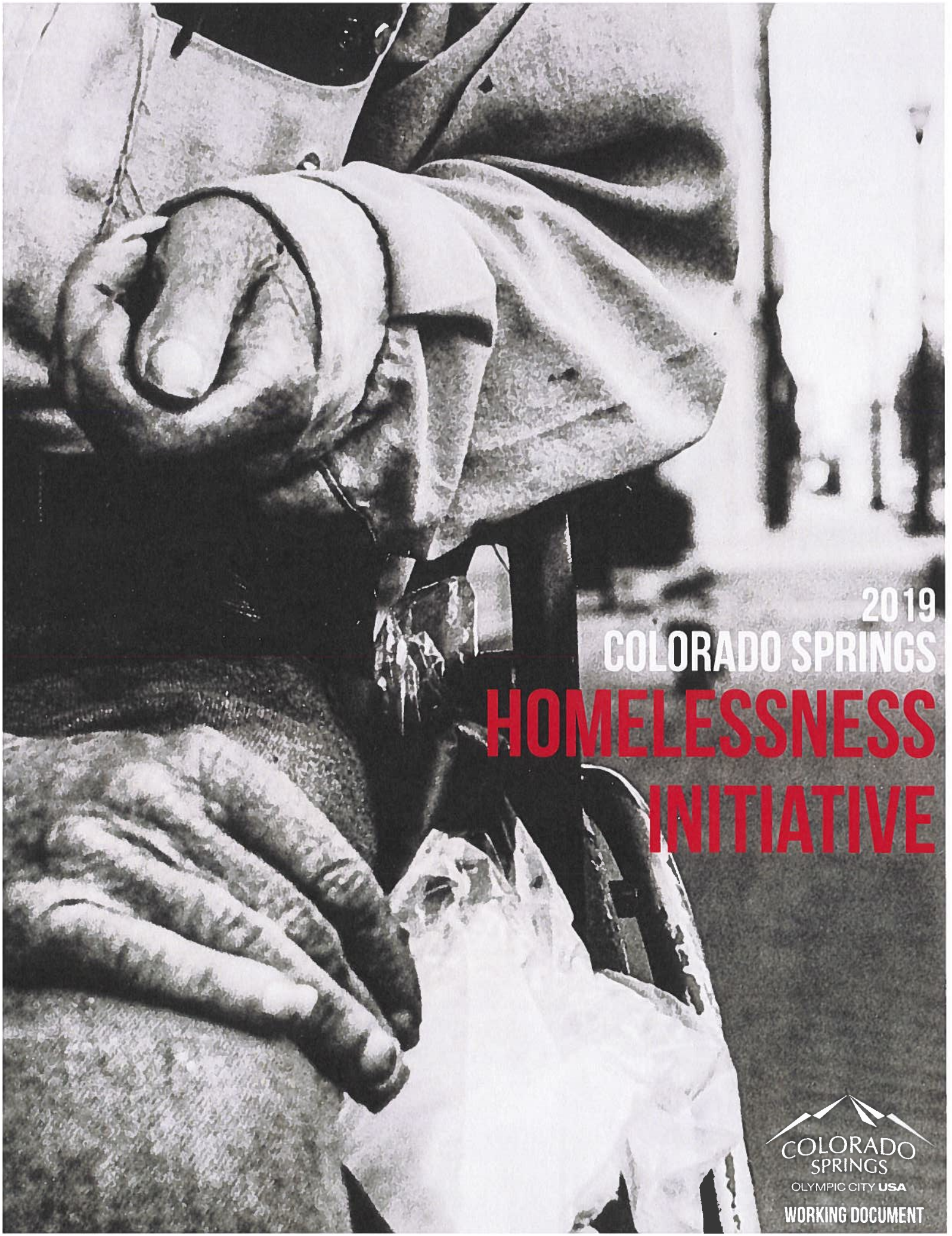


2019 COLORADO SPRINGS HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVE

COLORADO SPRINGS
OLYMPIC CITY USA

WORKING DOCUMENT



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the following contributors for their efforts in developing this initiative.

Mayor John Suthers
Richard Skorman: City Council President
Peter Wysocki: Director of Planning & Community Development
Andrew Phelps: Homelessness Prevention and Response Coordinator
The Planning & Community Development Department
The Pikes Peak Continuum of Care

The hundreds of residents that showed up to the Homelessness Town Hall meetings to give feedback. Your voices helped to shape this initiative.

