



Transforming the Adult Homeless Response System

We have the opportunity to transform Anchorage's homelessness response system by making strategic investments to stabilize and quickly house adults without homes. In collaboration with the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness (ACEH), the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) proposes to purchase several new buildings to create a more balanced adult shelter system, including space for "Community Resource Hub" services and additional housing units. One of the facilities included will address needs beyond homeless persons by offering treatment services and stabilization resources that can prevent homelessness and help Anchorage residents stabilize in the community.

For the last five years, the MOA has worked with the ACEH and community partners to develop a homelessness response system that is informed by data. We now have a much clearer picture of how many people experience homelessness, who they are, and what supports they need to get housed and employed.

It has become clear that making a significant dent in adult homelessness will require:

1. Shelter space that allows individuals to stabilize.
2. Additional affordable housing units that will house people transitioning out of homelessness.
3. More behavioral health resources to serve the entire community and address underlying drivers of homelessness.

Right now, we have a rare opportunity to address many of those needs at once through strategic investments.

Traditionally, Anchorage shelter locations have been overcrowded and did not connect individuals to support services. The main adult shelter at Brother Francis and Beans Café hosted nearly 400 individuals. As a result, some people experiencing homelessness refused to go into shelter because of overcrowding, and instead chose to camp in parks, greenbelts and community spaces.

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated existing efforts to provide year-round, decompressed shelter. The MOA and its partners acted quickly to relocate more than 350 homeless adults to the Sullivan and Ben Boeke Arenas, which allowed for the 6-feet of spacing recommended by the CDC. Screening and medical resources were added, which to-date have resulted in zero known cases of COVID-19-positive persons staying at the mass shelter sites.

The move also allowed for the opportunity to create a "Community Resource Hub" in the parking lot of the arenas. Bean's Café, Catholic Social Services, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Covenant House Alaska, Partner's Reentry Center, Veteran's Administration, RurAL CAP, Food Bank of Alaska, Anchorage Downtown Partnership and several other entities came together with the MOA to help re-house people at the mass shelter who had adequate income to pay rent or who were displaced by COVID-19 job loss or delays. This successful effort led to nearly 200 people being housed between mid-April and mid-June.



Further efforts to connect individuals in the shelter to housing are constrained by limited availability of transitional and supportive housing units.

We now have a model for what successful shelter and a continuum of supported housing looks like. While the CDC-recommended 6-feet of spacing remains in place for the rest of 2020 and potentially through 2021 or until a COVID-19 vaccine is widely available, we have the opportunity to transform homeless services into a robust housing system in our community.

Moving forward, the MOA is prioritizing the following:

- **A bias toward housing.** Purchasing a hotel provides a way to easily convert units to housing.
- **Limits on shelter numbers.** Preference is to keep the number of people at a shelter under 100, however, slightly higher numbers may be necessary.
- **Wherever shelter or housing is located, ensure there is space to co-locate services and meeting areas.** Engagement services are included in each proposed location to continue providing access to housing programs, educational meetings, employment resources and positive social activities.
- **Transition the adult homeless system to a reservation-based system where people can remain in one location with storage available.** People want to know they can rely on a safe place to sleep and to store belongings so they can attend appointments, look for work, and regain stability.
- **Balance across the community.** New locations are interspersed across the community; not concentrated at traditional downtown sites.

The MOA proposes to purchase three buildings for homeless services:

1. **Midtown Alaska Club** building becomes a daytime engagement center
2. **America's Best Value Inn** in Spenard becomes bridge and supportive housing with 100 units
3. **Bean's Café's primary location** on 3rd avenue becomes an engagement center for people staying at the Brother Francis Shelter.

The MOA is proposing to purchase a fourth building, in Midtown, that would become a substance abuse treatment center. These investments will cost less than staying at the Sullivan Arena, which costs almost \$750 thousand per month.

The MOA, ACEH and partners have been improving data and working towards balancing the adult homeless response system. Our community has a unique opportunity in front of it to provide adequate, safe adult shelter locations as a stopgap until more permanent housing options are available. **The proposed building purchases are the next step in transforming the way Anchorage approaches the adult homeless response system.**

