

DATE: January 15, 2020

TO: Durango City Councilors and La Plata County Commissioners

CC: Project Staff Chuck Stevens, County Manager, La Plata County and Kevin Hall, Assistant City Manager, City of Durango

FROM: Jenn Lopez and Meagan Picard, The Athena Group

RE: Cover Memo for City of Durango and La Plata County Strategic Plan on Homelessness

BACKGROUND

The Athena Group is pleased to attach the final draft of the *City of Durango and La Plata County Strategic Plan on Homelessness* for your consideration and potential support for implementation starting in the first quarter of 2020. This plan, funded by both entities, is the culmination of several months of listening, convening, and developing strategies with local community members to address this growing issue in the community.

The development of this strategic plan is grounded in one essential principle: *balance all interests to produce the best possible outcomes for the community as a whole*. Balancing all interests means that addressing homelessness will include meeting the needs of people who are unhoused or at risk of losing their housing and meeting the needs of all neighbors who wish to enjoy the beauty of this community with clean community spaces and to feel safe living here together.

The *Strategic Implementation Plan* is designed to serve as a framework for guiding and supporting successful implementation of strategic action items in the Actionable Management Plan and allow for nimble responses to challenges with implementation and emerging issues or new opportunities. Grounded in both best practices and community dynamics and needs, this plan seeks to:

1. Provide for an array of strategies built on common ground and effectively balance the array of interests in the community.
2. Establish a systematic approach that aims to keep people housed or get them into housing as quickly as possible, enabling a future in which homelessness is rare, brief and one time whenever it can't be fully prevented.
3. Leverage existing strengths in order to create a much greater chance of success in reaching that major goal of preventing or limiting the occurrence of homelessness.

The *Actionable Management Plan*, describes the array of strategies planned in each strategic theme identified for viable action during the planning process, including *Housing and Shelter, Health and Other Support Services, Safe and Clean Community, Connected Community and Work that Works*.

Strategies that are ready for implementation within 12 months of plan adoption are considered ***Tier 1 strategies***.

Tier 2 strategies are those that have been identified as highly desirable strategies but either need to wait for other strategies to be implemented first or need more development. These strategies are slated for consideration to be advanced as a Tier 1 Strategies during each annual review or in response to an emerging need or new opportunity to implement.

Primary Recommendation for Local Government

The Athena Group is asking for a formal endorsement or adoption of this strategic plan and for local government to commit new funding for plan implementation in 2020. Funding would be used to establish a coordinated system for implementation of this Strategic Plan on Homelessness.

Coordination System Overview

Through this planning process, we have confirmed that there is significant interest and need to increase the community's capacity to address homelessness through greater coordination and collaboration.

This planning process has designed a coordination system for the greater Durango area in La Plata County that includes:

- Developing a formal resource navigation center to better deploy services to unhoused community members and to prevent homelessness for housed community members;
- Creating a Coordinating Council structure for coordinated decision-making as the plan is implemented and requires updates;
- Integrating a coordinated data collection system into the navigation center that is linked to the Coordinated Entry System (CES) for housing and annual counts of people who are unhoused and for use with center intakes and check-ins; and
- Establishing a new Systems Navigation and Coordination Director position (Director) to both manage the navigation center and support the Coordinating Council in its responsibilities, including facilitating priority resource acquisition.

The plan recommends that the local governments identify funding to support the set-up and build out of this system for the first three years of implementation (2020-2023). After that time the community can evaluate its effectiveness and, hopefully, other resources are identified to augment the need for funding from local government. Total investment in this new system is estimated to cost up to \$170,000 annually, plus potential additional local investment in an organized camp. These investments are described in the following table of cost estimates for local government.

Strategic Plan Implementation New Investment Opportunities	
<i>Primary Investment Request</i>	
Establishing Coordination System	Cost Estimates
Systems Navigation and Coordination Director position*	\$95,000
Support staff for position and navigation center*	\$50,000
Data system enhancements, including possible technical assistance for set-up	\$10,000
Office support, supplies and set-up	\$15,000
Total	\$170,000
<i>Additional Investment Opportunities</i>	
Permanent Camp Establishment	
Consulting Support and Feasibility Analysis**	\$15,000-\$20,000
Site improvements	TBD based on site
Bathroom facilities and portable water	TBD based on site
Nonprofit sponsor and part-time staff support	\$30,000-\$40,000
Camp Manager Stipend (\$1000 a month for 12 months)	\$12,000
Transportation	TBD based on site
Supplemental Support for Tier 1 Action Items	
There are a number of opportunities to help fund tier 1 activities. If interested, the team suggests waiting for establishment of the council to help prioritize which actions may be most impactful for local government to support.	TBD

**Actual costs associated with these positions may be adjusted to align with local market rates; a comparative wage analysis may be warranted. Additionally, organizations that submit proposals for managing the coordination system should submit proposed salary ranges that will work within their organizations while also attracting highly qualified candidates to the positions.*

***Cost estimates for the camp are best guesses; The Athena Group does not have expertise in establishing or managing homeless camps. We recommend thinking about accessing energy impact grant funding or other sources to hire consultant support to develop an approach/feasibility analysis for a permanent camp program. Please connect with Jenn Lopez if interested in pursuing this opportunity.*

These initial system investments have the potential to create greater impact with existing resources as well as create the needed capacity to access new resources. As mentioned in the plan, the State of Colorado is investing millions more in housing and homeless solutions, and there are policy changes at the state level that could increase funding for substance abuse services in the very near future.

Investment in this coordination infrastructure would leverage the following returns:

- 1) Immediate increased capacity in the community for decision-making, program development, policy development and fundraising.
- 2) Decreased reliance on local government staff through the development of this oversight body that can review requests concerning resources, projects or policies and provide guidance to local government.
- 3) Increased capacity for grant writing. Specifically, our team developed a resource strategy document (plan appendix) for the first year to assist with first year efforts to build capacity in the community including foundation resources, State of Colorado grants, and federal grant programs.
- 4) Streamlined access to services to reduce barriers and support faster access to housing.
- 5) A clearinghouse for information about homelessness and a place for businesses and private community members to go to learn about the issue, get involved or donate.

Next Steps

The Athena Group recommends establishing an interim working group immediately (IWC) to guide the first steps toward making this plan reality. This working group should have two major tasks:

1. Work with the City of Durango and La Plata County to create an RFP for development and management of the coordinated system on homelessness.
2. Support on-going efforts to establish a permanent organized camp, which is currently identified as a Tier 2 strategy but should be moved to Tier 1 as soon as this group is able to identify an organization willing to manage it.

Once a contract is secured with an organization to manage this new community coordinated system, the first order of business should be to hire the Director to support all aspects of plan implementation. Once this position is filled, this staff person will establish the new Coordinating Council (council), based on the recommendations of the IWC. Once council members have been appointed, the director and council should begin working to launch the service navigation center, including agreements with partners and data management system design.

The IWC should consist of a small subset of the PATH group; approximately 5-7 members and should be formally invited by City and County staff to participate in this committee. The following individuals are being recommended for consideration: Elsa Inman, Sarada Leavenworth, John Gamble, Mike Todt, Richard Dilworth, Liane Jollon, Ann Morse, Rachel Bauske, Caroline Kinser, and a representative from both the County and the City. Not all invited may accept, so we have provided more than seven names for consideration.

The Athena Group's contract for services is ended once this plan is adopted. Jenn Lopez, a local community member, is offering to provide support to the IWC meetings as an in-kind donation over the next two months. She is also interested in working with local government staff to find grant resources to stay more involved, if desired, through the first 12 months of plan implementation.
