

Cambridge CONTINUUM
OF CARE

FINDING SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS IN CAMBRIDGE

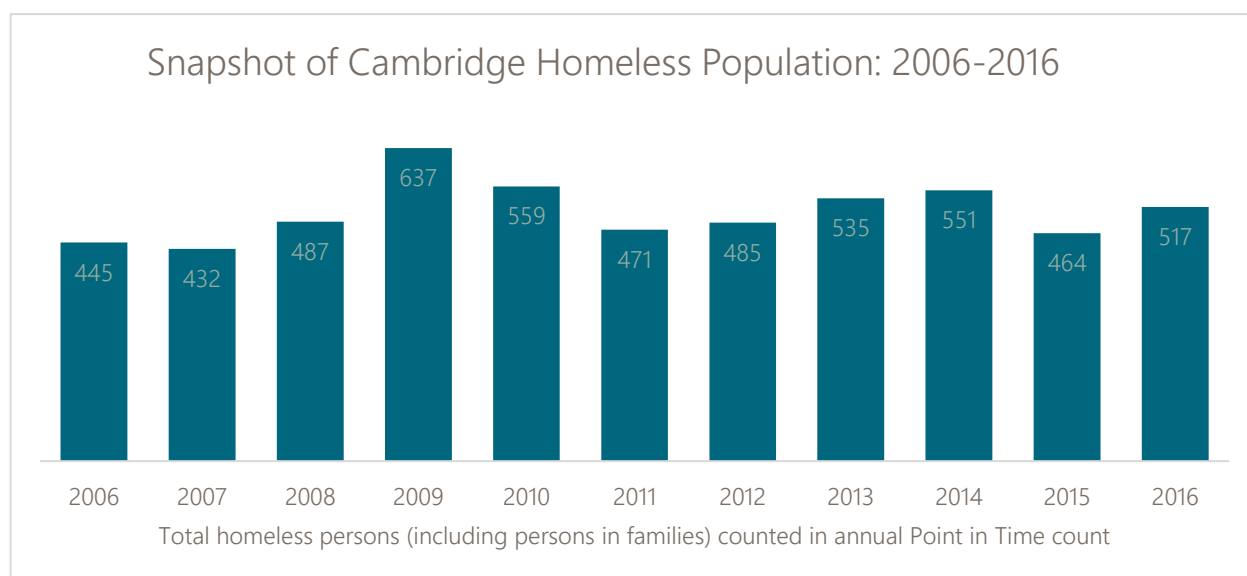
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CAMBRIDGE CHARRETTE ON
HOMELESSNESS

AUGUST 2016

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INTRODUCTION

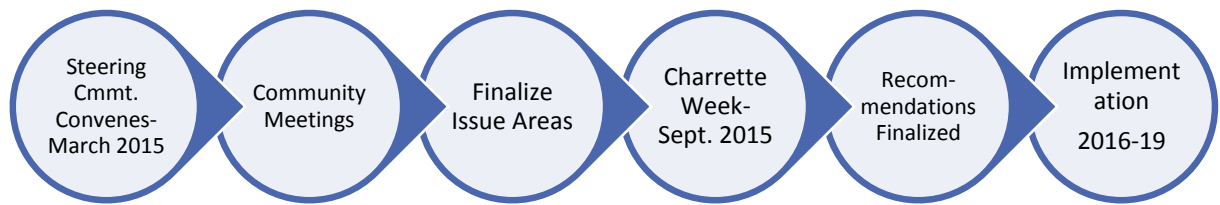
Cambridge has a history of thinking intentionally about the reality of homelessness and the human impacts in our community. In response, we have collectively developed a network of unique services to address the reality that poverty, illness, job instability, and other significant family stressors can lead any household into homelessness—a state of crisis that includes the absence of stable housing and can last for months or years. Cambridge service providers, in partnership with the City have engaged in a number of planning processes in relation to homelessness over the past decade, including a *Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness* in 2005. We have experienced some success in adding new permanent supportive housing units through federal homeless assistance dollars, but the overall homeless population has remained relatively unchanged over the past decade, despite considerable work to overcome barriers.



