

Recommendations from the Homeless Leadership Council for Use of Revenue from the Recently Enacted Alcohol Tax

July 12, 2020

Background

The Anchorage Assembly invited the public to provide recommendations for how to invest the revenues from the approved Municipal Charter amendment that has established an alcohol tax with the effective date of February 1, 2021. The charter amendment articulates a number of allowable dedicated uses of these funds, including to prevent and address Anchorage's homelessness crisis.

The Anchorage Homelessness Leadership Council (HLC) recognizes that while there are many root causes of homelessness, the incidence and experience of homelessness is certainly impacted by alcohol and substance misuse, as is the likelihood and speed of exiting homelessness into housing stability. The HLC also recognizes that the goal of all investments targeted toward homelessness should be consistent with, and contribute to, the Anchored Home goal to make homelessness rare, brief, and one-time. Strategies and priorities identified by the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness (ACEH) should be prioritized, including strategies that prevent homelessness, help people exit homelessness quickly, and strategies that promote long-term sustainability. Finally, ongoing regular communication and education with the public at large is a necessity.

The HLC also recognizes the critical importance and interconnectedness of each of the areas of need outlined in Proposition 13, as passed by the voters:

- Funding for police, related criminal justice personnel, and first responders;
- Funding to combat and address child abuse, sexual assault, and domestic violence; and
- Funding for substance misuse treatment, [and] prevention programs, detoxification of long-term addiction recovery facilities, mental and behavioral health programs, and resources to prevent and address Anchorage's homelessness crisis.

Funding decisions and communication to the public should be made with this continuum of services and activities in mind.

Guiding Principles

The HLC has focused on development of guiding principles and spending priorities. Much discussion and thought has been given to the types of activities that would be most helpful and effective. As more information becomes available over the coming months, the HLC may make more specific recommendations in some areas.

The HLC has adopted the following guiding principles to inform our recommendations. These guiding principles focused on investments that have measurable outcomes, are data driven, are built on partnerships, leverage capacity and resources, encourage sustainable outcomes through multi-year operational commitments, and contribute to a healthier, safer, and more equitable Anchorage for all community members.

- **All investments should contribute to a healthier, safer, and more equitable Anchorage for all community members** without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, or mental or physical impairment or disability.
- **Increasing the availability of substance misuse treatment and behavioral health services is essential.** This is especially true when considering the connection between substance misuse and behavioral health and issues of homelessness, child abuse and neglect, and incarceration.
- **Investments should be coordinated with community partners and funding should be leveraged** to maximize the impact of the alcohol tax revenue.
- **Investment decisions should be data-informed.** For homelessness-related funding, utilization of the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) and compliance with data quality standards should be required.
- **Regular reporting of measurable outcomes should be required** as a component of accountability to the community.
- **Multi-year operating fund commitments should be made whenever possible** to help ensure the sustainability of projects and programs, and therefore ensure consistency of services for people who need them.

Introduction to Recommendations

As business leaders in the Anchorage community, the HLC acknowledges that council members are experienced in their fields but do not have a comprehensive understanding of the specific funding needs, funding availability, or any detailed understanding of the current gaps in programs or services.

Specifically, we do not know how much it will cost to operate and provide both day engagement services and night shelter for the recently proposed acquisitions for two hotels (one proposed for transitional housing and one for a treatment center), the Beans Cafe building, and the old Alaska Club. We do not know exact costs but do support these acquisitions and their intended uses. We also encourage the Municipality to include the existing Brother Francis Shelter in their operations support as a critical part of our community's shelter infrastructure for adults.

In addition, the HLC acknowledges that we lack authority in the decision making process. We offer our perspective here with the belief that solutions will not be funded solely from the receipt of revenue from the Alcohol Tax. We believe there is a need for additional resources beyond this funding source and that we will be most effective as a community by leveraging and aligning resources. Additionally, when it comes to addressing homelessness, we see a need for investments that will build a sustainable Continuum of Care that includes prevention programs and makes homelessness in our community rare, brief, and one-time.

We also recognize that annual Municipality of Anchorage budgets must adapt and respond to current needs and available resources. We support the ongoing use of Municipality of Anchorage resources to keep our most vulnerable residents safe and in shelter. Reducing unsheltered homelessness and maintaining adequate shelter capacity should continue to be our community's top priority for use of resources available to the Municipality. This principle is core to our recommendations.

