



2022 Roadmap

Accelerating Relief for the Portland Region's
Housing Affordability & Homelessness Crisis

January 2022 | Adopted by the HereTogether Coalition

Overview

The Portland metro region, like many cities on the West Coast and across the nation, faces a severe housing affordability and homelessness crisis. Addressing it requires urgent action with both near-term and long-term solutions to support the health, safety and humanity of our most vulnerable neighbors. Our community must support all its members to be safe and meet their basic needs in order to thrive.

Fortunately, Portland has access to the tools and resources needed to tackle this crisis head-on, including affordable housing bonds, the Supportive Housing Services (SHS) measure spearheaded by the HereTogether coalition, and state and federal funding. **Moreover, there are things we can do now to accelerate the progress of our work to end people's homelessness and reach people who need assistance.** This moment calls for creativity and urgency to provide near-term and permanent solutions.

It is crucial to remember that the housing affordability and homelessness crisis Portland faces today did not happen overnight. Likewise, it will not be fixed overnight. Decades of federal disinvestment in social services and housing, housing shortages that have pushed up demand and prices, and systemic racial discrimination in our housing delivery system led to our current crisis. Due to the complexities of this crisis and the unique needs of those on the streets, there is no simple, one-size-fits-all solution to tackling homelessness.

At HereTogether, we are grounded in the reality that the only way to truly end someone's homelessness is with safe, stable, permanent housing—without preconditions—and to support them with wraparound services to meet their unique needs to remain stably and safely housed. That is the guiding principle that united our large coalition of homeless service providers, business leaders, faith leaders, elected officials, philanthropists and more in developing and passing the region-wide SHS measure.

Since July 2021, SHS dollars have been available and put to work to advance permanent solutions to homelessness – and we are seeing progress. **With programming underway to create transitional and permanent housing, along with the services needed to make it effective, we need to both continue this work and accelerate progress.** This includes increasing the focus on near-term actions that can reduce the burden on our most vulnerable neighbors and on our region.

We believe everyone has a basic need for a safe place to call home, and we recognize that more needs to be done now to support those who are sleeping outside every night.

The following 2022 Roadmap outlines **critical, immediate steps we can take now to accomplish those near-term and long-term, permanent goals to tackle the Portland region's housing affordability and homelessness crisis.**

2022 Roadmap: Near-Term Policy Recommendations

#1 – Expand hygiene and sanitation services for people sleeping outside in a manner that also helps clean our streets.

As we advance solutions to our affordable housing and homelessness crisis, **we owe it to our neighbors—both housed and unhoused—to ensure those living outside have easy access to hygiene, sanitation and trash clean up services.**

To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- **Institutionalize a regular series of garbage pick ups/dumpsters throughout the city and region** to ensure people living outside have adequate access to trash collection.
- **Dismantle the [state and local silos](#) currently governing our trash collection system across the Portland Metro region.** People want to see trash picked up regardless of who is in charge of it. The arcane rules currently in place are preventing a more efficient sanitation system, and are a large part of the problem today. Our governmental leaders have the ability to streamline these services and should take action.
- **Expand programs like City of Portland’s pandemic public hygiene/porta-pottie program** to ensure broad access to comprehensive hygiene facilities throughout the region.
- **Expand the model of employing unhoused people to be part of the clean up.** Local organizations have successfully implemented programs that couple sanitation services with job training and mentorship programs. These programs create a safe, supportive environment for unhoused people to re-enter the workforce and earn a good wage, while supporting fellow unhoused neighbors and a cleaner, healthier community.
- **Adequately fund and encourage volunteering/in-kind donations to community-based programs that are already doing this work successfully.** Hygiene4All, Trash 4 Peace, Ground Score, Cultivate Initiatives, LoveOne, Neighbors Helping Neighbors and myriad other community and neighborhood groups are already providing community beautification and hygiene services, and could scale up their work to reach more neighborhoods and people experiencing homelessness with adequate funding.

#2 – Increase permanent, transitional and emergency housing stock.

The solution to homelessness starts with access to safe, stable housing. **Criminalizing homelessness will never solve our crisis.**

Both the public and private sectors have a major role to play in advancing a [housing first model](#) and increasing the affordable housing stock in our region. **We should be considering every piece of unused land or vacant building as an opportunity to create emergency, transitional or permanent housing, and make smart investments in lasting, permanent solutions.**

We need to remember that emergency and transitional shelters — indoor congregate, outdoor village or otherwise — work best when they are temporary. **The focus of these emergency and transitional shelters should always be getting individuals into permanent housing as quickly as possible to open beds for more people who need them. That means we cannot neglect creating the permanent, affordable housing desperately needed in our region when we open more emergency and transitional shelters.** Furthermore, comprehensive and housing-focused services, like outreach workers and case managers, should always be at the center of this strategy to help people access and successfully transition into permanent housing, and *stay housed*.