The largest funding source for homeless housing and services in Cambridge is the federal homeless assistance program administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). A significant development in the past decade was the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act, the statutory vehicle of the HUD homeless assistance program. The HEARTH Act of 2009 created the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program, which modified funding categories and significantly realigned the policy priorities for this federal funding source. HUD’s updated priorities, based on [Opening Doors](#), the nation’s first federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, are now focused on prioritizing chronically homeless individuals and families for available permanent supportive housing units; and utilizing a Housing First orientation in the interest of removing unnecessary barriers to housing. The plan calls for transforming homeless services into crisis response systems that prevent homelessness and rapidly houses people experiencing homelessness by moving them quickly out of shelter and into stable housing. The annual funding request has become increasingly competitive, with resources largely being directed towards Permanent Supportive Housing, while funding for non-housing (supportive services only programs) and Transitional Housing have been largely eliminated. This significant realignment of federal funding, coupled with a Cambridge rental market that is deeply unaffordable for low-income individuals and families has compelled us to take a renewed look at our approach to addressing homelessness in Cambridge.

THE CAMBRIDGE CHARRETTE ON HOMELESSNESS

The [Cambridge Continuum of Care](#) (CCoC) and the City of Cambridge were interested in engaging the community in an authentic, time-limited planning process focused on actionable outcomes. The objective was to create a community process that would help identify our local priorities in responding to homelessness. The City and CCoC agreed to partner with a national organization, the [Corporation for Supportive Housing](#) (CSH), to facilitate a charrette (community planning) process that began in early 2015 with the formation of a local cross-sector Steering Committee that guided the process. The Steering Committee met for five months with City and CSH staff to provide a local context, identify the most critical issue areas, and conducted two community meetings to gain community input. These inputs became the basis of dialogue during the Charrette Week event held in September of 2015. The event participants included 5 CSH facilitators, over 100 community members per day, and 28 local and national experts.



DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Initial ideas that emerged from Charrette Week were presented by CSH staff on the final day of the event in September 2015. The Steering Committee subsequently met with City staff over several months to offer consultation on strategic priorities. Five priority areas emerged and the associated recommendations are detailed as follows.

PRIORITY AREA 1:

CREATE DEDICATED PATHWAYS TO PERMANENT AND BRIDGE HOUSING

By definition, the answer to homelessness is housing. We face significant challenges in Cambridge on this front due to a high cost/ low vacancy rental market and conditions that impede the creation of new affordable housing. In 2015, the typical housing subsidy only covered 60-70% of market rents, making it difficult to secure Cambridge units even when a public resource is available. Both community commitment and creativity are required to overcome these constraints. These recommendations include a blend of housing interventions, including *Rapid Re-housing* and *Bridge (Interim) Housing*, forms of housing that provide time-limited or respite housing resources while more permanent options are being secured.

Recommendations:

1A	Pursue local, state, and federal funding opportunities to secure resources dedicated to housing homeless Cambridge individuals and families.
1B	Consider all available options for addressing the significant gap between subsidy caps and local market rents, including streamlining access to existing and new affordable housing.
1C	Work with local housing authorities to pilot the movement of 5 formerly homeless persons per year from Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) to mainstream subsidized housing.
1D	Support increased density opportunities for private developers to create more affordable housing.
1E	Identify nonprofit partners interested and able to develop/ operate housing for homeless individuals and families. Consult with the Community Development Department and Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust to create new housing opportunities (including the potential of a homeless set-aside).
1F	Create a single-site or multiple-site housing project for the 10 highest utilizers of public services utilizing a housing first model and on-site supportive services.
1G	Convene partners to evaluate current gaps in housing and services for individual homeless women. Assess options for developing a new single-site housing project for this population.
1H	Create dedicated pathways from federally-funded Rapid Re-housing programs to local affordable housing (Inclusionary Zoning units or Housing Choice vouchers) for individuals/ families with sustainable incomes.
1I	Explore the development of a program with time-limited bridge housing subsidies for Cambridge residents on waiting lists for affordable housing <i>or</i> residing in Inclusionary Zoning units AND who lose income and are unable to

sustain current rents. The temporary assistance will sustain their tenancies while they are stabilizing their job/ income loss.

