

April 16, 2020

To: AllAlders@cityofmadison.com

From: Madison Affordable Housing Action Alliance – COVID 19 Next Steps Subcommittee

Subject: Discussion Item #5: Council's role, process and structure in regards to city's recovery from COVID-19 Emergency

The COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted how essential housing is to health, and the inadequacies of the local homeless shelters for providing appropriate space to minimize the spread of infectious disease.

There will come a time when the moratorium on evictions is over, the motels will go back to housing tourists instead of families and high-risk individuals and the Warner Park facility will return to its role as a recreation center. It is essential that before that time the city and county have a plan for keeping homeless individuals and families safe and healthy and preventing additional people from becoming homeless.

The AHAA – COVID Subcommittee met April 14 and listed the following immediate concerns:

- 1) With warmer weather coming we expect an increase in homeless tent encampments.
 - a) The Public Health funding of porta-potties and hand washing stations needs to continue. While these sites are not a long-term solution, they may reduce the crowding in the shelters during the warmer months.
 - b) The reaction of law enforcement needs to be strategic, with support for this form of housing in appropriate locations, not tickets or orders to “move along” with no place to move to.
 - c) Access to electricity and WiFi would allow individuals in encampments to search for employment and housing and keep up with the requirements of various programs providing assistance.
- 2) There will be a tsunami of evictions once the moratorium is over.
 - a) It is less expensive and less disruptive to keep a family (or individual) housed than to add more people to the overburdened homeless shelter system. This will not be possible in 100% of the cases, but efforts need to be made to help individuals and families stay in their existing housing.
 - b) Eviction prevention, financial assistance, case management, and legal services programs will be in high demand and increased funding is needed to provide access to funding and services. The City must expand existing programs including those operated by the Tenant Resource Center, Joining Forces for Families, Porchlight, and Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc. to prevent a significant increase in homelessness and ensure tenants have the resources and services necessary to enforce their rights under state and federal law.
- 3) When Warner and the hotels close, the shelter system will be inadequate.
 - a) Space was inadequate before the crisis.
 - b) There will be increased demand (see item 2).
 - c) This disease will not be gone, just reduced, and there are likely to be additional waves of COVID 19 coming through the community.
 - d) There is some evidence that individuals who have been doubled up or “couch surfing” are joining the formal homeless population as their friends or relatives become concerned about additional members of the household posing additional risk of bringing infection home. Some of those families/individuals may lose their housing too.
 - e) We need a plan to address changed conditions before closing the temporary facilities, especially the need for a bigger and better men's shelter.

- f) Provide storage for folks experiencing homelessness as a way to decrease the cost (both financial and emotional) of individuals/households being forced to replace all of the items lost in displacement/homelessness.
- 4) There will be a need for more housing options – additional case management, additional units, funding to help people who aren't back on the job yet because their sector of the economy is not back to "normal".
 - a) Acquire available hotels/motel(s) for supportive housing for formerly homeless persons.
 - b) Increase funding for non-profits to attract and retain qualified direct service and supervisory staff necessary to expand supportive housing services for housing formerly homeless persons.
 - c) Review and enhance incentives for City-funded affordable housing developers to dedicate more units in each project to formerly homeless persons and families to provide more scattered site permanent supportive housing options.
- 5) The city can't do this alone. We urge the CDBG Commission and City/County Homeless Issues Committee to get to work on this immediately. This ties in with item #6 on the agenda about tiered prioritization of meetings.
- 6) AHAA would like to help.
 - a) We will be working to raise the issue of affordable housing, and a coordinated response to services over the next several months as the COVID-19 issue waxes and wanes.
 - b) AHAA is also interested in other longer-term policies to address homelessness and will be presenting those in the future.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.