To successfully accelerate the rate of transitioning people into permanent housing, we recommend the following:

- **Expand indoor, outdoor, congregate and non-congregate transitional housing designed as on-ramps to permanent housing.** Shelters, camps and other transitional housing sites are a key component of the housing continuum and can serve as a supportive space for individuals transitioning from homelessness to housing. These shelters work best when properly paired with peer support, case management and housing vouchers. Service providers and people with lived experience should be transparently engaged in the development and design of these sites.
 - **Fund these sites using local, state and federal funding such as federal [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 \(ARPA\)](#) funds.** In order to preserve the funding needed to create sufficient permanent housing and support critical wraparound services, the setup and ongoing operations of these villages should not be funded with SHS dollars beyond current local implementation plans and budget allocations.
- **Work with the private market to expand/purchase extended stay motels to increase housing stock.** Building off the success of the state's recent [Project Turnkey](#) acquisitions, use ARPA funds, state funds or unallocated housing bond funds to quickly purchase more regional motels. This will help rapidly create safe, low-barrier emergency shelter and transitional housing for another 500-1000+ people.
 - **Use SHS funds to couple these units with ongoing support** like case managers and wraparound services.

- **Work with the private market to explore converting unused office spaces into housing.** Like the successful Project Turnkey model did with motels, there may be opportunities to convert unused office spaces to single room occupancy (SROs) apartments and efficiency studios. These units may present opportunities to match one-time revenue, like ARPA, housing bonds or other public dollars with SHS funds. We encourage the business community to explore opportunities and feasibility of these projects.
- **Work with the private market to expand housing stock through master lease/block lease units for permanent supportive housing.** Under [a master lease program](#) one entity — typically a nonprofit or government agency — holds a master lease and subleases to people exiting homelessness. This benefits tenants by opening up more rapid housing placements, while giving landlords a single point of contact and a long-term lease. The master lease model is used in other [communities](#) and has proven successful at accelerating housing for individuals. We encourage private developers and landlords to expand our housing stock through this program.
- **Expand creative, deeply affordable housing solutions** like home sharing, recovery housing and other models that have a local or national track record of ending homelessness.
- **Dramatically reduce and streamline the regulatory burdens, bureaucratic hurdles, approval processes, financing complexities and delays for private developers,** and find ways to actively incentivize them to accelerate their investments in affordable housing units.

#3 – Immediately implement and scale up the Regional Long-Term Rent Assistance (RLRA) program by working with both public and private partners.

The [RLRA program](#) provides a game changing opportunity to leverage the private market to permanently house people. This new, local rent assistance program allows tenants to pay 30% of their income toward their rent (similar to a Section 8 voucher) in the private market or affordable housing complexes.

For this program to be successful, we recommend the following:

- **Encourage private landlords to step forward as housing providers** for people exiting homelessness with a voucher, while benefiting from consistent rent payments. Our region’s elected officials have a critical role to play in educating and encouraging landlords and developers to participate in master leasing and RLRA.
- **Accelerate the implementation of this program at the county level** so housing case managers can quickly get people off the streets and into stable, supportive housing.
- **Work with the private market to implement and use best practices.** Support landlords to take part in this program by expanding tenant education programs like Rent Well, and provide training and mediation in fair housing law.

#4 – Expand effective outreach programs.

As a person transitions out of homelessness, building trust, identifying their individual needs, finding specific solutions, and providing ongoing counseling are critical. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and effective outreach is essential to supporting their unique needs.

Investing the time and resources necessary to build strong, trusting relationships can both reduce harm to those working to transition out of homelessness, and provide an entry point into permanent housing.

To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- **Expand effective outreach programs**, including programs like Portland Street Response, to better support people experiencing a crisis and build trust with those living outside. This approach helps unhoused people with their immediate needs, and builds a relationship to lead them to stable, supportive housing.
- **Hire and train more behavioral health workers and housing case managers** to create additional capacity for critical, ongoing outreach programs.

#5 – Increase accountability, transparency and collaboration.

There is no question that the key to success is collaboration. Increasing transparency and collaboration will help us efficiently and effectively assess the impact of our combined efforts, leverage more private market and affordable housing opportunities, and identify new opportunities to better support our unhoused neighbors.

To improve accountability, transparency and collaboration, we recommend the following:

- **Improve data collection, tracking and coordination.** We believe in accountability, and would like to see data already collected by jurisdictions better analyzed to answer questions raised by service providers, people on the streets, and the general public about how efforts are progressing.
 - **To be successful, this work will take buy-in from all parties**, including government bureaus, elected officials and nonprofit service providers. We are encouraged to see all three counties are working with Community Solutions to implement their Built For Zero (BFZ) platform for better coordination, outreach and reporting.

- **Implement the Tri-County Planning Body (TCPB).** As outlined in the SHS ballot measure, the TCPB will be housed at Metro and charged with regional coordination and planning. We believe the TCPB is an essential element for transparency and accountability and needs to begin its work. Our region’s homeless crisis expands beyond county lines, and we strongly encourage Metro and the counties to implement this committee ASAP, working with the community to create its charter and initial goals.

#6 – Ensure renters who have applied for rental assistance continue to be protected, and receive assistance as soon as possible.

We applaud the Oregon Legislature for [passing additional rental assistance funding and extended eviction protections](#) in December 2021. Moving forward, we call on our elected leaders – locally and statewide – to do everything in their power to continue helping vulnerable Oregonians stay in their homes, and ensure assistance reaches them quickly, efficiently and equitably.