

City of Wilmington Task Force on Homelessness Report

Commissioned by

The Honorable John C. Carney, Mayor

Executive Order No. 1

Draft September 30, 2025

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Section 1. Executive Summary

On March 20, 2025, Wilmington Mayor John Carney signed Executive Order No. 1 establishing the Task Force on Homelessness. The following members were appointed to the Task Force on April 30, 2025:

Ray Fitzgerald, Wilmington Housing Authority
Rev. Thomas Laymon, Sunday Breakfast Mission
Kim Eppehimer, Friendship House
Priscilla Rakestraw, Ministry of Caring
John Sisson, Delaware Transit Corporation
Debra Crosson, Delaware Health and Social Services
Lt. Harold Bozeman, Wilmington Police Department
Latisha Bracy, Wilmington City Council – At Large
Coby Owens, Wilmington City Council – 1st District
Mike Maggitti, Downtown Visions
Tina Robinson, Wilmington Resident
Demetrio Ortega, Wilmington Resident
Claire DeMatteis, Chair

Task Force members are grateful for the administrative and community engagement support of Jacqueline Benitez-Castañeda, who serves as Special Assistant for Community Engagement in Mayor Carney’s office. Her professionalism, dedication, and public service greatly assisted the work of this Task Force over the past five months.

The Executive Order set forth the following responsibilities of the Task Force:

- a. Evaluate and examine existing City policies and procedures surrounding engagement with individuals experiencing homelessness;
- b. Convene interested parties, groups, and individuals impacted by homelessness to inform the Taskforce’s recommendations, as needed;
- c. Recommend and promote effective strategies to provide services to individuals experiencing homelessness, while limiting the negative effects to other City constituents;
- d. Recommend processes and approaches for effectively engaging unhoused individuals to contribute to moving such population into stable housing; and
- e. Recommend ways to coordinate the use of resources and provisions of services for unhoused populations.
- f. Wilmington’s interaction with the broader unhoused population living on the street.
- g. Wilmington’s interaction with the unhoused population suffering from co-occurring challenges, specifically substance use disorders and mental health challenges.
- h. Assigning a specific location(s) for Wilmington’s unhoused population on the street to go in the absence of steady, affordable, and available housing options.

- i. Ideas for mitigating the negative impacts on the broader community while making connections to the appropriate entities to provide the services for this populations.
 - Examine how we work to ensure sanitary environments
 - Examine how we work to reduce the number of bags and boxes in public spaces
 - Examine how we work to coordinate meals in a consistent manner
- j. Examine the City's role is reversing the adverse effects of homelessness within the City's ability and resources.
- k. Identify the individuals and entities providing services to the unhoused population living on the street.

The Executive Order required the Task Force to submit its recommendations to Mayor Carney within six months of its first meeting. The Task Force's initial meeting was May 6, 2025. All Task Force meeting dates and agendas were posted on the City's website at least seven days in advance, and all Task Force meetings were open to the public. The Task Force met ten times, with robust attendance and active participation by members of the public at each meeting.

At the first meeting on May 6, 2025, Task Force members unanimously agreed to focus our recommendations on the following five areas:

1. Establish a location in a City-owned park for a safe site for unsheltered homeless individuals
2. Explore a "Tiny Homes" option
3. Create a Drop-in or Day Center in partnership with a local service provider
4. Establish a personal item storage facility
5. Explore additional affordable housing options

Task Force Meeting Locations and Guest Speakers

To inform the work and recommendations of the Task Force, our meetings were held at locations most impacted by homelessness and at locations that provide services to unhoused individuals, including: The Sunday Breakfast Mission, Opera Delaware on Poplar Street, one of the Ministry of Caring facilities, the YWCA's Home-Life Management Center, and the Episcopal Church of Saints Andrews & Matthew. All of the meetings provided a hybrid option for Task Force members and the public to attend in person or virtually, except for one meeting where the virtual platform technology was not available. Each meeting featured guest speakers with in-depth knowledge and experience on homelessness. Service providers who are members of the Task Force provided detailed information about the range of shelter, housing, and wrap-around services they have been providing for decades in the City of Wilmington. We also engaged with professionals from the National Alliance to End Homelessness, academics, state and local outreach teams, leaders from the Housing Alliance and United Way of Delaware, and the Director of the Delaware State Housing Authority.

Point in Time Count - City of Wilmington Homeless Population

Statewide, the most recent Point in Time homelessness survey for 2024 conducted by the Housing Alliance of Delaware identified 1,585 individuals experiencing homelessness statewide, with 40% of unhoused individuals within the City of Wilmington.

