



# OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

## CITY OF BANGOR

CATHERINE M. CONLOW  
CITY MANAGER

To: Bangor City Council  
From: Catherine Conlow, City Manager  
CC: Richard Cromwell, Patty Hamilton, Mark Hathaway, Dave Bushey, Rindy Fogler, Wade Betters, Tracy Willette  
Date: June 21, 2019  
RE: Homelessness in Bangor

**The Challenge:** Over the past two years, the city staff have received an increasing number of calls from residents and visitors about homelessness in Bangor. This appears to be the result of an increase in the number of unsheltered homeless individuals living in the City of Bangor. Most of the calls are complaints and safety concerns regarding encampments scattered throughout the city, drug use, and panhandling. For that reason, city staff began meeting to discuss ways in which we could coordinate efforts around our homeless population. Below is summary information based on our discussions to date. Key challenges are as follows:

1. Agencies charged with supporting vulnerable populations have a lack of resources and capacity.
2. Exacerbating this problem is the lack of a statewide response to deal with the complex issues of homelessness.
3. Individuals are sick and getting sicker. A living environment such as the encampments does nothing to help these individuals address underlying mental health challenges, physical ailments, addiction, and other issues. Untreated individuals will continue to see a decline in health and their issues compound.
4. Violence, including sexual violence, is a serious problem in the encampments. The need for Police/EMS response increases with the size of these camps.
5. Health and sanitation is a serious concern. Close living conditions with no sanitation or medical care means potential increase in serious diseases, which can spread rapidly. Portland and other locations are seeing a spread of hepatitis.
6. Residents are concerned about the impact of homelessness. Residents, visitors, and businesses have expressed concern for safety.
7. City resources are overwhelmed by the need to support and respond to unsheltered individuals and those who cannot or will not meet requirements of their programs. These individuals require significant city response from Police, EMS,

Fire, and Health and Community Services. Consequently, other calls for non-emergency services may experience significant delays.

8. There are a number of non-profit and private responses to homelessness such as the distribution of tents and sleeping bags. While well intentioned, these programs often do not address the serious underlying issues and, in some cases, they compound the problems.
9. Some individuals may be brought to Bangor without a choice, even though they may be better supported closer to friends and family.
10. Correctional facilities releasing inmates to Bangor with no housing or plan for housing is causing a more problems. Many of these individuals have no ties to the city and may be better served by being released to their own communities. Correctional Officers are also stretched to find housing for inmates. With no job and no understanding of what it means to be tenant, some individuals fail.
11. Neighboring municipalities, sheriff's deputies, and state police are known to relocate or direct individuals to Bangor for services. Unfortunately, those services may not be available or have capacity, yet the individuals are still left here. Sometimes individuals are left, unattended, outside of Bangor facilities by law enforcement agencies or other program staff. These drain resources from Bangor PD, who is then called upon to deal with the issues created.
12. Fueling these concerns is that staff has heard that the perception from non-profit institutions, municipalities, and state agencies that Bangor has the resources for homeless adults and families. The result is an increase in the number of individuals living outside who are not receiving appropriate housing or care.
13. Public Works and Parks and Recreation are committing significant time and resources to cleaning up encampments.
14. The numbers of individuals in crisis overwhelms police staff. Police have been serving as mental health and crisis workers. The number of group homes that are not adequately staffed compounds this issue.

**Current Efforts:** City staff have undertaken a number of steps to better understand and address the issue:

1. Staff from the Police Department, Health and Community Services, Parks and Recreation, and the City Manager's office convened a series of stakeholder meetings facilitated by Dennis Marble, former director of the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter. Stakeholder groups include the following:
  - a. Faith based (April 25): Hammond St. Congregational Church, Salvation Army, Columbia Street Baptist Church, Greater Bangor Street Pastors, St John's Episcopal Church, All Souls Congregational Church, among others.
  - b. Shelter Providers (May 17, 2019): PCHC Hope House, Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, Shaw House, Community Care.
  - c. Outreach: Biker Church, Manna, Jericho Road, Hope for Homeless, Preble Street

- d. Business (May 31, 2019) : Diversified Ink, Downtown Partnership, Bangor Public Library
  - e. Healthcare: (June 14, 2019): Acadia Hospital, Northern Light Emergency Department, Community Health and Counseling Services.
2. Convened conversations with the railroad regarding help cleaning up encampments along RR property. We are cautiously optimistic that the RR will cooperate.
  3. Reaching out to the encampments through Sgt. Betters and Rindy Fogler from Public Health and Community Services to determine if there are immediate needs that can be met. We have provided IDs, transportation, etc.
  4. Applied for and received a grant from the John T. Gorman Foundation for a Homeless Outreach Coordinator to further our efforts in this area.

