

TO: City Council
FROM: Jena Jones, Homelessness Response Manager
RE: Cleveland St. Encampment Closure Update
DATE: November 7, 2024

The process of closing the homeless encampment in the vicinity of Cleveland Street and Texas Ave continues to move forward in coordination with the partnership of engaged individuals and organizations we've worked to assemble and mobilize toward ensuring every person currently living in that space has every opportunity to reach permanent, stable, and affordable housing.

There are certainly kinks in the fabric of this partnership that we're diligently working to iron out and most involve elements of coordination of care as multiple teams are working in the encampment space to collaborate and share the load. We're seeing incredible work being done by the PATH and HOME teams and multiple community organizations are stepping up to assist. As the success of this endeavor will ultimately be decided by our collective ability to insulate and protect the work being done between encampment residents and their support systems, it is imperative we identify and remove as many barriers to their ability to work as possible.

The challenges we're currently working through primarily involve the coordination of getting folks to appointments, rental viewings, lease signings, etc. and the teams are working internally to identify lines of communication that could be enhanced and additional options for transportation assistance. Partnership members like Penobscot County Cares has stepped up to assist and we're exploring options to leverage volunteer partners who might be willing to connect with individuals living in the encampment to help develop the skills needed to manage their daily activities like utilizing public transportation when available, for example.

Though this process is nuanced and requires delicate balance and care, we are seeing forward momentum and real signs of positive changes occurring. Encampment residents have been engaging in the shelter resources available and we hear from outreach teams that more people continue to express willingness to consider those options as we progress through the closure. At the time of this memo's composition and since October 10:

- 21 vouchers have been matched and/or approved
- 9 individuals have been housed
- 5 people are in the process of leasing up with 6 more folks lined up for unit viewings
- 2 people have been reconnected with family

Beyond the numbers which show positive forward momentum, our barometer for a successfully compassionate and humane closure process has been the teams that provide outreach and case management support in the encampment on a daily and weekly basis and reports on the engagement levels they're seeing since the closure was announced. The information provided reflects increased engagement with reports of folks capitalizing on housing opportunities that have previously been resistant to this kind of change and that as more positive connections are being made additional folks are coming forward to explore what options might be right for them.

As we have committed to making this a process that provides dignity, compassion, and the opportunities needed to break the cycle of homelessness, we've been solution-oriented in its design and have accounted for common barriers like ensuring folks have access to get their laundry washed before it's packed up, a safe place to store their belongings, managing active warrants, wrapping resources around folks and ensuring they are supported in their next steps and through transitions of care, and crafting a variety of choices in the options to seek shelter so residents are afforded a chance to self-identify what space might be right for them as they transition out of a life of sleeping rough.

The group of core partners and the housing navigation group are meeting weekly in addition to the normal case conferencing process that allows us to account for each individual's needs and next steps. The gold standard of this process is to identify any and all means to support the workers who have diligently and successfully developed the kind of relationships with encampment neighbors that allow the safe exploration of choices and next steps.

As this process is adaptive, we continue to seek feedback on resource availability and application and welcome all new ideas to partner on meaningful solutions to ensure all residents of the Bangor community have access to stable, affordable, and permanent housing.