The 2024 Point in Time survey reported that the City of Wilmington recorded 636 people experiencing homelessness. That number includes 81 individuals sleeping in unsheltered locations, including streets, parks, cars, and encampments: plus 555 individuals sleeping in emergency shelters and transitional housing dedicated to people experiencing homelessness. The Point in Time survey noted that only 188 of people experiencing homelessness in the City of Wilmington received street outreach services in 2024, which represents only 30 percent of the City's homeless population.

The survey estimates that nearly 44 percent of households who received temporary shelter services were families with children.

It is important to note that the Point in Time data captures participating agencies in the state's Centralized Management Information System (CMIS), which includes agencies who receive federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding. The three dominant Wilmington homeless shelters do not receive HUD funding, however, the Point in Time data includes homeless individuals who seek overnight shelter and housing at the Sunday Breakfast Mission, The Ministry of Caring, and the Friendship House Empowerment Center.

Respecting the critical role of these three service providers, **Section 4** of this report details the shelter, food, hygiene, and other services they have been providing for decades to provide unhoused individuals with the compassion, dignity, and support they deserve.

Based on the Point in Time report, the recommendations in this report focus on closing the gap for the urgent action needed to create or identify additional shelter beds for the estimated 81 individuals sleeping in unsheltered locations throughout the City.

Section 2 – Homelessness Locations and Services

City of Wilmington Homelessness Locations

As City leaders strive to create more affordable housing, chronic homelessness and the lack of permanent supportive housing among people with disabilities, mental health challenges, substance abuse issues, and a long history of being unhoused are factors driving the street homeless crisis in several concentrated locations in Wilmington. Another factor driving increased homelessness on City streets and in City parks is a

trend of unsheltered individuals coming to Wilmington from the Philadelphia and Baltimore areas, as well as from Kent and Sussex Counties in Delaware. Homeless locations throughout the City include:

- Front Street from Walnut, Poplar, to Lombard Streets
- Christina Park
- Several sites beneath I-95, including from Lancaster Ave to Linden Street
- Adams Street
- The CSX Rail lines near Beech Street
- 100 block of W. 8th Street
- Fletcher Brown Park
- 7 ½ Street / Beatty Place
- 17th & Thatcher Streets
- Wilmington Public Library
- Rodney Square
- 8th & Orange Streets
- Christina Gateway Park

Services for Unhoused Individuals in the City of Wilmington

The City of Wilmington website lists 29 service providers for emergency housing and financial assistance tab (under the Department of Real Estate and Housing).

<https://www.wilmingtonde.gov/government/city-departments/real-estate-and-housing/emergency-housing-and-financial-assistance>

A frequent comment at Task Force meetings was that existing service providers were not aware of their counterparts throughout the City providing similar services. Thus, as part of our efforts, the Task Force developed this **map of services**

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=11GFsgPDLVDMcePdLbZHXjlc7xxykBGA&usp=sharing> to highlight the location of the numerous emergency shelter, food, day centers, and other services available to unhoused individuals.

Section 3 – Recommendations

The recommendations included in this report are the cumulation of the substantive information from our Task Force meetings and numerous guest speakers, along with visits multiple times every week by Task Force members over the past five months to talk with unhoused, unsheltered individuals throughout our City. The recommendations have been researched, reviewed, discussed, debated, and revised. They also have been informed by feedback from members of the public, business owners, and residents. The recommendations align with and are organized into the five key areas highlighted above that the Task Force unanimously agreed to focus on for this report.

Task Force members acknowledge these recommendations are the first steps toward a multi-tier approach that involves resources and coordination among federal, state, county, city, and nonprofit agency partners. As these first steps are implemented, City leaders should remain committed to working with federal, state, county, and nonprofit partners to provide a full spectrum of services for unhoused individuals -- from prevention and emergency rental assistance to temporary shelters, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and affordable, below market rate housing on a path toward self-sufficiency.

In Delaware, where funding for homeless services is unified and coordinated at the state level, the overriding recommendation of the Task Force is to seek a sustainable funding source from the State necessary to implement the measures outlined in this report and achieve the goals inherent in these targeted recommendations designed to address the most pressing problem of increasing, chronic street homelessness.

Being homeless is not a crime and homelessness should not be criminalized. These recommendations provide a compassionate, balanced approach to providing additional shelter beds and housing opportunities, medical care, mental health, and other services to unhoused individuals, if a sustainable funding source can be identified and approved. The recommendations also reflect the fact that City property owners, business owners, renters, workers, and visitors have a right to expect orderly conduct, clean, safe, and sanitary conditions on City streets, sidewalks, parks, and other public property.

