting red tape, to developing new financing and incentives, and continuing the focus on expanding accessible and stable housing.

While the plan seeks to spur housing development at a variety of price points and types, **Anchorage's most urgent need is small, affordable rental units** (studio and 1 bedroom). Lack of affordable units is our biggest roadblock to helping more people out of shelter and off the street. And today in our city, more people live in unsafe or crowded housing because they don't have choice. We know the market needs to address a lot of our housing needs—and currently, it's not easy to build the housing types that our city needs to meet our demand for our workforce, families, and young people. To meet the need to develop more small, affordable rental units and spur private development of more diverse housing types, the **Anchorage Housing Action Plan 2024 priorities include:**

- Continuing conversions of aging, **underperforming hotels for low-income housing**
- Completing the **Providence Supportive Housing** project (under construction, received MOA funding)



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- **Revisiting incentives** like tax credits, braiding funding sources, and infrastructure investment
- **Reusing and rehabilitating existing housing** stock (ACDA and AWWU currently seeking Federal funding to launch a rehabilitation program)
- **Zoning reform, removing regulatory barriers**, and reducing the cost of development with strategies to share the costs of public infrastructure

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The Municipality and its partners are working collaboratively at all levels of the housing spectrum, but the problems are too big for local communities to solve on their own. Statewide solutions are needed. **The Municipality seeks a \$4M capital request for low barrier shelter operations in 2024 and \$10M for the Housing Alaskans: A Public Private Partnership (HAPP)** to help communities across the state, including in Anchorage, solve the housing crisis.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS SOLUTIONS

The Assembly is a resource for your questions – and we encourage connecting with organizations doing great work, who can share programs serving our constituents:

Municipality of Anchorage

Mia Costello, Legislative Liaison, Office of Mayor Bronson, mia.costello@anchorageak.gov
Alexis Johnson, Housing & Homelessness Coordinator, Health Dept.,
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Alaska Housing Finance Corporation

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Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness

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United Way of Anchorage

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