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Third Door Coalition Announces Proposal to Solve King County’s Chronic Homelessness

The plan calls for a public-private partnership to bring supportive housing to scale for 6,500 people, including at least 4,500 new units throughout the region

SEATTLE — King County can solve its chronic homelessness in five years, according to a proposal today announced by the [Third Door Coalition](#), an all-volunteer, cross-sector group of business, nonprofit providers, healthcare professionals, academics and advocates.

In our region’s first-ever plan specifically addressing chronic homelessness, the coalition crafted a proposal based on nearly two years of needs assessment, cost-driver analysis, and exploration of funding models, with the goal of reaching a “functional zero.” The Third Door Coalition’s recommendations include:

- Build, lease, or otherwise create enough permanent supportive housing to meet the needs of people experiencing chronic homelessness in our region. This includes the construction of at least 4,500 new units and securing an additional 1,000 units through an increase in scattered sites that leverages existing inventory; combined with already-planned construction, this totals 6,500 units over five years. The coalition’s analysis suggests 6,500 people are experiencing unsheltered chronic homelessness in our region — about twice the number from previous estimates.
- Reduce the typical cost to build permanent supportive housing. The coalition has analyzed cost barriers to building that housing and identified numerous solutions, such as reducing the cost of land, leveraging innovative construction technology and reducing regulatory costs.
- Fund the estimated capital cost of \$1.6 billion over five years for building the new units through a public-private partnership of city, state and local governments and businesses.
- Invite the participation of a county-wide, broad-based cross-sector coalition — of businesses, nonprofit service providers, healthcare professionals, academic institutions, faith communities, advocacy organizations, funders, individuals, government and more — to hone and implement the proposal.

The Third Door Coalition was conceived in 2018 by an unlikely union of business leaders and homeless rights advocates. Frustrated by polarization and gridlock around chronic homelessness, co-chairs Chad Mackay of Fire & Vine Hospitality and Professor Sara Rankin of Seattle University School of Law envisioned an alternate path to planning and regional mobilization — a third door.

“Data, not drama, was our mantra from the start,” said Mackay. “The Third Door’s whole culture is about bridging the divides: we believe we don’t have to agree on everything in order to understand the data proving that supportive housing works. We conducted a comprehensive analysis of the need, the barriers to success and innovative solutions. The business community has been asking for a solution, and this is it.”

“Our two years of work underscores that chronic unsheltered homelessness is the epicenter of our homelessness crisis, but it can be solved,” said Professor Rankin, who also founded the Homeless Rights Advocacy Project (HRAP) at Seattle University. “Permanent supportive housing is consistently proven to be the most humane and cost-effective solution to chronic homelessness. If we can make a difference with chronic homelessness, we can generate momentum to solve homelessness overall.”

The coalition's proposal builds an essential bridge between the region's public and private sectors: Funding must come from both sectors, and both must endorse the plan and be active participants in its implementation. Accordingly, the coalition has already gathered the input of hundreds of community members, and has had promising conversations about the funding model at the city, county and state levels.

In times of strained state, local and regional budgets, housing leader and State Rep. Frank Chopp sees this partnership as critical. "The current public-health crisis has shown us we should address chronic homelessness like the emergency it is. This proposal presents a cooperative and productive path with long-term solutions that can help save lives and improve public safety," said Chopp.

The region's two largest providers of permanent supportive housing agree. Paul Lambros, CEO of Plymouth Housing, and Daniel Malone, executive director of Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC), serve on the Third Door Coalition board of directors.

"This plan was crucial before COVID-19, but is more crucial today than ever," Malone said. "People experiencing chronic homelessness have underlying health risks that make them much more vulnerable to infection; we all share an interest in the public health benefits that are specific to supportive housing."

"Permanent supportive housing is the best solution for people experiencing chronic homelessness," said Lambros. "This time-tested model is not just cost-effective, it's also compassionate. If our region invests in and builds it, we'll see swift, measurable declines in the rate of chronic homelessness."

In addition to Lambros, Mackay, Malone and Rankin, Third Door board members represent a cross-sector partnership of business, healthcare, nonprofit service providers and homelessness advocacy: Jeri Andrews, David Blandford, Noah Fay, Matt Galvin, Benjamin Miksch, Catherine Hinrichsen, Debbie Thiele, H.S. Wright III and Steve Wright. A team of up to 30 other Third Door members has contributed hundreds of hours on research, analysis, and energy to the proposal, which can bring our community together to solve chronic homelessness.

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The Third Door Coalition is a nimble group of business leaders, service providers, researchers and advocates who seek to solve chronic homelessness in King County through permanent supportive housing. The organization's nonprofit status is pending IRS approval. Learn more: <https://thirddoorcoalition.org>.