Credits:

Cover Photo: Andrew Phelps
Interior Photos: Tim Kippel, Katie Sunderlin, City of Colorado Springs Communications, Lander Media, and RTA Architects
Graphic Design: Katie Sunderlin



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INTRODUCTION

As the population continues to grow in Colorado Springs, the number of people experiencing homelessness has also increased. In January 2018, the Pikes Peak Continuum of Care recruited volunteers to facilitate the Point-in-Time count, which is an accepted method for counting people experiencing homelessness in a community. The 2018 Point-in-Time count showed that there were at least 1,551 people experiencing homelessness in El Paso County on the night of January 28th, 2018. This number includes people in shelters, transitional housing, and those unsheltered. The total unsheltered count was 513. The Point-in-Time count, although considered a conservative estimate, is the best objective data available to help our community understand the issue of homelessness.

Homelessness-related issues are among the most frequent complaints that the City receives. Our community is concerned about the health and safety of individuals and families surviving outside. There are also concerns about the substantial impact of illegal camping and dumping in our public spaces. Although not a service or a housing provider, the City of Colorado Springs remains committed to championing strategies that prevent and reduce homelessness in our community by assessing gaps across landscapes, building awareness, convening stakeholder groups, identifying public-private partnerships, facilitating long-range planning efforts, and leveraging resources. It is clear that the costs of homelessness are significant in human suffering, actual dollars, and public perceptions about the safety and vitality of the Pikes Peak region.

The City of Colorado Springs has made progress over the last 10 years on the issue of homelessness. The goals set forth by the "2014 Initiative to End Homelessness in Colorado Springs" have been mostly met.

- The number of year round shelter beds has more than doubled
- The Resource Center at Springs Rescue Mission was opened, offering comprehensive services and amenities
- The Pikes Peak Continuum of Care developed a governance charter
- The Pikes Peak Continuum of Care developed a 10-year strategic plan to end homelessness

Even though progress has been made to assist homeless individuals and families, there is still work to be done. This initiative is a renewed commitment by the City of Colorado Springs to address homelessness in coordination with our community partners. This initiative sets forth attainable, near-term goals and objectives to improve homelessness related services and to reduce negative community impacts resulting from homelessness.