Sustainable Funding Source

Federal housing and homeless funds flow to the State of Delaware through the State Department of Health & Human Services (DHSS) and the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA). Counties, cities, towns, and nonprofit organizations throughout the state rely on state and federal funding for homeless services.

To meet the increased demand for homeless services in Wilmington and in many other cities in our state, the overriding recommendation from the Task Force is for Mayor Carney, City Council, and other City leaders to work with Governor Meyer's Administration and state legislators on a sustainable funding source for homeless services. Respectfully, the ideas for such state funding include:

- Use of a percentage of the state alcohol, cigarette, or marijuana sales tax for homeless services, with the state funds distributed to cities, towns, and counties based on homeless needs.
- Use of a percentage of the state realty transfer tax or state hotel lodging tax for homeless services, with the state funds distributed to cities, towns, and counties based on homeless needs.
- Authority from the General Assembly for the City of Wilmington to enact its own tax on cigarette, alcohol, and/or marijuana sales to fund services for the homeless.

Recommendations to establish a location in a City-owned park for a safe site for unsheltered homeless individuals

The City of Wilmington owns more than 60 parks, with responsibility of managing more than 50 parks. Christina Park is among the top five largest parks that the city manages and maintains, spanning 13.6 acres. Christina Park is bounded by East 4th Street, North Church Street, Christina River, and the Winchester Bridge. Christina Park increasingly has become an area where unhoused individuals have migrated over the past several years -- pitching tents, accumulating personal items, and occupying one of the two pavilions. During several occasions talking with unhoused individuals living or spending part of the day in Christina Park, some individuals say they walk to Christina Park after spending the night at the Sunday Breakfast Mission, and then return to the Sunday Breakfast Mission later in the evening. Others live in Christina Park because they want to, or because they do not have, or do not know of other housing options. Conversations with unhoused individuals in Christina Park indicate that some people find their way there from the Amtrak station, on guidance from Wilmington Police officers, and word of mouth.

During informal conversations with unsheltered people living in Christina Park, the vast majority say they would welcome a Day Center to go to during the day and early evening and would consider living in a “tiny homes” shelter village if offered the opportunity.

As City leaders consider the option of constructing a “tiny homes” shelter village (see Recommendation #2 below), the Task Force recommends an interim solution of allowing unhoused individuals to live in tents in Christina Park. City leaders should explore partnering with nonprofit organizations to provide food, healthcare, mental health counseling, hygiene services, workforce training opportunities and related services. Such a model currently is in operation in Lewes, Delaware in the Tharros village, located on the grounds of the former Delaware State Police Troop 7 station off of Route 1. The State of Delaware entered into a license agreement with the nonprofit organization, Code Purple of the Cape, to operate Tharros Village from July 2025 to November 30, 2025. Tharros, which is the Greek word for courage, limits the number of tents to 28 on the 7-acre site. The village receives donations for restrooms, showers, a security and privacy fence, security cameras, a locked rear gate, a dedicated area for

food donations, a trash dumpster, and a bulletin board listing available services and job opportunities. “No drugs or alcohol are allowed in the Tharros village, and every resident is registered for safety purposes.” Beebe Healthcare brings its mobile medical unit to the site weekly.

The Task Force recognizes that replicating the Tharros model requires funding, which neither the City nor nonprofit agencies that serve the homeless have budgeted for in their current operating budgets. To fund such temporary homeless services, the Task Force encourages the City to consider accessing its one-time, State-distributed funds from the national opioid settlement as an impactful use of these settlement funds.

A temporary homeless village in Christina Park and/or another City location also will require enhanced coordination with the Wilmington Police Department’s community engagement officers, walking the area, and building trust with the homeless individuals and nonprofit agencies providing services.

Encouraging unhoused, unsheltered individuals living on City streets to relocate to an outdoor tent village will require significant coordination among outreach teams. Several such outreach teams frequently attended Task Force meetings and provided their insights at Task Force meetings. The outreach teams consist of paid employees as well as volunteers. The Task Force recommends a concerted, coordinated, proactive approach among outreach teams, including the Delaware Department of Health & Social Services, Friendship House, the Horizon House, the Wilmington Police Department, and Christiana Care Healthy System’s Partners in Care team.

