

Maine
Cumberland **County**
Staff memo

TO: Cumberland County Commissioners
FROM: Sandra Warren, Compliance and Audit Manager
DATE: 11/12/2024
SUBJECT: Lake Region Homeless Study Summary of Recommendations and Possible Action Steps for the County

The Lakes Region Homeless Services Study includes a series of recommendations to guide Cumberland County toward establishing a centralized, one-stop service center to address homelessness. However, staff advise an incremental approach to begin with smaller, manageable steps and work towards securing additional funds over time. The initial steps include presenting the study findings to elected officials, town managers, and other stakeholders to build awareness and support. The County could use a portion of the remaining ARPA funds to engage Jeff Levine to present his findings, followed by staff initiating feasibility and planning phases as the next step in the process.

This phased approach focuses first on engaging community leaders and securing buy-in before moving towards a fully developed one-stop service center. Key components include identifying accessible locations like Bridgton and Windham for the proposed center, leveraging existing resources and gradually expanding available services as funding allows.

Summary of Study Recommendations

- **Develop a One-Stop Service Center**
Begin planning for a centralized service hub in the Lakes Region that could eventually provide shelter beds and access to essential services.
- **Prioritize Location Selection**
Focus on Bridgton and Windham, where existing infrastructure and transportation access make them strong candidates for a central service location.
- **Expand Services Over Time**
Include support services in phases, such as case management, housing navigation, mental health and substance use support, transportation, and healthcare as the center scales.
- **Consider Transitional Housing Options**
Offer transitional housing as part of a continuum of care for individuals moving towards permanent housing solutions.
- **Build Landlord Engagement and Outreach**
Educate landlords on housing programs, including vouchers and subsidies, and consider funding a risk mitigation program to address landlord concerns.
- **Establish Mobile Outreach Services**
Deploy a mobile outreach team to provide support throughout the region, ensuring accessibility for those who cannot reach the center.

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- **Improve Data Collection on Homelessness**
Track local homelessness data more accurately through centralized and mobile services to inform future planning.
- **Encourage Affordable Housing Development**
Explore creative solutions such as small homes and public-private partnerships to increase the affordable housing stock.
- **Enhance Pre- and Post-Housing Support**
Offer resources like financial literacy and vocational support to help individuals achieve housing stability.
- **Form a Community Advisory Board**
Establish a diverse advisory board to address community concerns, foster support, and guide the center's development.

Possible Action Steps for Cumberland County

1. **Present Findings to Stakeholders**
Engage elected officials, town managers, and community leaders by presenting the study's findings to build support and collaboration.
2. **Initiate Feasibility Study and Planning**
Hire Jeff Levine to present the study and assist with initial planning steps, using remaining ARPA funds to cover costs.
3. **Engage the Community in Location Discussions**
Host public forums in Bridgton and Windham to gather input on potential sites and assess community support.
4. **Build Partnerships with Service Providers**
Collaborate with local service providers to gradually offer essential services at existing community spaces.
5. **Secure Initial Funding for Transitional Housing**
Pursue grant opportunities and work with state agencies to begin funding transitional housing as part of the center's services.
6. **Launch Landlord Engagement Campaign**
Educate landlords on housing support programs to increase acceptance of housing vouchers and reduce stigma.
7. **Deploy Mobile Outreach Services**
Establish a mobile outreach team for regional coverage, enhancing access to services for individuals who cannot reach a central location.
8. **Strengthen Data Tracking Efforts**
Develop systems to track individuals accessing the hub and mobile services, helping to assess needs and inform future growth.
9. **Pursue Affordable Housing Initiatives**
Explore partnerships for affordable housing projects, including models like small-footprint homes that can be scaled to budget and space constraints.

10. Create a Community Advisory Board

Form an advisory board early in the process to build community ownership and address concerns, ensuring a collaborative approach.

By adopting this phased approach, Cumberland County can lay the groundwork for a one-stop service center, gradually expanding resources and support for homeless individuals while fostering housing stability across the Lakes Region. This strategy enables the County to incrementally evaluate costs, address logistical requirements, and build partnerships with service providers. As funding becomes available, Cumberland County can explore sources for transitional housing options, ultimately broadening service offerings.

Early outreach efforts to landlords will help reduce stigma around housing vouchers and encourage broader participation, potentially supported by a risk mitigation fund to further incentivize landlord engagement. A mobile outreach team will play a crucial role in reaching underserved areas; ensuring individuals across the region have access to necessary services even before the center is fully operational. Through these initial and ongoing actions, Cumberland County can establish a cohesive support system, addressing homelessness in a sustainable, community-centered manner that promotes long-term housing stability in the Lakes Region.