STARBUCKS COFFEE

ALIGNMENT WITH PLANCOS

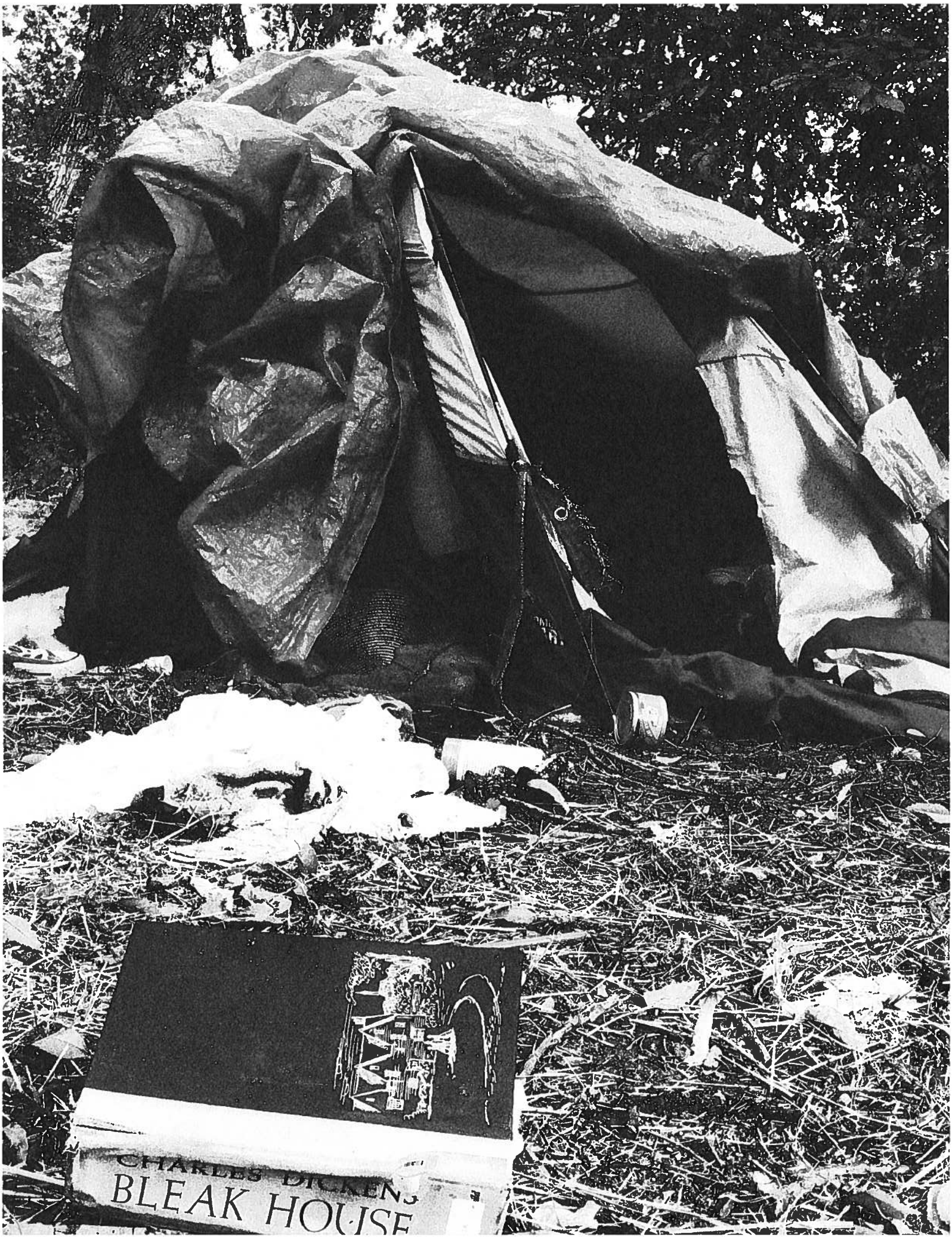
The 2019 Colorado Springs Homelessness Initiative aligns with PlanCOS, the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan for the City. PlanCOS identifies homelessness as an issue of importance and a priority for our community in three separate areas: as strategy VN-2.A-1 in the Vibrant Neighborhoods chapter, as a Keystone Indicator, and as part of the Attainable Housing Plan.

Strategy VN-2.A-1: In partnership with other organizations and agencies, continue to develop and support existing, expanded, and new initiatives to address homelessness to include provision of additional shelter beds, permanent supportive housing, and programs to be coupled with increased enforcement of applicable laws including camping bans.

Keystone Indicator #5: Improving housing affordability over time is identified and addressed as one of the cornerstone challenges and priorities in PlanCOS. This recommended indicator combines overall median single-family and multifamily housing affordability along with total homeless population counts. Together this combination of measures is intended to provide an important and helpful general barometer for progress based on the broad averages and overall counts at different levels along the economic spectrum. It will be important to also be attentive to impacts on sub-groups of housing consumers, whose needs and experience may not be fully represented by measures that focus on overall median housing costs. Likewise, although changes in the overall homeless populations provide an important measure in that area, the status of sub-groups within that overall number will be important.

- Single Family Home Ownership Affordability Index
- Apartment Rental Affordability Index
- Total Homeless Populations in El Paso County

Attainable Housing Plan: Attainable housing is arguably the most important but also most challenging topic addressed in PlanCOS. A key recommendation is to create and maintain a broad spectrum plan with multiple but coordinated strategies. These would all be directed toward the goal of providing a range of housing types and programs that together will contribute to more attainable housing along the full continuum from homelessness to workforce housing, throughout the city and within its subareas. This would be a City-initiated and maintained plan that would complement but extend beyond the planning requirements associated with federal and state housing programs and funding. Included in the plan would be analysis of overall needs and conditions from a community perspective along with ongoing city recommendations and priorities for strategies to address overall housing attainability.


CHARLES DICKENS
BLEAK HOUSE

GOAL 1 INFORM THE PUBLIC ON HOMELESSNESS ISSUES

HELPCOS CAMPAIGN

The HelpCOS website is a central hub for homelessness issues in our community. The HelpCOS Campaign informs the public on how to most effectively give assistance to those in need by directing donations, resources, and volunteerism to impactful local service providers. People can access the website to learn how they can help by donating money, time, or goods. The website also provides a directory of services aimed at those who are seeking assistance. The City will continue to promote this campaign via signage, social media, and other mediums.

