

City of Allentown
Commission on Homelessness
2021 Strategic Plan

The Allentown Commission on Homelessness was created on February 5th 2020 when the Allentown City Council voted on Bill NO-8 -2020. The Commission on Homelessness's mission is to provide the Mayor of Allentown a strategic plan to end homelessness in the City of Allentown.

The commission envisions that every person living in the City of Allentown has safe and affordable housing. According to the Eastern Continuum Coordinated Entry from January 1 2019 to September 2019 there were a total of 2,249 individuals who were either homeless or at risk of homelessness in Lehigh and Northampton county, of which 1,426 of those identified Allentown as their previous night's residence. We know that this number is higher than what is counted but demonstrates that Allentown's residents shoulder the burden of the homelessness in the Lehigh Valley.

The definition of a person who is either homeless or at-risk, is a person who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence; and an individual who has a nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately-operated shelter to provide temporary living accommodations, an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for human habitation.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic our country, state and region will begin to see unprecedented amounts of individuals and families who will lose their housing due in adequate funding. The importance of having a sustainable, strategic plan to address Homelessness will be even more imperative in the coming months and years. There has been an eviction moratorium in place for most 2020 after the CDC declared it necessary to stem the spread of the COVID virus, but that moratorium is due to end on December 31st 2020, once it has expired there will be a landslide of people and families facing eviction and possibly homelessness. Even prior to the

pandemic, housing has been a problem for residents of Allentown, over 17% of Lehigh County residents face housing problems including unaffordable rents, unsafe or inadequate housing, which leads to overcrowding or people not able to find housing once evicted or leases terminated. Another indicator of the housing crisis in Allentown is looking at the cost burden of a household. Households should pay 30% or less of their monthly income to housing costs including mortgage, rent and utilities, but, according to the St. Luke's Community Health Needs Assessment 2019 there are 4 census tracts in Center City Allentown where over 56%-62% of households are paying more than 30% of their income to housing costs, placing a significant burden on their budgets.

Addressing homelessness in a city or region requires commitment from elected officials, resources, including adequate funding, and a collaborative approach from organizations and individuals who work directly in the field of homelessness and prevention. The Commission is made up of individuals who work directly with homeless individuals, individuals who have lived experience, health systems and city officials. Public meetings commenced on September 4th 2020 and the commission has met every month since then and the Strategic Planning Committee, composed of the chairs of the sub-committees, have met twice a month to work on a comprehensive plan to present to the City Council in March of 2021.

The Strategic Plan is composed of the parts: A Tiny Home Village, Prevention Assistance for those who currently have housing, but are at risk of losing it, and Landlord Engagement. This Strategic Plan will map out the three parts and discuss funding options.

Tiny Home Village

VISION :

A community where homeless people can feel safe and secure their belongings, go to work, and live life.

A place that offers addiction and mental health services to individuals who need them.

A way out of the cycle of homelessness. This is not a permanent solution. This will be a stepping stone INTO permanent housing for these people. These shelters were designed by the homeless FOR the homeless. Great care was taken in the design to give people a reason to want better for themselves.



The Plan:

The tent encampment committee would like to implement a safer, more secure and controlled environment to our citizens experiencing homelessness.

Using the Pallet Shelters you see to the left, we can lower traditional shelter costs dramatically, give people their own secure space, and reuse them for other things like natural disasters, triage for emergencies, and can even provide an educational experience for our children. (seniors needing community service hours)

Unlike tents, these stand up to the elements, can be built in about an hour, and are mold and pest resistant and they do not require the maintenance and building costs of tiny homes.

