

Metropolitan Council

Meeting date: January 8, 2019

Subject: Engaging with People Experiencing Homelessness

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: 24 CFR 982

Staff Prepared/Presented: Terri Smith, 651-602-1187; Ryane Leifheit, 651-602-1869; Brooke Blakey 612-349-7200

Division/Department: Community Development/HRA & Metro Transit Homeless Action Team

Proposed Action

None. Information Only.

Background

The number of Minnesotans experiencing homelessness has been fluctuating for several years as shown by annual Point-In-Time (PIT) Counts. However, Minnesota's population experiencing unsheltered homelessness has been increasing year-over-year since 2014. Many among this population have been utilizing the Metro light rail system for shelter. On average 199 persons, and as many as 362 persons, utilize light rail trains as their primary means of shelter making our public transit system the second largest homeless "shelter" in the state. As the unsheltered homelessness population utilizing public transit as their primary means of shelter grew, so did increased calls for assistance to the Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD). 2018's highest recorded PIT Count of unsheltered homeless (926) persons correlated to MTPD's highest recorded yearly total of calls for service (2770).

Seeking a solution to this growing concern, in the first half of 2018 MTPD conducted best practices research visiting and interviewing transit system operators throughout the country. MTPD engaged several transit police departments from Los Angeles Metro Rail, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (Philadelphia), Denver Regional Transportation, Portland Metropolitan Area Express, Dallas Area Rapid Transit and Bay Area Rapid Transit. MTPD officers learned how similar regional transportation systems addressed their homeless transit rider population. Common practices included training Transit Police as Outreach Workers and building collaborations with local non-profits to provide medical, substance abuse and mental health care. MTPD officers saw the benefits of this work but identified a continual need for homeless riders that transit police could not provide; housing.

During the Summer of 2018, MTPD and the Metropolitan Council Housing and Redevelopment Authority (Metro HRA) initiated an innovative partnership aimed at addressing this issue. By September of 2018, MTPD established a team of officers, certified as Street Outreach Workers, dedicated to working overnights between shelter closing hours and transit morning rush hours.

In November of 2018, Metro HRA was awarded 89 Mainstream Vouchers to serve non-elderly, disabled households experiencing homelessness and utilizing public transit as shelter. MTPD and Metro HRA joined in a shared mission to provide this population access to housing and services thus becoming the Homeless Action Team (HAT).

The purpose of this information item is to provide an overview of the Metro HRA and HAT partnership in engaging with people experiencing homelessness.