

Dear County Commissioners,

Thank you for working with the Bend City Council to end homelessness in our region. Our conversation this afternoon, particularly about the need for managed camps to help an immediate need, are a great step. We are eager to continue our partnership in the interests of our region and shared constituents. We are writing as two individual Councilors in the hope of advancing these conversations. Please consider these starting points for additional work and conversations together after today. We all agree that community members in Bend and Deschutes County do not want our area to turn into areas of the Country where homelessness is treated as an unavoidable reality of our future. Therefore, it is critical that we take steps now, learn from other regions' mistakes, and forge our own path as a community. In short, we may still have time to avoid the mistakes of larger Oregon cities in addressing this national public health issue. Let's work together to ensure we do so before time runs out. Please consider the following possible joint efforts:

**Create a Joint Office to End Homelessness:** We need to centralize communication, policy, and services for local governments, people experiencing homelessness, funders, housed neighbors, and the service provider community. Simply put, we need a connector. Your staff and our staff have worked admirably on homelessness; County professionals are a credit to your organization. We are very proud of the work by City employees in response to this crisis. But, unfortunately, our numbers of unhoused individuals continues to increase around 13% a year. The 2021 count also had two alarming statistics: a 200% increase in Unaccompanied Children and a 220% increase in Unaccompanied Youth. Our housing costs are driving homelessness and will continue to do so.

This is not sustainable. The non-profit and faith community cannot continue to bear this burden. It is not fair to people experiencing homelessness or their housed neighbors. Homelessness also brings other crises beyond housing. Fire risk, hazardous waste crises, conflicts with local businesses, and, as the public health agency for our region, you are all too familiar with the exorbitant costs to our system presented by people struggling to find a safe home. We as a region are not being efficient with public dollars in healthcare, law enforcement, emergency services, and homeless services. To that end, we need a joint office housed at the County and led by an executive with the responsibility to connect all efforts to prevent and end homelessness and make sure that the strategic plans and ideas that come out of the Emergency Homelessness Task Force are implemented. At the City we provide infrastructure, drive the creation of more housing, and are pushing solutions based on land use decisions. But the County is best suited to address behavioral health and public health crises like homelessness. Funding could be a combination of the County's existing unallocated TRT revenue, other public and partner financing, and participant government funding agreements.

**Formally Adopt Community Solutions Approach:**

"Homelessness is an inadequate description of a million different housing crises.' The problems are individual, and until the government knows how many people need help, it's impossible to know how far America's communities still have to go."

We are optimistic that there are solutions. Rockford, Illinois is a good example. In January of 2017, Rockford became the first community in the United States to end both chronic and veteran homelessness. By focusing on data, a centralized command center, and strategically targeting resources, it has virtually reversed homelessness in the region. How is that possible? It's expensive. And it takes a lot of work. But it's less expensive than what we are doing now. We need to *know* every person in our community experiencing homelessness.

We need to track them individually, connect them with coordinators, and know when they meet with veteran agencies, law enforcement, the St. Charles Emergency Room, your service providers, and mental health organizations. Let us first focus on a good database of human beings, then figure out how each person can be helped.

We must combine this effort with more housing for people in our region and cities providing the kinds of land use infrastructure to safely house people. From managed camps, to shelters, to supportive housing, to affordable housing, the path is clear. We need more housing. But we also need to know who needs to be living in such housing. Joining Built for Zero through the Community Solutions approach will provide the framework for the County and its cities to end homelessness here. Community Solutions recently received an \$100 million Macarthur Grant to continue their successful approach to getting to "functional zero" with chronic homelessness in cities all over America. Plus, a cohort of providers from Deschutes County went through the initial Quality By-Name List training with Community Solutions and is well-suited to continue this work.

As we re-embark together on the ground floor of this issue, we are optimistic that we can successfully serve the people of Bend and Deschutes County. We need to get away from the politics of other places. Efforts to dehumanize people who are experiencing homelessness will not solve our problems. Neither will casting all people experiencing homeless as victims without agency over their futures. With the right to a safe home comes responsibility. Each person experiencing homelessness in our community is a constituent and a neighbor. To treat them and our housed neighbors fairly we must adopt a new cohesive strategy based on Central Oregon values. Thank you for being open to our suggestions. We look forward to working together to serve Bend and Deschutes County.

Sincerely,

Anthony Broadman and Megan Perkins  
Bend City Councilors