GOAL 1 OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1: CONTINUE INFORMING THE PUBLIC ON HOMELESSNESS RELATED ISSUES VIA THE HELPCOS CAMPAIGN

ACTION ITEMS

1: Build an interactive map of services on www.helpcos.org
2: Provide monthly information updates on www.helpcos.org
3: Partner with the Pikes Peak Continuum of Care and the Council of Neighbors and Organizations to hold neighborhood town hall meetings to educate and update residents on homelessness topics and programs.



GOAL 2 INCREASE ACCESS TO SHELTER AND SERVICES

INCREASE LOW-BARRIER BED CAPACITY AND SHELTER FOR FAMILIES

The 2018 Point in Time Count revealed a deficit in low-barrier shelter in our community. In order to respond to this community need and ensure that no one in our community is forced to sleep outside, the City will collaborate with service providers to add more than 300 additional low-barrier shelter beds as well as increase shelter options for families experiencing homelessness. This will more than double our community's low-barrier shelter bed capacity. Having adequate shelter bed capacity will also enable CSPD officers to enforce camping ban ordinances and aid in protecting our environment.

INCREASE STREET OUTREACH

Adequate shelter bed capacity is just the first step in getting people off the streets and into housing. Persistent, coordinated, and creative outreach efforts are vitally important to identify and engage those experiencing homelessness and link them to housing and service interventions available in our community. In 2019, the City will continue to collaborate with local service providers to increase homeless outreach in our community.

GOAL 2 OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1: ADD ADDITIONAL 370 LOW-BARRIER SHELTER BEDS

ACTION ITEMS

1: Collaborate with the Springs Rescue Mission to create an additional 150 low-barrier shelter beds in an existing building on the Springs Rescue Mission campus. (Completed December, 2018)

2: Collaborate with the Salvation Army to remodel the RJ Montgomery Center located in southwest downtown to transition the existing facility into a low-barrier shelter serving individuals and families. When complete, the shelter will have 220 low barrier beds for individuals and over 40 beds for families.

OBJECTIVE 2: ADD SHELTER OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

ACTION ITEMS

1: The Homeless Family Solutions Collaborative (HFSC) will identify an agency for future family shelter construction and operations

2: HFSC to conduct financial feasibility study and an operational pro-forma

3: HFSC to develop a funding plan

4: HFSC to conduct a capital campaign for both construction and on-going operational costs

5: HFSC to identify property for low-barrier family shelter

OBJECTIVE 3: INCREASE STREET OUTREACH

ACTION ITEMS

1: Work with community organizations to pilot a collaborative homeless outreach program in downtown Colorado Springs

2: Evaluate results of the pilot to inform best practices and future costs for a long term homeless outreach program in Colorado Springs





GOAL 3 DECREASE BARRIERS FOR PEOPLE READY TO EXIT HOMELESSNESS

OUTREACH COURT

Outreach Court is a unique community-centric approach to criminal justice. By bringing non-profit stakeholders across the entire services spectrum into the court to work collaboratively to address the needs of each person experiencing homelessness, Outreach Court is able to marshal the expertise and resources of the broader community to both reduce homelessness and reduce the strain on Colorado Springs City services.

The goal of the Outreach Court is to help those experiencing homelessness move forward from life on the streets by providing alternative sentencing in appropriate cases, as well as a community-based method to get their cases back on track. In lieu of assessing traditional penalties, the Outreach Court will connect individuals with case managers who can help guide them to the services they need. By doing so, the Outreach Court will address the root causes of offending behavior and empower individuals to take concrete steps to move out of homelessness. In addition to providing this alternative sentencing approach, Outreach Court will leverage technology and work collaboratively with community service providers to clear active municipal warrants and schedule cases from these very same community service providers' locations.

HOMELESS WORK PROGRAM

For some experiencing homelessness, employment is an important key to leaving life on the streets. A homeless work program would provide both needed services to our community and gainful employment to those experiencing homelessness. An ideal location for this program would be within an existing local non-profit organization. In 2019, the City will issue a competitive Request For Proposal (RFP) to determine the best organization to run a work program.

