

*Recommendations on*  
**Shelter, Camping, and Coordination**  
*To address homelessness in Austin*

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# BACKGROUND

- 6,000 people are estimated to be homeless in Austin. There is one bed for every 5 unhoused individuals.
- Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center reports that families/children are the fastest growing homeless population.
- Families, refugees and victims of domestic violence are turned away from shelter daily.
- The Austin camping ban makes it illegal to sit down or sleep in many places, frequently leaving people with nowhere to go.



# Crisis Response

An aerial photograph of the Texas State Capitol building in Austin, Texas. The building is a large, classical-style structure with a prominent dome. It is surrounded by a large park area with many trees and a winding path. The sky is filled with large, dramatic clouds. The overall tone is somewhat somber due to the monochromatic color scheme.

The number of children in homeless households has doubled over the past year to over 1,300

# SHELTER

While shelter is not the end goal for anyone, it is often the most critical first step to resolving homelessness. It can be the quickest way to meet the most neighbors' immediate, basic needs.

*A July 2023 Report and Assessment from Austin Public Health and then Homeless Strategy Officer Diana Gray indicated that by 2025 Austin will need shelter beds for **1,519 households**. Currently, we have 1,391, but are set to remove 300 in March 2025.*



# SHELTER Recommendations

## *Address the family homelessness crisis*

- Open a new, city-owned family shelter, or allocate funding for existing family shelters to expand operations and add beds. Protecting children should be our top priority.

## *Allocate More Resources for Crisis Response*

- Providing shelter is the unique responsibility of the City of Austin. We must do more to protect the health and safety of Austinites experiencing homelessness.



# CAMPING Recommendations

Austin implemented a camping ban in 2021 but it does not have enough shelter beds for people to stop camping and sleeping in cars.

**No matter the law, there will be camping.**

# CAMPING Recommendation

Denver's Safe Outdoor Spaces Program  
led to a reduction in crime.



# CAMPING



COLORADO  
VILLAGE  
COLLABORATIVE

## *Replicate Denver's Safe Outdoor Spaces (SOS) Program*

- Includes eight managed camping areas throughout Denver
- Run by a nonprofit contracted through the City of Denver
- Provides a safe place to sleep for 515 citizens
- Staffed 24 hours and offers services
- Connected 180 people to permanent housing
- Gives safer alternative to congregate shelter and the unsheltered



# COORDINATION

## *2018 Recommendations for the Redesign of Emergency Shelters in Austin*

- The National Alliance to End Homelessness worked with Austin on a 2018 report stating that shelter is a critical component of homeless response and all those in crisis should have easy shelter access.
- The report recommended standardization of operations of all shelters, and 50 percent of beds be assigned by coordinated entry referral. The report also suggested that a community-wide decision-making process be used to determine prioritization for who gets shelter beds.

**NOT IMPLEMENTED**

# COORDINATION

The City Council Adopted a [2018 Draft Plan](#) to End Homelessness

**NOT IMPLEMENTED**

[July 2020 Investing for Results:](#)

[Priorities and Recommendations for A Systems Approach to End Homelessness](#)

called for smaller-scale, trauma informed shelters

**NOT IMPLEMENTED**

# COORDINATION

## July 2023 Shelter Assessment

- Recommended that the City establish a coordinated shelter referral and access process, including a bed management tool and a common intake assessment for city-funded shelters, because many providers providers do not have basic information about shelter entry or availability.

**NOT IMPLEMENTED**

# COORDINATION



Austin's 2022 Recovery Plan earmarked only ~10% of ARPA funding for emergency shelters and crisis services. Crisis response accounted for 25% of the City of Austin's homeless service budget in 2024, while housing accounted for over 50%.

# COORDINATION

Reports and national best practices call for a **balanced approach** that addresses all needs along the continuum, including both **crisis response AND housing** stabilization. Austin has historically chosen to invest more in housing stabilization, resulting in continued, unsheltered homelessness for those with immediate, front-end needs.

Almost all resources, private and public (e.g. Dell, Inc., Finding Home ATX, Community First Village, Foundation Communities, Travis County Continuum of Care) are focused on permanent housing, leaving shelters and the crisis response system underfunded. While both Housing and Crisis Response are critical parts of the system, **the City is uniquely responsible for the crisis response function.**



# COORDINATION

## *Coordinate Shelter*

- Appoint an entity or individual to coordinate all emergency shelter services with a system that is accessible and responsive to community needs. Implement a **central phone number** and **bed tracking tool** to give the community real-time data on bed availability. This will be increasingly valuable to help the highest risk individuals and save lives during deadly heat waves.

## *Create a Task Force*

- Create a task force to structure and implement a comprehensive, public plan on homelessness, with smart, measurable goals. This task force should include HSO, ECHO, providers and members of the community.



# ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

**Rec #1:** Open or expand shelter capacity to add 100 new beds of family shelter.

**Rec #2:** Locate and operationalize a congregate shelter to replace Marshalling Yard by March 2025.

**Rec #3:** Replicate Denver's Safe Outdoor Spaces Program in Austin.

**Rec #4:** Implement a community-wide shelter referral process using the coordinated entry system and a common intake assessment.

**Rec #5:** Create a task force that includes HSO, ECHO, providers and members of the community to design an actionable plan.

# SUPPORT

The following organizations and churches support these recommendations on **Camping, Shelter, and Coordination:**

*The Other Ones Foundation*

*Trinity Center*

*Austin Mutual Aid*

*Street Youth Ministry*

*Central Presbyterian Church*

*First Baptist Church Austin*

*St. Martin's Lutheran Church*

*First United Methodist Church, Austin*

*Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church*

*St. David's Episcopal Church*