A temporary outdoor homeless village in Christina Park should have clear boundaries encompassing the area near the pavilion closest to the 4th Street side of the park, extending no further than the outfield of the baseball field, which no longer is available to area residents due to the growing homeless population in the park. For safety reasons, no tents should be allowed in the pavilion; tents should only be allowed on the grass area.

The rest of the park, including the second pavilion located closest to Church Street, should be preserved for use by City residents who enjoy playing cards, fishing, and other outdoor activities. Visits to the park to talk with City residents indicate that dividing the park in this manner would be an acceptable temporary accommodation.

Task Force members understand the concerns of east side residents who live near Second, Poplar, and Lombard Streets that allowing a temporary homeless village in Christina Park further exacerbates the concentration of unhoused individuals in this area. To address these concerns, the City should consider a second outdoor homeless village in the northern area of the City outside of the downtown business district. St. Patrick’s Center, Friendship House, The Ministry of Caring, the YWCA, and the YMCA have a long history of providing services to unhoused individuals and may be a partner in exploring other options further north if funding is available.

Providing an outdoor area in a City park for unhoused individuals to seek temporary shelter and services should also help address the concerns of business owners along Front and Poplar Streets where a growing number of homeless people are living. Many of these business owners regularly attended Task Force meetings and shared their experiences of unhoused individuals erecting cardboard encampments on sidewalks leading to their places of business, defecating on their private property, and the problems of trash piling up daily on the streets and sidewalks. Business owners repeatedly expressed concerns for their safety and of increasingly unsanitary conditions along Front and Poplar Streets. As Springboard Delaware's Georgetown shelter village and the Tharros village have demonstrated, with a dedicated outreach team consistently engaging with and building trust among unhousing individuals, providing wrap-around services in an outdoor area can encourage unhoused individuals to relocate and seek these services.

The Task Force encourages the City to explore an additional outdoor, temporary tent village option in the northern area of the City, near 13th, 14th, Pine and Church Streets.

Recommendations to explore a “Tiny Homes” option

On June 3, 2025, the founders of Springboard Delaware presented to the Task Force a proposal to utilize approved federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for a low-barrier homeless navigation center/shelter in Wilmington.

The proposal is based on the successful “tiny homes” model village in Georgetown, Delaware, which two Task Force members visited on July 10, 2025.

The low-barrier shelter center would be constructed as module, private rooms with shared shower and bathroom facilities. It could house 50-60 people, with wrap-around services including food, clothing, trauma-informed care, mental health services, and substance abuse referrals. The center is meant to serve as transitional housing, with the goal of connecting residents with permanent, stable housing. The Springboard Delaware model includes intensive outreach efforts to build trust with unhoused, unsheltered individuals and persuade them to join the village community.

The proposed Springboard Delaware shelter village would require about one acre of City land and would require obtaining necessary permits and approvals. One proposed location is Christina Park on the East 4th Street side of the park.

While there are approved federal capital funds available to construct the shelter village, these funds must be fully spent by December 2026. Other cities beside Wilmington may be interested in these federal funds as well. Another significant consideration is the estimated \$1 million annual operating budget necessary to sustain services. Without a sustainable funding source outlined above, the City of Wilmington cannot afford the high costs of providing additional homeless services, including a “tiny homes” shelter community.

The Task Force highly recommends the City pursue every avenue necessary to obtain funding and approvals for a module, low-barrier shelter village as a more long-term solution for temporary housing services.

Recommendations to create a Drop-in or Day Center in partnership with a local service provider(s)

The work of the Task Force included mapping out food, shelter, and other services provided daily to unhoused and unsheltered individuals. Several locations provide breakfast, including the Sunday Breakfast Mission at 110 S. Poplar Street, the Friendship House Empowerment Center at 8th & Orange Streets, and the St. Patrick's Center at 14th & King Streets. After breakfast, unhoused individuals must leave these locations, and they routinely either remain on the streets near these locations, or walk to Front & Poplar Streets, Christina Park, the Wilmington Public Library, Rodney Square, 71/2 Street, Fletcher Brown Park, Christina Gateway Park, the Amtrak Station, Delaware Transit Station, and bus depots. It is important to note that the Friendship House Empowerment Center at 8th & Orange Streets allows unsheltered individuals to return to the Day Center later in the morning and afternoon for a place to stay before dinner meals at various locations are offered.

The Emmanuel Dining Hall operated by the Ministry of Caring also offers a mid-day meal at its two locations.