GOAL 3 OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1: INCENTIVIZE PARTICIPATION IN CASE MANAGEMENT VIA THE CREATION OF A HOMELESS OUTREACH COURT PROGRAM

ACTION ITEMS

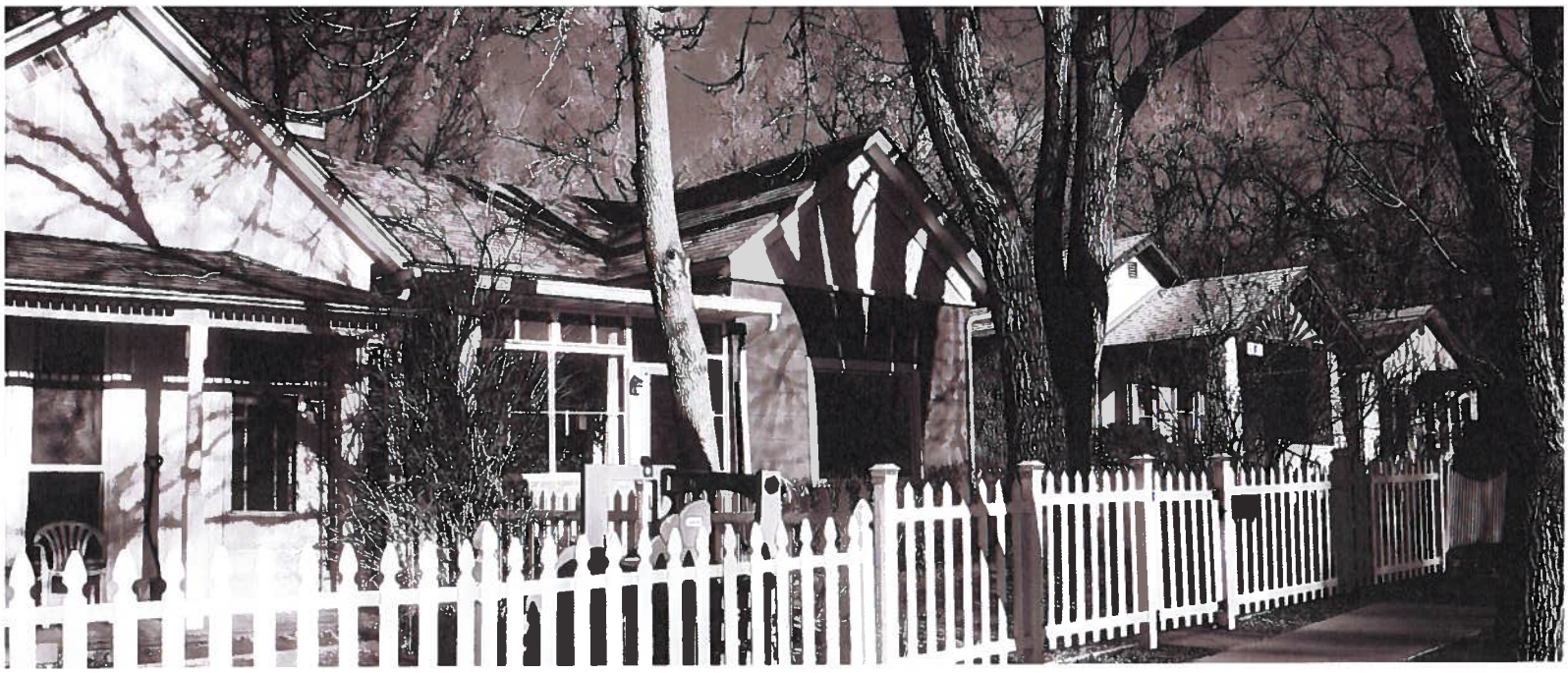
1: Develop procedure for Homeless Outreach Court Program
2: Set up system for remote warrant removal at Springs Rescue Mission
3: Identify case managers at participating non-profits and train them in Homeless Outreach Court program procedures
4: Routinely and systematically track measurable outcomes

OBJECTIVE 2: SUPPORT FUNDING FOR HOMELESS WORK PROGRAM WITH AREA NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

ACTION ITEMS

1: Publish Request for Information (RFI) for the purpose of determining whether there is sufficient capacity of interested and qualified sources that can build and maintain a homeless work program. Additionally, the RFI would determine a budgetary estimate for the project and any necessary ancillary services.
2: Identify and coordinate funding
3: Publish Request for Proposals and select best proposal





