



MEMORANDUM

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Mayor Libby Schaaf

SUBJECT: Updates on Oakland's COVID-19
Homeless Response Efforts

DATE: April 16, 2020

INFORMATION

Summary

Since the Council's ratification of Oakland's local emergency on March 12, the City has been hard at work to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among our homeless population:

- Alameda County has moved 57 individuals into their "Operation Comfort" hotel for COVID positive and presumptive patients requiring medical supervision, a public health intervention to provide isolation and respite to homeless individuals who are symptomatic. They also have moved 154 individuals into their "Safer Ground" hotel for homeless individuals who are vulnerable to complications from COVID-19. These hotels are County programs and the City of Oakland neither operates nor funds them.
- **Importantly, as of Wednesday, April 15, there are no known cases of COVID-19 among Oakland's homeless programs, and, according to County Health Officials, only a number too small to report (fewer than 10) of total homeless cases in all of Alameda County.** As of this writing, 53 individuals from Oakland's two largest congregate sites (27 at Saint Vincent de Paul and 26 at Crossroads) were targeted, tested, and offered and/or moved into hotels. **On Wednesday, April 15, all 53 tests came back negative; there continue to be no new known positive cases in any Oakland homeless program.**
- The City is working with astounding speed and urgency to open a 66 trailer, double-occupancy isolation and respite program for homeless Oaklanders who are medically vulnerable and/or 65+ years-old, and thus at risk of serious complications from COVID-19. The site preparation includes connections for each trailer to sewer and water. The trailers will be located at the Home Base site near the Coliseum, and crews are working as hard as they can to have the trailers ready for move-in the first week of May.

- Also in May, we plan to open a 30-bed shelter for transition-aged youth and a 20-25 unit shelter for families. The Wood Street Safe RV Parking program is on hold while litigation is resolved and the last remaining residents of the private parcel can be relocated; no timeline is yet available.
- To enable safe sheltering in place at our encampments, we have halted all encampment closures in accordance with a March 27 Council resolution. We are providing sanitation and port-a-potties to 40 encampments citywide; protective equipment and education via street outreach; and in partnership with World Central Kitchen, 1000 meals per week to encampments citywide. Outreach medical teams visit encampments regularly to screen for symptoms and make referrals into the County's isolation hotels. Beginning today, the County will make a push to refer 75 of the most vulnerable encampment residents in Oakland into their isolation hotels.

Unsheltered and Encampment Response

On March 27, the Council, in order to ensure compliance with recently issued CDC guidance on COVID-19 among unsheltered persons, passed a resolution requesting that the City Administrator refrain from closing encampments unless alternative housing locations could be located. The City is adhering to this resolution and incorporating its directive into a temporary emergency management policy that will guide the Administration's response to encampments that pose serious health or safety threats during the remainder of the crisis.

Meanwhile, the City continues to provide port-a-potties, wash stations, and garbage removal services to 40 encampments citywide. We are aware of reports indicating that these hygiene stations are not being serviced regularly or predictably, and we continue to work with United Site Services to troubleshoot and fix any problems. In addition, in order to enable our unsheltered residents to safely shelter in place:

- Via a partnership with World Central Kitchen (WCK), we are providing over 1000 meals a week to encampment residents citywide.
- Our outreach teams are providing safety supplies (hygiene and personal protective equipment), as available given national shortages, to persons living in encampments, education about the disease, guidance on how to reduce transmission and safely shelter in place, and referrals to Medical Street Health teams when appropriate.
- Testing for individuals who screen positive for symptoms of COVID-19 is happening in partnership with Alameda County's Trust Clinic at 14th and Franklin, Roots Community Health Clinic at 99th and International, and in the field through the County's Health Care for the Homeless Medical Outreach team. Very few homeless individuals in Alameda County have tested positive so far, and to protect the privacy of this small numbers of individuals in accordance with HIPAA, Alameda County has not released any Oakland-specific numbers.
- Mobile shower and laundry services continue to operate through a contracted agency at 10-sites, and we are adding another starting next week. These service Community Cabins, RV Safe Parking, and encampment sites.

Shelter and Transitional Housing Updates/ Information.

Alongside Alameda County, we are helping all shelters to implement appropriate physical distancing requirements, health screenings, and PPE provision. As a result, Oakland has downsized our shelter capacity by 49 congregate shelter beds to manage appropriate social distancing and staffing; an additional 14 cabins' beds have been removed to allow for single occupancy among those who are medically vulnerable. All shelters are performing symptom screenings for new shelter intakes, and any guests who show symptoms are offered a referral to the County's Operation Comfort isolation program (see below). Oakland's drive-through testing sites are open to shelter and homeless services workers.

Oakland's flagship transitional housing programs – the Henry and the Holland – and the permanent supportive housing programs at the Harrison Hotel and the California Hotel have also been receiving support to help residents adhere to shelter in place orders. This includes video medical conferencing and PPE when available.

Finally, the community's generosity in responding to this crisis cannot be overstated. Oakland's COVID-19 Relief Fund has raised over \$600,000 (private funding) to help homeless shelter providers with increased costs for remote working, PPE supplies, expanded cleaning and other general operating costs.