Goals:

1. Find a suitable location where the city can construct the pallet homes. One suggestion is the old Fountain pool. It was recently updated for use of the warming station a couple years ago. If the pool was backfilled it would have enough space to put at least 25 of these units. The existing building could host organizations like Street Medicine, Parish Nursing, or Treatment Tends to come in on certain days and administer services. These places already do this on a regular basis. The existing pool house would be for showers and restroom facilities, laundry etc.
2. Implement a 90 day rehabilitation program coordinated between agencies and Non-Profits in the city where the homeless would be required to go to work and save money in an account. While they are waiting for permanent housing, they can be reassured their things won't be stolen because they now have a door that locks to their personal unit. One of the biggest reasons people fail on the streets is not having a secure place to keep their things.
3. Organize a transitional program where people who receive permanent housing after the Pallet Shelter program continue to get motivational support from different organizations. Think Ripple, OATH, to check in and make sure they are staying on the program. This is important, because going from a structured program to being on your own is also another area that causes people to fail and slip back into homelessness.





Where they work..

WAIMANALO, HAWAII

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hawaii resident Blanche McMillan was the force behind a shelter community for her neighbors experiencing homelessness. “Because of the coronavirus I said, ‘No more. This is enough. We need to bring our people here right now,’” McMillan said. All 17 people who live in the village used to live across the street, and each one of them had a hand in clearing the land and building their own shelter.

RIVERSIDE CALIFORNIA

The City of Riverside, California faced an urgent crisis – as of January 2020, more than 400 people were living unsheltered in the city, and the city’s leaders were looking for a rapid and emergency shelter solution for these residents. To add capacity to an existing shelter system, Riverside leaders built a Pallet shelter community with 30 emergency shelters in just four days.



Landlord Engagement

Vision:

Homeless renters face many barriers to obtaining housing, including bad credit, stigma and unaffordable or inadequate housing stock. The vision of the Landlord Engagement Plan is to develop relationships with willing landlords who would be willing to work with individuals and organizations to safely house individuals who are homeless or facing imminent homelessness. The plan would also want to establish risk mitigation funds that can be used to encourage landlords to rent to homeless households by ensuring reimbursement for property damage or missed rent.

Goal 1.

Work with existing Housing Navigators to build relationships with landlords and to create a listing of available units.

Action Items:

1. Build a data base of available units. The Lehigh Valley RHAB is looking into Padmission. Padmission is a web-based platform for homeless services organizations to manage landlord relationships and assist individuals and families in a housing search. Padmission is able to centralize landlord relationships, expand housing opportunities, track performances with reports and reduce housing search times.

2. Work with LV RHAB on cost of hiring Padmission.

Goal 2.

Raise funds for risk mitigation and incentives for landlords willing to rent to homeless individuals and families.

Action Items

1. Work with private foundations
2. Apply for grants

Goal 3.

Establish protocols for use of funds for landlords

Action Items

1. Establish an entity to hold the funds (property management experience needed)
2. Establish uses for the funds
3. Establish criteria
4. Establish procedures

Prevention:

Currently there is a prevention action committee that exists in Allentown and some of their members are part of the Commission. The aim of this committee is to develop a multi-prong

system to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless. Preventing an individual or family from becoming homeless will save the family immeasurable trauma and also economically it is more cost effective to keep a person or family in housing then having to find new housing, which may not be readily accessible.

Goal 1: To administer prevention funds to households in need

Action Steps: A Rooster Relief fund has been created that currently has over \$8,000 dollars in it to help families who are at risk of homelessness. Organizations that actively work with families and households can submit applications to the prevention team to receive the assistance.

Goal 2: Develop a standard operation procedure to administer funds

Action Steps:

“The Prevention Action Team’s Rooster’s Relief Fund operates using grant and private funding to assist households who do not qualify for existing prevention services. Applicants will only be considered after they call PA 211, complete the prevention tool, and are determined to not qualify for existing homeless prevention services.”

- Client needs to prove that this one-time assistance will provide the means to remain stably housed. Rooster relief fund works to prevent displacement of a family or individual and prevent an episode of homelessness.
- Client needs to contact HMIS prior to applying for funds to see if they qualify for other funding.
- Application is sent to the Prevention Action Team and a vote is taken on whether or not to move forward with the assistance.
- Once funding is approved a check must be made out to the landlord
- The organizations who is working with the family is responsible for any follow up services.