#### **What we are Learning:**

1. This issue is bigger than Bangor. Addressing these challenges requires a larger effort and resources from the State and the region. Data shows that only 35% of residents in Bangor's shelters are from Penobscot County. How do we get interests outside of Bangor to get involved?
2. Handing out tents and sleeping bags is not the answer and may actually be contributing to more people staying unsheltered and not seeking the resources they truly need to address mental and physical health, substance use, and other issues.
3. The facilitation of more "camping" creates serious sanitation and health concerns which are costing the City and private property owners time and money to clean up. It also can lead to disease outbreaks that continue unmitigated.
4. Surrounding communities do not see this as their issue and are actually contributing to the growing number of unsheltered people in Bangor. Many simply direct people to Bangor for services or drop them off here without any further support.
5. The number of unsheltered individuals from other states is increasing; Corrections programs outside Maine (as well as those within our state) are discharging people to our community into homelessness.
6. Resources are stretched, and shelters are full most - if not all – of the time
7. Efforts are not aligned and therefore not as effective as they could be. There is a complete lack of a system level approach.
8. While we have some data, we still need information regarding who is here, the number of families needing shelter, how and why people are coming to Bangor, and their actual needs.
9. Individuals who live in these conditions are continuing to deteriorate mentally and physically. Unmet or untreated mental health needs are a large component. Staff are seeing individuals that are more elderly with physical challenges related to aging in addition to mental health and/or substance use issues.

- 10.** Homelessness cannot be solved without involving the State in a larger conversation of housing, employment, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, and community support services.
- 11.** Some group homes are compounding the problem because they can be inadequately staffed to deal with behavioral issues that may arise. Bangor PD is often called upon to help staff deal with these behavioral issues. Folks that are unsuccessful in group home settings have nowhere to go.

#### **Next Steps and What is Currently Being Done:**

- 1.** A Homeless Outreach Coordinator is being hired to work with the Police and Public Health Departments to identify the unmet needs of individuals who are homeless and connect them with housing and the support services required to maintain housing stability. Collect Data about the individuals to connect with the appropriate resources.
- 2.** Met with railroad staff to get support for clean ups on railroad properties.
- 3.** We are working with and encourage outreach providers to collaborate to offer resources out of one location (The Brick Church), which results in a better process for delivering the needed services.
- 4.** Clean up efforts have been happening with partners such as businesses, Jericho Road Ministries, and Public Works, but the City could consider a Community wide 'clean-up day' to highlight efforts and leverage resources.
- 5.** A tag out system for equipment such as tents and sleeping bags will help slow the flow of equipment which is then dumped and becomes trash for clean ups. For example, if an individual receives a tent or sleeping bag from Jericho Road, they can't receive another until they turn in the original.
- 6.** The scheduled biannual brush cutting along the Kenduskeag Stream and Penobscot River will help remove the "cover" under which some encampments hide.
- 7.** Our Health Dept. staff is providing resource material when making outreach visits.
- 8.** Contractors can be hired to clean up vacant camp sites on city property.
- 9.** Plans are in the works to schedule campsite visits with City Councilors.

#### **Longer Term Goals:**

- 1.** Help our homeless population realize safe, clean and affordable housing.
- 2.** Obtain support from the State to develop a comprehensive strategy for dealing with homelessness across municipalities and service providers. This must include curtailing the act of discharging individuals to homelessness in Bangor by state correctional facilities, mental health facilities, the state police, sheriffs, and other local municipalities and institutions.
- 3.** Work with agencies in Bangor to align efforts and coordinate services and care. Create a permanent working group.
- 4.** Develop capacity in other communities with increased focus on housing, mental and physical health supports, substance use disorder treatment, and employment.