Budget

The City was awarded nearly \$10.5M in emergency funding from the Federal CARES Act and from the State of California's SB 89 emergency funds that can be used to support COVID-19 homelessness and related services responses. A final budget outlining specific uses is being developed.

As a result of the economic downturn during the shelter-in-place order, the City of Oakland is projecting significant budget deficits for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021. Furthermore, roughly \$27M in funding for Oakland homeless programs, originally launched with one-time State, County, or philanthropic resources, is scheduled to expire by June 2021. All of this will have significant implications for the City's ongoing homeless efforts.

State Trailers for COVID-19 Response:

On March 18, Governor Newsom announced the purchasing and mobilization of 1,309 emergency travel trailers for communities throughout the State to provide isolation and quarantine to Californians experiencing homelessness. Delivery of these trailers to Oakland was completed on April 9, and the City immediately began preparing the Home Base site on Hegenberger Road to host a 66 trailer, double-occupancy program for homeless individuals who are especially vulnerable to serious illness or death if they were to contract the virus (this includes people 65+ years-old and/or who have one or more underlying health risk factors).

Barring any construction delays, the City anticipates an early May launch for this program. Site construction on this timeline is challenging because all 66 trailers will be receiving individual water and sewer connections for in-unit bathroom facilities to maximize physical distancing.

Funding will be supported by one-time State and Federal resources for COVID-19 homeless response. The site will provide 24/7 double staffing coverage, 3 meals/day, laundry, and light touch housing navigation. While the City is exploring resources to ensure no program guests are discharged back to the streets, there is currently no funding identified to allow the indefinite operation of this new program after the emergency has passed.

Hotels for COVID-19 Response

Alameda County, in partnership with the State of California and Abode Services, recently opened 393 hotel rooms at two hotels located in Oakland. These hotels provide isolation and respite for homeless individuals who are symptomatic or presumptive positive (at the Operation Comfort program, which to date has housed 57 individuals); as well as non-symptomatic individuals who are 65+ years-old and medically vulnerable (at the Safer Ground Program, which to date has housed 154 individuals). The latter program does not require that people be symptomatic or ill to access the rooms. The City of Oakland does not operate nor fund these hotels; more information can be found from the County here: <https://www.achch.org/isolation-housing.html>.

On Saturday, April 11, one day after news of a COVID-19 outbreak at San Francisco's largest homeless shelter, Alameda County began Operation Dynamo, a pre-emptive push to rapidly move any symptomatic or medically vulnerable people out of the County's largest congregate shelters and into these hotels. As of this writing, 53 individuals from Oakland's two largest congregate sites (27 at Saint Vincent de Paul and 26 at Crossroads) were targeted, tested, and offered hotels; by Wednesday, April 15, 46 had accepted and moved. **On Wednesday, April 15, all 53 tests came back negative; there continue to be no new known positive cases in any Oakland homeless program, and only a very small number of positive cases Countywide.** Fortunately, Oakland's newest shelter programs, such as the community cabins, offer a non-congregate setting with a far greater degree of privacy, which has helped reduce the likelihood of disease transmission.

Additionally, on March 27, the City Council approved a resolution requesting that the City Administrator acquire buildings for homeless housing in response to COVID-19, and authorizing the City to seek FEMA reimbursement for such expenses. In response, the City has begun outreach and negotiations with a number of hotel owners in Oakland who would be willing to enter into a FEMA-reimbursable occupancy and lease agreement. We aim to structure any such lease with an option to purchase, allowing us to bring additional homeless units for homeless COVID-19 response online now under the auspices of the Governor's Project Roomkey initiative, and to explore whether and how to finance the conversion of these units into permanent housing or homeless programs post-crisis. All of this effort will be undertaken within

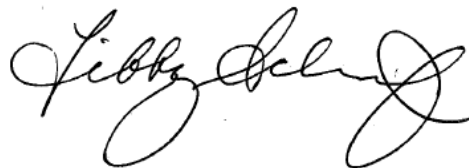
the context of long-term fiscal sustainability. I thank the Council for their vision in passing this resolution, and I will provide updates as to any major progress as it is made.

Additional Homeless Programs:

Oakland continues preparations for a number of additional, non-COVID-19-related homeless programs:

- After having secured lease authority for these programs from Council on April 7, the City plans to open a 15 trailer, 30 bed youth program, in partnership with Covenant House, the City of Berkeley, and the County of Alameda, on May 1. These trailers include 6 of Oakland's original 15 travel trailers secured from the State in January.
- The 20-25 unit/60 bed Family Matters family shelter will be opened in partnership with the City of Emeryville no later than May 15, barring no additional construction and site prep delays. The 24/7 program will offer intensive housing navigation services, meals, and flexible funding for families to secure permanent housing. Assuming supplies and staffing stay on track during the shelter in place order, our goal is to open the site in mid-May.
- Finally, the City will soon open its fourth Safe Parking program for over 80 vehicles in West Oakland, Wood Street. We are awaiting the property owner's ability to move the final residents from the planned site; no timeline for that can be guaranteed, due to the shelter-in-place order's effects on the courts. Once that is complete, we anticipate two months for site prep before program launch.

Respectfully submitted,



MAYOR LIBBY SCHAAF

For questions, please contact Peter Radu, Homeless Policy Director (510-238-7581 or pradu@oaklandca.gov).