



**CITY OF BOULDER
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM**

MEETING DATE: May 4, 2023

AGENDA TITLE: Consideration of a motion to accept the April 13, 2023 study session summary regarding homelessness strategy - Family Homelessness

PRESENTERS

Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, City Manager
Elizabeth Crowe, Deputy Director, Housing and Human Services
Julie Van Domelen, Executive Director, Emergency Family Assistance Association
Whitney Wilcox, Family Resource Network Manager, Boulder County Housing and Human Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of a study session on homelessness, city staff and partners with the Emergency Family Assistance Association (EFAA) and Boulder County Housing and Human Services (BCHHS) provided an update on the

SUGGESTED MOTION LANGUAGE

Staff requests council consideration of this matter and action in the form of the following motion:
Motion to accept the study session summary from April 13, 2023 on Family Homelessness.

ANALYSIS

Overview. Staff from city HHS, EFAA and Boulder County provided an overview of family homelessness and how it manifests in Boulder. Primary drivers are economic, related to lack of affordable housing and other household costs; changes in family economic circumstances or structures, including domestic violence. Compared to single adult homelessness, family homelessness tends to be episodic; experienced by people already established and living in Boulder; among people who are already working. Referencing the Colorado Center for Law and Policy's Self-Sufficiency Standard, staff noted the significant gap between income that low-income community members receive through work and government or nonprofit assistance, and

what is needed for a Boulder family to sustain itself. Family homelessness tends to be less visible, as encampments, substance use and mental health challenges.

Among the negative impacts of family homelessness, is that for children it can be an indicator of adult homelessness. Other lasting impacts on children include developmental and educational delays, decreased school performance, and increased mental and behavioral health challenges.

The numbers of families experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk of homelessness in the city and in Boulder County, is at a record high. This is evidenced in the number of families receiving hoteling support, who are requesting rental assistance through eviction prevention programs and otherwise. The McKinney-Vento data provided by Boulder Valley School District indicates that for the 2022-23 school year so far, more than 750 children throughout the district are receiving services required for students experiencing homelessness.

Strategies for addressing family homelessness are also different than those for single adult individuals experiencing homelessness. Prevention tends to be the most successful intervention, through housing retention (rental assistance, case management, financial assistance for other basic needs). For families already experiencing homelessness, the goals are safety and stabilization through hotel/motel vouchers and temporary sheltering when the cause is domestic violence; and stabilization through temporary housing and supportive services. These services are primarily provided through nonprofit agencies including EFAA and Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (SPAN), and with investment support from the city HHS and county government agencies. In the long-term, subsidizing affordable housing resolves these challenges and the city works with county and nonprofit partners to utilize housing vouchers and make available permanently affordable units.

Collaborative Spaces and Strategies.

Boulder County staff provided an overview of the Family Resource Network (FRN) structure and its Family Homelessness Subcommittee, through which city HHS staff and a wide, diverse range of nonprofit partners engage with county staff for shared strategies and action. The Family Homelessness Subcommittee in particular, focuses on common Assessment, Training, Data & Analytics and Hoteling strategies. The value-add of FRN strategies and activities also includes resource mapping that help government and nonprofit staff more effectively and efficiently serve community members in need of rental assistance and homelessness prevention services; and in 2023 will include a new rental assistance dashboard which will provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive information on available rental assistance and housing options.

City Strategies and Interventions.

HHS provides a wide range of services and interventions that help keep families housed, and to address the needs of families already experiencing homelessness. These include:

- Support, navigation assistance and financial assistance through the Family Resource Schools;

- Eviction prevention services and assistance – through legal guidance, mediation and rental assistance – through the Eviction Prevention and Rental Assistance Services (EPRAS) program;
- Annual investments in EFAA’s Keep Families Housed program and for hoteling, which in 2022-23 includes grants to EFAA and SPAN;
- Annual Human Services Fund and Health Equity Fund grants, including for food, health care and other basic needs;
- Funding allocations from the city’s American Rescue Plan Act, for basic needs including rental assistance, food, and innovative programs such as the Left Behind Workers Fund and the guaranteed income pilot project.

Joining the city in investments and other response services, are the county’s \$5M through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (2020-22); EFAA through its government and private funded-programming; roughly \$4M in Boulder County local and HUD grant funds for housing support. Staff acknowledge the benefits from other public and private foundations and donors and encourage community members to support local agencies in this effort.

Staff note that the high demand for rental assistance has resulted in a resource crisis for the city HHS and nonprofit partners. The 2023 EPRAS budget for rental assistance through city staff, has been completely expended and staff plan to use ARPA and reserve funds to help stretch the impacts. The high demands are also causing backups at EFAA and other nonprofit agencies as the need is vastly outpacing the collective resources available.

Staff will continue to engage with partners for prompt action where we are able to take it to continue providing homelessness prevention financial assistance; seek other funding sources; adjust program processes as necessary; monitor and explore policy initiatives; and maintain current prevention response and investments.

Council Questions and Comments. Questions and comments by council members included the following:

- Request for clarification on whether or not the city is experiencing a shortage of available housing for low-income families (e.g. three-bedroom homes). City staff shared that there is often an increased wait list for multi-bedroom homes, and that staff are engaging with Boulder Housing Partners (BHP) about ways in which rental rates could be reduced. Staff also note that developments like Rally will increase the availability of multi-bedroom homes.
- A council member also questioned whether or not the city and BHP are adequately prioritizing family housing options. Staff will consult with BHP and provide a response. This may be a point for continued discussion.
- The city and county planning on minimum wage is advancing, which may address some of the core economic challenges that affect families.
- Questions regarding how families experience homelessness: 85% of families experiencing homelessness are “doubling up” residence with other friends or family

members. A much smaller number of families are in recreational vehicles or cars in order to stay sheltered when homeless. The success rate for family temporary housing and hoteling is roughly 50% -60% transition to permanent housing solutions.

- A council member commented that Boulder as a community has resources with which we could collectively be investing to address the socio-economic challenges that lead to family homelessness; and that we have decisions to make about prioritizing investments and policies to do so.

NEXT STEPS

HHS staff will provide clarification more information as necessary, to council members regarding the level of affordable family housing options are available, and any challenges identified by staff, BHP and nonprofit partners in more effectively making these options available to families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.