1J

Explore converting an existing shelter into a bridge housing facility.

1K

Work with the Cambridge Housing Authority to create new sponsor-based partnerships with local nonprofits to create supportive bridge housing for individuals/ families with significant obstacles to housing.

PRIORITY AREA 2:

PROVIDE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES TO PROMOTE LONG-TERM STABILITY AND PREVENT RETURNS TO HOMELESSNESS

Homeless individuals and families often have a complex web of needs that have contributed to their state of homelessness. While individual situations vary, housing alone rarely addresses more enduring conditions that lead to recurrent homelessness. The availability of appropriate supportive services, including mental health and addiction services, play a pivotal role in transitioning beyond homelessness to a stabilizing and self-empowering way of life.

As federal homeless assistance funds have shifted towards housing and away from services, it is imperative that we cultivate sustainable resources for supporting these services. Landlords are more likely to rent to currently homeless tenants with challenging housing histories if the tenant is connected to supportive services.

Recommendations:

2A	Provide technical support and local expertise for local nonprofits eligible to bill Medicaid for housing-related and/or health services.
2B	Ensure that homeless service providers have the opportunity to access sustainable supportive service funding through the City’s Community Benefits process. Housing opportunities increase when robust supportive services are available.
2C	Support income creation for households in Rapid Re-housing and households at risk of losing their housing by investing in individually tailored employment services.
2D	Establish a dedicated location where currently homeless individuals can receive mail. This is a critical linkage to securing housing and other mainstream benefits.
2E	Support the skill development of Cambridge homeless service providers by offering low-cost opportunities for training in evidence-based practices (Motivational Interviewing, Harm Reduction, Critical Time Intervention, and Trauma-Informed Care) and greater connection to the provider community.

PRIORITY AREA 3:

PREVENT HOMELESSNESS FOR CAMBRIDGE INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

Keeping households out of the front door of homelessness is one of the wisest investments we can make. Cambridge faces persistent needs from citizens who are on the verge of losing their homes—the foundation of their life stability. Preserving an existing tenancy prevents a household from the destabilizing toll of entering homeless and is less costly than even a short period of homelessness. Prevention strategies include identifying at-risk or near-homeless households and applying applicable financial resources, legal services, and other supportive services that enable an individual or family to regain stability in the face of economic, health, or family crises.

Recommendations:

3A	Increase flexible emergency financial resources for households at risk of eviction or displacement. Expand eligible expenses to include landlord incentive payments and holding fees (and other categories not included in federal prevention resources).
3B	Identify resources for funding appropriate housing search services as a homeless prevention strategy for tenants who need to relocate.
3C	Create a centralized process at the Cambridge Multi-Service Center for evaluating prevention requests utilizing local, state and federal financial assistance resources.
3D	Advocate for housing providers and the Community Development Department to give priority for “no fault” eviction to include families evicted for non-payment of rent where loss of income is related to death, divorce, loss of employment, disability, etc.

PRIORITY AREA 4:

INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES AND DECREASE BARRIERS THROUGH POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Cambridge community has tremendous creative capital, engagement with social issues, and economic reach. Great potential exists to create change in relation to homelessness by tapping shared visions across sectors. Currently, it is often challenging to make these connections as interests and resources are not always visible.