GOAL 4 INCREASE ACCESS TO HOUSING

ATTAINABLE HOUSING PLAN

Many people experiencing homelessness in our community are homeless because of the gap between their income and housing costs. Certainly, the people most at risk of homelessness are those with no income and those with extremely low-income – earning less than 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Poverty rates tend to be higher amongst populations with specialized housing needs, such as extremely low-income seniors, individuals with disabilities and female-headed households with children. Rising housing costs disproportionately impact these populations and can lead to housing instability. To further understand the issue and set strategic goals for our City's housing future, the City of Colorado Springs is developing an attainable housing plan. The plan will include an overview of the housing options for very low and extremely low-income populations and include an analysis of the unique housing challenges faced by individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The plan will point the way towards developing an adequate supply of housing for all segments of the population in Colorado Springs.

THE VETERAN INCENTIVE FUND

Since the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness was launched in 2014, more than 63 communities across 33 different states have achieved "functional zero." Functional zero is defined as "a well-coordinated and efficient community system that assures homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring and no veteran is forced to live on the streets." Even though our community has made great strides towards the goal of functional zero, we still have veterans experiencing homelessness. Our community's sole remaining unmet criteria for reaching this threshold is housing more veterans per quarter than those veterans that are newly identified as experiencing homelessness. To meet this need, the City will create The Veteran Incentive Fund. This Fund will be utilized by service providers to incentivize landlords to house veterans experiencing homelessness and help our community reach the goal of functional zero. No taxpayer dollars will used for this Fund, only private donations.

GOAL 4 OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1: DEVELOP AN ATTAINABLE HOUSING PLAN

ACTION ITEMS

1: With input from stakeholders, develop a plan that includes housing stock and needs analysis, recommendations on incentives, funding sources, operations, and removal of any barriers in developing attainable housing
2: Obtain acceptance/endorsement of the Plan

OBJECTIVE 2: ESTABLISH A VETERAN INCENTIVE FUND

ACTION ITEMS

1: Develop a standard operating procedures manual for the Fund
2: Identify fiscal agent to receive donations
3: Create and execute appropriate agreements with fiscal agents
4: Raise money
5: Inform Pikes Peak Continuum of Care staff involved with Coordinated Entry on how to utilize the Fund





GOAL 5 CLEAN UP ILLEGAL CAMPS AND PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

ADDITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES STAFF

To more expeditiously and effectively remove the debris and trash resulting from the illegal camps in our community, the City will add three additional staff to the Neighborhood Services Division. Neighborhood Services will assign two full-time maintenance technicians to work with the Colorado Springs Police Department's Homeless Outreach Team (HOT). These maintenance technicians will be solely responsible for immediate remediation of vacated homeless camps as identified by CSPD. One full-time senior maintenance technician will be assigned to assist with larger clean-ups or facilitate needs identified by the Homeless Outreach Team.

ADDITIONAL OFFICERS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS RELATED ISSUES

In 2019, the Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) plans to train more officers to assist the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) as well as increase the number of hours dedicated to responding to issues involving homelessness. While CSPD understands that criminal enforcement is not the best method for a long-term solution for homelessness, HOT officers and other specially trained officers will continue to enforce City ordinance and State laws when appropriate. Additionally, HOT officers will continue to conduct outreach and provide service referrals as much as possible to those in need.

GOAL 5 OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1: ADD NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES STAFF TO AID IN CLEANING UP ILLEGAL CAMPS

ACTION ITEMS

1: Add three Maintenance Technician positions to the Neighborhood Services Quality of Life team. Once all vacant positions are filled, the Quality of Life Team will have eight full time employees and one Code Enforcement Supervisor. Homeless camp clean-up will remain this team's highest priority.

OBJECTIVE 2: CSPD WILL ENHANCE RESPONSE TO ISSUES INVOLVING HOMELESSNESS

ACTION ITEMS

1: Train three additional officers and one additional sergeant in enforcing camping ban ordinances at each patrol division

2: Add two additional officers on foot patrol in the Downtown area. CSPD has had two uniformed police officers on foot patrol in the Downtown area for the last two years on Friday through Sunday, from 10AM to 7PM. In 2019 CSPD patrols will expand to include Monday through Thursday from 10AM to 3PM resulting in two police officers on foot patrol every day of the week in the Downtown area.

3: The Colorado Springs Police Department will increase the size of the Homeless Outreach Team from four officers to six starting February 10th, 2019.

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