To provide unhoused, unsheltered individuals a place to call home on their journey during daylight hours, the Task Force recommends establishing additional Day or Drop-In Centers throughout the City. As with other Task Force recommendations, additional Day Centers will require an additional funding from the State for the City to be able to meet operating costs. Suggested locations for a Day Center include:

1. Converting the Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA) building at 600 E. 4th Street, with meal services provided by the Ministry of Caring and other services provided by other nonprofit organizations, including the YWCA or Friendship House.
2. If the City allows unhoused individuals to temporarily use Christina Park until a "tiny homes" village can be constructed, if funding is available, the City should consider partnering with nonprofit organizations on a "Pop-Up" or temporary tented day center in Christina Park, including showers, an appropriate toilet structure, regular trash pick-up, and organized meals.
3. The St. Patrick's Center operates until 10:30 am, however, the Church previously provided a Day Center as well. The City should work with the St. Patrick's Center and local developers on other suitable locations near St. Patrick's Church to re-establish the Center's services during the day so that unhoused individuals in the northern area of the City have a place to go rather than on the street, in Rodney Square, or the Wilmington Public Library.

4. The Friendship House Empowerment Center in Wilmington currently operates in a small, confined space. The nonprofit organization has expressed interest in offering expanded Day Center services in partnership with the City if funding is available.

Recommendations to establish a personal item storage facility

Research suggests that individuals who are unhoused collect possessions, food, clothing, shopping carts, discarded suitcases, bicycles, pets, and many other items for survival. As a way to cope with trauma and anxiety, they may find comfort or a sense of control through their belongings, a behavior sometimes related to hoarding. The items can also provide a sense of identity or a link to a more stable past, representing a way to hold onto some sense of security in an uncertain future. They often store prescribed medicines and their identification cards in their bagged belongings.

To residents, business owners, people who work in the City, and tourists, these accumulated belongings can be seen as an eyesore and a potential source of unsanitary conditions, including germs, viruses, and bed bugs.

City shelters require homeless individuals utilizing food and overnight services to place their accumulated belongings in a “heat” room. In this dedicated room, an infrared heat source kills potential bed bugs and germs, while keeping the belongings safe.

The Task Force understands that its recommendations to create a personal item storage facility should include the best practice of a heat chamber to prevent the spread of bed bugs or other unsanitary conditions. Our recommendation to establish such a facility recognizes the most efficient location would be in conjunction with Day Centers and at existing shelters. The storage facility could take the form of oversized, industrial containers large enough to hold bags and suitcases. Another option would be a locker-type structure on the grounds of a Day Center. A more unconventional idea might include repurposing a state-owned transit bus or school bus on the grounds of a Day Center or near the Delaware Transit Center on Front Street. The seats of the bus could be numbered and assigned to an individual to store his or her belongings. The bus could be decorated by local artists to further show community support.

Recommendations to explore additional affordable housing options

The Task Force recommends the City explore several options to provide more long-term affordable housing. Such options may help prevent City residents from losing their housing in the future and will help stabilize rents for apartments at below-market rates.

1. To help stabilize rents, other cities have established a “**Mixed-Income Neighborhood Trust**” (MINT) model – a housing trust that owns the buildings maintains a mix of units at below-market rents, while allowing some market-rate units, protecting longtime tenants from displacement without relying on traditional subsidies.

WHA's nonprofit organization recently agreed to renovate a four-unit building that will create four rent-stable units. Additional projects like this with other nonprofit agencies and developers should be pursued. These rent-stable units would be rented at 20-30% below fair market rent.

Examples of similar projects in other cities include:

