



Task force unveils plan to end homelessness in Pitt County

By [Brock Letchworth](#)
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The leader of a national collaboration aimed at ending homelessness says county and city officials will transition from serving the chronically homeless locally to solving the problems which create the condition if they follow their recently developed plan.

Philip Mangano, executive director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, said Tuesday that Pitt County's 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness is one of the most sophisticated he has seen for a community of its size, and it includes many of the elements that have proven to be effective in other plans nationwide.

Pitt County's Blue Ribbon Task Force unveiled its plan during a ceremony held Tuesday afternoon at the Willis Building.

The plan arrives after the task force spent nearly eight months collecting data on homelessness in Pitt County, reviewing approaches used in other communities and gathering public input.

Pitt County's plan is one of about 350 nationwide that were formed in response to a national challenge issued in 2005 by the council.

"This plan stands out," Mangano said. "It is a very realistic, down-to-earth plan that intends to get the job done. It focuses on prevention and intervention. This plan stands out in terms of the level of sophistication both in its approach and in the strategic nature of the plan.

"It is not just a wish list on a piece of paper."

Ruth Peebles, project manager for Pitt's plan, said the county hopes to end chronic homelessness by securing resources and redirecting and reinvesting them in coordinated, sustained efforts that address the underlying causes.

Funding for the implementation of the plan begins July 1 and includes local, state and federal government entities, private foundations and businesses. According to the administrative implementation budget, the first two years will cost a combined \$184,000.

Pitt County's plan includes two broad goals: providing community-based services and support to prevent homelessness and diminish risks for it to recur and creating adequate, short-term housing options and supportive permanent housing for those who are chronically homeless.

The plan states that all sectors of the community will participate in the planning and implementation phases, and the plan will be data-driven and based on best practices.

"Ultimately, we believe this will bring stability to individuals and their families, and enable them to live life to the fullest," Greenville Mayor Pat Dunn said during Tuesday's ceremony.

Chronically homeless is defined by the plan as an unaccompanied, disabled individual who has been persistently homeless for more than a year or who has been homeless for four or more episodes over a period of three years.

A point-in-time study in January revealed that at least 131 people are homeless in Pitt County on any given night and about 10 percent of those are chronically homeless.

Chronically homeless individuals consume more than 50 percent of community resources, according to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

A task force survey of the Pitt County Detention Center, Greenville police and the Greenville Community Shelter earlier this year revealed that the average chronically homeless person costs the county \$23,786 annually.

Mangano said that figure would be even higher if mental health or substance abuse treatment was factored into it. The costs are getting many communities to take notice of the effectiveness of plans like the one in Pitt.

“As soon as we discover that we are already spending more money to sustain people in homelessness than it would cost to end their homelessness, then that precipitates a much deeper level of political and civic will to accomplish the vision of the plan,” Mangano said.

Mangano said officials shouldn’t expect immediate results and offered a few recommendations for the task force as it moves toward implementation. He said the group should perform a more sophisticated cost study that involves all entities, deepen the commitment of the business community and create more strategies to access resources available to them.

He also recommended more trips to other communities to see what strategies work.

“It is all about investing in strategies that are field-tested and evidence-based,” Mangano said. “You invest in what works and, shockingly you get results. That is what will happen with this plan. As it is implemented, you will start to see change.

“There is no perfect plan in our country. The only thing perfect about your plan is that it can end the long misery of homelessness for your neighbors.”

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