Likewise, the vehicle of public policy is a tool that allows us as a community to identify and address structural constraints that inhibit our goals to create new housing and address homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

4A	Formalize initiatives between the nonprofit community, academic community, innovation/business sector, and the City that provide stabilizing opportunities for persons experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness.
4B	Work with city departments to research and advocate for zoning changes that will increase opportunities for affordable housing development.
4C	Explore opportunities within the City’s Participatory Budgeting (PB) process to support our community’s homeless response systems.
4D	Pursue policy and advocacy that preserves existing affordable housing stock.
4E	The Charrette Steering Committee strongly endorses policy decisions that ensure the Cambridge Inclusionary Zoning Rental Program is a dedicated housing resource for low-income households: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand the requirement to make 20% of new units designated for low-income individuals/ families under 80% AMI• Maintain 80% AMI as the eligibility for units dedicated to low-income households

PRIORITY AREA 5:

CREATE COORDINATED AND OUTCOME-DRIVEN SYSTEMS

In Cambridge, many organizations are independently impacting homelessness. However, for individuals facing a housing crisis there is a need to navigate a complex web of resources and requirements, resulting in an inefficient expenditure of time, energy and focus. We need to fix this. The Cambridge Coordinated Access system will begin to develop a synchronized means of gaining access to information and prioritizing the highest need individuals for scarce housing and service resources.

Recommendations:

5A	Implement a Coordinated Access process that will utilize multiple points of entry to assess all individuals entering homelessness, offer triage interventions and resources, and prioritize the highest need individuals for permanent supportive housing (PSH) vacancies.
5B	Develop a by-name list of all chronically homeless individuals and veterans, ensuring they are the first in line for available housing resources and services. Use data to measure progress on housing these high-priority populations.
5C	Implement a public information campaign about the reality of homelessness and how to access homeless resources in Cambridge
5D	Develop formal regional collaborations with neighboring urban communities that may be serving a similar population in order to optimize resources.

CONCLUSIONS

Taken as a whole, these recommended strategies are intended to augment the effectiveness of current efforts to combat homelessness, expand high-impact approaches, and implement new initiatives where appropriate. The current level of available funding is far less than the funding needed to eliminate homelessness in Cambridge. The adopted strategies should blend the need to cultivate new resources with a commitment to ensuring that all financial and community resources are clearly tied to the goal of reducing the number of homeless individuals and families in Cambridge.

NEXT STEPS

The next steps in this process involve sharing these recommendations with community stakeholders and formally requesting that the City incorporate adopted recommendations into the citywide planning process, [Envision Cambridge](#).

Some of the recommended items will require sustained multi-year efforts, while others are actionable in the short- or medium-term. The following strategies are targeted for implementation by June 30, 2017:

Strategy 1A- Pursue federal funding to increase units for homeless households

Strategy 2D- Dedicated location for homeless individuals to receive mail

Strategy 2E- Training for homeless service providers on Evidence-Based Practices

Strategy 3A- Expand flexible emergency rental assistance for at-risk households

Strategy 3C- Develop a centralized process for evaluating prevention requests utilizing multiple resources

Strategy 4C- Explore utilizing Participatory Budgeting for a homeless-specific project

Strategy 4E- Support Inclusionary Zoning policy change

Strategy 5A- Implement Coordinated Access

Strategy 5C- Public Information Campaign about how to access services

PLANNING PARTNERS:

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Partners & Community Service Providers

AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts

Bay Cove Human Services

Bridge Over Troubled Waters

Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services/ Greater Boston Legal Services

Cambridge Community Foundation

Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee, Inc.

Cambridge Health Alliance/ Cambridge Healthcare for the Homeless

Cambridge Housing Authority

Cambridge Police Department

Cambridge Public Health Department

Caritas Communities

CASCAP, Inc.

CASPAR, Inc.

Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Boston

Community Legal Services and Counseling Center

East End House

Eliot Community Human Services

Food for Free
Heading Home, Inc.
Hildebrand Family Self-Help Center, Inc.
Homeless Empowerment Project
HomeStart, Inc.
Just a Start
Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House
New Communities Services, Inc.
North Charles, Inc.
On the Rise
Phillips Brooks House
Salvation Army
Shelter Legal Services
Transition House
Vinfen
YWCA

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