- **Parliament Place & Southwood Park in Nashville, TN** – 165 units across two adjacent garden-apartment complexes. These 1970s-era properties are **naturally occurring affordable housing** that have retained below-market rents without formal rent controls. In 2021, nonprofit Urban Housing Solutions partnered with private foundations and a bank to acquire and preserve these units. The landmark deal provided a \$19.2 million **0% interest loan** (with local foundations guaranteeing the financing), enabling UHS to keep rents affordable for at least **30 years**, and plan a future refinance using federal LIHTCs for long-term stability.
 - **East Boston Neighborhood Trust (East Boston, MA)** – 114 units of **naturally occurring affordable housing** spread across **36 small buildings** in the East Boston neighborhood. In October 2022, community residents and nonprofits formed the East Boston Neighborhood Trust to **acquire and preserve these naturally affordable apartments**. This was the first “**Mixed-Income Neighborhood Trust**” (MINT) model in Massachusetts – a housing trust that owns the buildings and ensures they remain affordable for local families. The Trust keeps a mix of units at below-market rents (with city support) while allowing some market-rate units, protecting longtime tenants from displacement without relying on traditional subsidies.
 - Hyattsville, MD - 245 units; preserved as long-term **workforce housing** through a public-private initiative. Originally a market-rate garden apartment complex, it was purchased in 2021 by the nonprofit Washington Housing Conservancy (WHC) in partnership with impact investors and local government. A 20-year covenant now guarantees *184 of the 245 units* remain affordable to households earning up to 80% of AMI. This preservation deal leveraged WHC's social-impact investment fund plus Prince George's County support to prevent rent hikes and keep the apartments affordable.
2. For housing developments approved for city funding and tax subsidies, require that at least 20 percent of the housing units be permanent affordable below-market rent.
 3. Recommend that WHA continue to utilize and coordinate project-based vouchers to transition people into long-term housing choice vouchers.
 4. Encourage nonprofit organizations to work with local developers and City leaders on a Housing First Hub in the City that incorporates a mixed-use development model. The goal of a “housing first” model is to provide immediate access to housing utilizing a low-barrier approach.

Additional Recommendations

1. Implement a communications plan to release details of the Task Force recommendations among City agencies, nonprofit organizations, residents, businesses, churches
2. Assign oversight and implementation of these recommendations to a member of Mayor Carney's Administration
3. Create a "dashboard" to record implementation of these recommendations and other measures so members of the public may track the City's response to homelessness
4. Enhance coordination across City agencies for a comprehensive approach on homelessness issues
5. Prioritize enhanced and coordinated outreach services, utilizing the existing wrap-around services offered by the Wilmington Police Department Partners in Care team, the State Bridge Clinic teams, Friendship House, Horizon House, and related services
6. Provide daily trash pick-up in Christina Park and other areas serving unhoused individuals
7. Implement street cleanings several days every week along Front Street, Poplar Street, 8th & Orange Streets, with signs posted on these streets providing notice of the days/times of the street cleanings
8. Provide and cover the cost of biohazardous clean-up of Christina Park and City streets frequented by unhoused individuals
9. Purchase of commercial-grade power washer for public works department (similar to Downtown Visions)
10. Purchase stand-alone toilet facility, similar to the Portland Loo, for use by unhoused individuals in areas frequented by homeless individuals and provide 24/7 access to water.
11. Install lighting under Amtrak Bridge on Front Street
12. Install cameras on Lombard, Second, and Poplar Streets as part of the Wilmington Police Department's existing closed-circuit camera network
13. Enhance police community engagement initiatives, with officers walking the street, on foot patrols, building relationships with the unhoused individuals and staff at Day Centers throughout the City
14. Require organizations and individuals who provide food delivery to unhoused individuals to clean-up trash and discarded food
15. Identify abandoned buildings that could be converted for use by unhoused individuals
16. Establish a timeline to return Christina Park to City residents for recreational uses, sports, fishing, and other social gatherings
17. Convene regular meetings among Mayors in cross-border states and within the State of Delaware to coordinate on homelessness issues

18. Develop a concerted prevention strategy across state, county and city agencies to identify people at risk of becoming homeless and work to find them temporary shelter or keep them in existing housing

Section 4 – Highlight Existing Service Providers

There are several well-established nonprofit service providers that have been assisting unhoused, unsheltered individuals for decades in the City of Wilmington. In this section, the Task Force highlights the impactful contributions of these agencies.

Sunday Breakfast Mission

The Sunday Breakfast Mission has been providing shelter and services to homeless individuals and families in Wilmington for more than 130 years. Located at 110 Poplar Street directly across from the Delaware Transit Hub and just two blocks from the Wilmington Amtrak Station and Greyhound Bus Center, the Sunday Breakfast Mission is a pillar in the homelessness service community. Founded on Christian religious principles, the Sunday Breakfast Mission adheres to strict rules regarding shelter hours, prohibits drug use, and reserves the right to ban overnight shelter guests who are disorderly from the premises. In addition to providing overnight shelter and meals to more than 200 men, women, and children daily, the Sunday Breakfast Mission offers unhoused individuals a “New Life Discipleship” program, providing residents safe, spacious, apartment-like spaces to live and develop the skills they need to live independently with good-paying jobs. The Sunday Breakfast Mission has an annual operating budget of more than \$7 million, and does not rely on federal, state, or city funding for its operating costs.

