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COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

COUNTY OF FAIRFAX

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JOINT BOARD MATTER

**Chairman McKay, Supervisor Foust, Supervisor Alcorn,
Supervisor Lusk and Supervisor Palchik
May 24, 2022**

HOMELESSNESS: REVIEW OF COUNTY PROGRAMS

Background: On March 31, 2008, the Board of Supervisors adopted a plan to end and prevent homelessness in the Fairfax-Falls Church Community. The key approach recommended in the plan was to connect people to permanent housing, not only temporary shelters. Under the plan, permanent housing becomes the first step to moving out of homelessness, not the last (this approach is called “Housing First.”) During the plan’s implementation, there was an almost 50 percent decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness in the County as measured by the annual Point in Time count (PIT). That success was achieved because of significant commitments of efforts and resources by the County and its partners, including the Cities of Falls Church and Fairfax, government agencies, non-profits, faith communities, and businesses. While there has been significant progress toward the goal of ending homelessness, there is still more that can and must be done.

According to the most recent PIT, as of January 26, 2022, there were 1,191 people experiencing homelessness in the Fairfax area including:

- 282 adults identified to be experiencing chronic homelessness.
- 32 people who identified as veterans.
- 91 transition age youth (18 to 24 years old).
- 115 households identified as currently fleeing domestic violence.
- 220 households that reported a history of domestic violence.
- 50 percent of the people experiencing homelessness identified as Black or African American (despite Black or African Americans representing only 10 percent of the general population of the County).
- 30 individuals aged 70 years and above were experiencing homelessness.

The county implemented the Quarantine, Protection, Isolation/Decompression (QPID) hotels program as a key part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This program was implemented to respond to health-related issues created by COVID, but it also served as emergency shelter for homeless families and individuals. Each year, at the end of the hypothermia prevention season, the County’s lack of sufficient emergency shelter and permanent housing for chronically homeless individuals becomes very evident. That was especially true this year when QPID ended at the same time the hypothermia program ended.

The County and its nonprofit partners provide excellent support services while efforts to find shelter and housing for homeless individuals are ongoing. However, many individuals find themselves unsheltered and on their own until a shelter bed or housing becomes available. Given the shortage of shelter beds and

housing, individuals may be unsheltered and unhoused between hypothermia prevention seasons. These individuals can wind up sleeping in cars, at bus shelters, in tents in the woods, and in other outdoor places. They often sleep near the County's homeless shelters so they can access services such as meals, bathrooms and showering, laundry, and outreach/case worker assistance.

The "Housing First" approach recognizes that emergency shelter, as part of a crisis response system, provides safety and important service connections to rapidly connect individuals and families to permanent housing, such as supportive housing. The Board recognizes that the County must continue its current efforts while considering creative new ways to address the unacceptable shortage of emergency shelter and permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals. In a Board Matter sponsored by Supervisor Alcorn and adopted by the Board on April 12, 2022, the Board addressed these issues by directing that:

- The County's Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) review current operational performance of County and nonprofit service providers in preventing and ending homelessness.
- OPEH lead an effort to update the County's homelessness strategies in collaboration with the Continuum of Care committee of the Affordable Housing Advisory Council.

There are immediate needs for emergency shelter and permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals who live in our county. As we respond to those needs, including most critically by increasing our pipeline of new permanent supportive housing units in locations across the county, we should exercise caution to avoid unintended consequences of a possible isolated policy shift. The issues are complex, and it is essential that the Board receive a comprehensive set of recommendations to move forward. We believe that, as they work on homelessness strategies, OPEH staff and members of the Continuum of Care Committee should be aware of and be guided by the Board's input and concerns about these issues.

Motion: Therefore, Mr. Chairman, along with the direction provided in the April 12 Board Matter and such other issues as they deem essential to address, we move that the Board direct staff to:

- Evaluate the successes and challenges experienced with QPID, including costs, operations, and results, and including how QPID compares with the success of the County's established use of hotel rooms as temporary shelter for qualifying unhoused families.
- Identify site-specific options for the development of more permanent supportive housing, with a focus on creative solutions for the long-term housing and service needs of the homeless population.
- Review current zoning requirements and allowances for emergency shelter in commercial and industrial districts where vacant and underutilized properties might be used by private entities to provide sheltering and transitional services to the homeless population and include this issue as a possible addition to the Zoning Ordinance work program for the Board's consideration.
- Provide an analysis of other available options that are not currently being used to address homelessness in the County, including costs and benefits of each, and provide recommendations for the Board's consideration. This analysis should include a review of successful efforts that have been implemented in other jurisdictions.
- Ensure that the county's partners in addressing homelessness have an opportunity to provide input to staff regarding matters addressed herein, including the operational review requested in the April 12 board matter.

We further move that the Board direct staff to present its findings and recommendations at the Board's Housing Committee meeting on November 22, 2022.