Recommendations for Investment of Revenues from the Alcohol Tax

- 1) Reduce unsheltered homelessness and provide adequate year-round shelter capacity, thus allowing year-round outreach and camp abatement; and
- 2) Increase the availability of treatment of substance misuse and behavioral health services; and
- 3) Increase housing for people experiencing homelessness and those who lack stable housing; and
- 4) Prevent and respond to child abuse and sexual assault

Investments Supported by the HLC

Recommendation 1: Reduce unsheltered homelessness and provide adequate year-round shelter capacity, thus allowing year-round outreach and camp abatement.

Emergency Night Shelter and Daytime Engagement Center Operations

- The MOA is at the forefront of conversations and decisions about emergency shelter services in the community. The HLC supports planning to develop emergency shelters in several locations and to create engagement centers. The purpose of engagement centers is to provide an environment for active engagement of clients with services and planning for the next steps in their lives. Operations funding support for the new shelters and for Brother Francis shelter is critically important.

Outreach

- The MOA has the opportunity to develop strong outreach work into camps and other unsheltered locations. Development of positive relationships with people living in unsheltered environments has been shown to positively affect their transition into shelters and permanent housing. The HLC encourages the MOA to work in partnership with ACEH to develop and lead this work.

Camp Abatement

- The HLC agrees that camp abatement work should continue throughout the year, so long as adequate shelter capacity exists.
- Investments in camp abatement should be coupled with investments in outreach and navigation, as articulated in section 2 above.

Transportation and Other Supportive Services

- Recent experience at the resource hub at Sullivan Arena has demonstrated the need for a small, unrestricted fund source for some individual needs. Examples of need include transportation of individuals and their belongings from camps, transportation support to find housing and/or employment, purchase of some initial furniture and basic home goods, etc.

Recommendation 2: Increase the availability of treatment of substance misuse and behavioral health services.

Mental and Behavioral Health Services to Support Public Safety

- The HLC believes that public safety in Anchorage will be improved if mobile and facility-based clinical services are available as an alternative to traditional police and fire response for people in crisis in homes and in camps and shelters.

Substance Misuse Grants and/or Treatment Center Operations

- Prompt availability of substance misuses treatment is one of the significant gaps that contributes to the experience of homelessness. There is strong data that sobriety is enhanced by safe and permanent housing, and that stability in housing is enhanced by sobriety.
- The MOA has plans underway to replace the treatment center known as the Clitheroe Center. If the MLP sale is completed, there will be \$15 million available for capital funding. Ongoing operations funding subsidy will also be needed, estimated at \$2 million annually. In the interim, until the new facility comes online, the HLC recommends incremental investment this coming year.

In future years, when the alcohol tax revenue becomes a 12 month/year funding source, the amount of dollars for substance misuse treatment should be increased.

Recommendation 3: Increase housing for people experiencing homelessness and those who lack stable housing.

Rental Support and Other Housing Support

- Many people who experience homelessness can move to independence with modest support. This support can be provided through rapid rehousing programs and one-time assistance. Support can include a few months of rental subsidy, initial deposits, utility assistance, and temporary case management.

Incentivize and Support Existing and New Permanent Supportive Housing for Adults

- Anchorage needs a substantial increase in the availability of permanent supportive housing. The Forget-Me-Note Manor in Juneau is the best recent Alaska example of the difference that permanent supportive housing can make for clients and for the community.
- The HLC recommends that the MOA support and incentivize new and existing permanent supportive housing projects to stimulate the development of more capacity in Anchorage.

Recommendation 4: Prevent and respond to child abuse and sexual assault.

Evidence-Based Grants to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Assault and Child Abuse and Neglect

- The HLC supports funding projects to prevent sexual assault and child abuse through grants to organizations with expertise in this field. The child abuse prevention projects that are funded should be focused on work to reduce and prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Early Childhood Education

- Research has conclusively demonstrated the value of early childhood education for reducing the risk of experiencing child abuse and neglect, strengthening social emotional learning, and increasing educational success. All of which reduces the risk of experiencing a variety of negative physical, social, and behavioral outcomes, including substance misuse, homelessness, diabetes, incarceration, and so much more.

- The HLC endorses the recommendation from the Anchorage Health Department to provide funding for additional pre-kindergarten classes (estimated to be about 15 classes with this funding). The HLC recognizes that this will be only a step toward pre-K availability for all families who need it, with the initial goal being to increase availability of pre-K to include all Title I schools.