Ministry of Caring

For nearly 50 years, the Ministry of Caring, led by founder and executive director, Br. Ronald Giannone, OFM Cap., has provided emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing, and daily meals for thousands of men, women, and children in the greater Wilmington area. Seeking to create new beginnings and improve the quality of life for the poor and the working poor, the Ministry of Caring has 19 programs in 29 buildings, including job placement and training, rehousing assistance, low-cost, high-quality childcare, case management, permanent housing for low-income seniors, a donation/distribution center, and drug, alcohol and mental health counseling as well as other supportive services.

The Ministry of Caring has an annual operating budget of over \$10 million dollars, relying largely on individual and corporate donations, with some funding from the City, state, and federal governments.

Friendship House

Friendship House has been providing services to unhoused, unsheltered individuals in New Castle County for more than 35 years. It operates three Empowerment Centers in New Castle County, including one in the City of Wilmington located at the Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew & Matthew. Friendship House provides services to more than 3,300 people at its Wilmington location annually. Friendship House is the designated Code Purple and Code Orange emergency shelter coordinator for New Castle County. Along with emergency shelter services, it provides food, life skills and training, a clothing bank, transitional housing, and other services to more than 17,000 individuals and families every year. With an annual operating budget of \$2.7 million, Friendship House does not receive federal, state, or county funding. As the lead agency in New Castle County for Code Purple,¹ Friendship House receives about \$15,000 from the City of Wilmington to assist with the coordination of Code Purple emergency shelters during the winter months. New Castle County Council also provides about \$10,000 - \$15,000 to Friendship House to support its emergency seasonal programs, including Code Purple and Code Orange.

Partners in Care

The Wilmington Police Department's Partners in Care Program pairs trained mental health clinicians with police officers, who respond as a team to calls for service and conduct proactive outreach to support those in need in our community, including homeless individuals. The innovative collaboration established in March 2024, is a partnership with ChristianaCare that includes two senior social workers, a substance use specialist peer, and two crisis intervention trained officers.

State Bridge Clinic Team

The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services established statewide Bridge Clinic Teams in 2019, under the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH). The Bridge Clinic Team consists of clinicians and peer support specialists who staff Bridge Clinics and provide outreach to unhoused individuals across Delaware. These teams offer direct access to screenings, referrals, and stabilization services for individuals with mental health and substance use disorders, helping them connect with

¹ **Code Purple** is an emergency cold-weather shelter initiative in Delaware and some other areas that provides temporary overnight shelter to individuals experiencing homelessness when temperatures are dangerously low, often below 10-20°F or when extreme ice, snow, or wind creates life-threatening conditions. The program involves partnerships between local government, nonprofits, faith communities, and volunteers to open additional shelters and increase capacity, connecting those in need with resources and support to prevent hypothermia and frostbite. **Code Orange** refers to emergency measures, such as opening extra cooling centers, that are activated during extreme hot weather events to provide shelter and air conditioning for unhoused individuals.

treatment and other community resources. The mobile Bridge Clinics also provide social support to individuals returning to the community from incarceration, including support for family members.

Horizon House

Founded in 1952, Horizon House operates several locations in Delaware and Pennsylvania. It provides community-based services for adults with psychiatric disabilities and intellectual/developmental disabilities in Delaware. Services include residential options, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), Intensive Case Management (ICM), and outpatient services. The Horizon House is the recipient of federal funding from the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) grant that provides mental health services for unhoused individuals.

Examples to end homelessness from Other Cities

Wilmington can learn from and adapt housing programs that have shown results in other states and cities. Here are a few examples.

1. Housing First Model

- **Houston**
 - Adopted a **Housing First** approach through the "*The Way Home*" initiative starting in 2012, which created a coordinated homeless response system with data-driven matching, wraparound services, and stable housing.
 - Result: A **60% reduction** in homelessness across the City of Houston, Harris, and Fort Bend counties, along with ending veteran homelessness.
- **Santa Clara County**
 - The *Housing 1000* campaign housed 850 chronically homeless people, with **83% maintaining stable housing** over the campaign duration.
- **Milwaukee County**
 - Emphasized Housing First with robust wraparound support and landlord engagement, fostering strong partnerships across agencies.
 - Community leaders credited this collaborative model as key to encouraging results.

2. Coordinated Systems & Data-Driven Matching

- **Houston** stands out for using the **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)**, which integrated local resources for faster, targeted housing solutions.
- **Chattanooga, TN**: Focused tailored support and data-driven targeting to effectively **end veteran homelessness by 2020**.

3. Temporary / Interim Housing as Stepping Stones

- **DignityMoves (California)**: Builds tiny-home communities—costing as little as \$30,000 each—as interim housing for unsheltered individuals, providing shelter before more long-term support can be provided.

4. Affordable Housing & Zoning Reforms

- A Brookings Institution study highlights how **Chicago** and **Philadelphia** achieved declines in homelessness (7% and 21% respectively) through increased housing production, relaxed zoning, tenant protections, and support programs.

5. Temporary Enforcement Plus Support

- **San Francisco**: Issued over 1,080 illegal lodging arrests between July 2024 to July 2025, and cleared encampments—reporting an **85% drop** from pandemic peaks. The strategy was paired with street outreach and temporary shelter expansion, although long-term solutions remain undetermined.

6. Preventative Tools & Smart Allocation

- **Allegheny County**: Developed a **machine-learning system** to more proactively allocate rental assistance to those at highest risk of eviction, preventing homelessness more effectively than standard reactive methods.
- **San Francisco**: Utilized 311 service calls combined with street imagery to get daily, neighborhood-level visibility into homeless tent trends — providing actionable data for policy response.

7. Targeted Prevention & Strong Leadership

- The **Urban Institute** identifies four core pillars of effective homelessness prevention: (1) targeting those most at risk, (2) investing in prevention, (3) cross-sector collaboration (e.g., housing, mental health, child welfare), and (4) leadership that sets goals, tracks progress, and uses data to improve.

Section 6 – Summary of Public Comment

Each Task Force meeting included an opportunity for members of the public to provide comment. In addition, the Task Force meeting on September 15, 2025 was dedicated to feedback on the draft recommendations from City residents, business owners, advocates, academics, and other stakeholders. Generally, public comments included the following:

A. Community Concerns:

Residents and business owners raised issues with encampments, safety, and sanitation. Several described human waste, trash, and unsafe conditions near businesses and public areas. Several business owners also reported theft, break-ins, and fear among staff and neighbors, urging stronger enforcement of laws alongside compassionate services.

B. Service Needs:

Speakers emphasized the lack of adequate housing, food, clothing, and shelter options. Service providers noted challenges with substance abuse, mental health, and the need to hire and support more caseworkers. A general theme was that “you can’t police the problem of homelessness” and stressed that it is fundamentally a social issue requiring a comprehensive plan.

C. System Gaps:

Concerns were raised about underutilized or unsuitable buildings, and the absence of a clear plan for individuals displaced from parks and encampments. Stakeholders noted outreach gaps, lack of coordination, and insufficient resources to meet the scale of the crisis.

D. Calls for Urgent Action and Broader Action:

Commenters urged the City and State to act now and to develop a coordinated plan, increased outreach, and sustainable state funding. Several called for the Task Force’s recommendations to reflect Wilmington’s diverse population to strive for equitable outcomes. Many emphasized that immediate investment in expanded housing and shelter programs, along with systemic responses to addiction, must remain at the forefront of the City’s strategy.

E. Additional Themes

The importance of empathy, engagement with families, measurable goals, and stronger leadership were echoed. Commenters pressed for clear communication from the Task Force and practical next steps to demonstrate progress.

Section 7 – Federal and State Developments Impacting City Homelessness

Over the past year, there have been several developments on the federal and state level impacting homelessness in the City of Wilmington. These developments, plus efforts in nearby cities to end encampments, have resulted in an influx of unhoused individuals migrating to Wilmington near the Sunday Breakfast Mission, Christina Park, the Amtrak Station, and the Wilmington Transit Center on Front and Walnut Streets operated by the Delaware Transit Corporation.

U.S. Supreme Court Ruling

On June 28, 2024, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling by a 6-3 majority that allows cities and states to prohibit people from living, sleeping, or camping in public spaces. In the *City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson et.al.*, the conservative majority of the Supreme Court held that generally applicable laws prohibiting camping on public property do not violate the “cruel and unusual punishment” clause of the 8th Amendment. The ordinance at issue in *Grants Pass* proscribed conduct, not the status of an individual, and the punishments themselves were neither cruel nor unusual. The ruling granted cities more flexibility in determining how best to approach the “complex” issue of unsheltered individuals who sleep outside in public places, including the power to arrest and fine, even if there are not adequate shelters to provide temporary housing.

Specifically, the Grants Pass Municipal Code prohibits activities such as camping on public property or parking overnight in the city’s parks (§§5.61.030, 6.46.090(A)–(B). Initial violations can trigger a fine, while multiple violations can result in imprisonment.

The City of Wilmington Code does not allow a tent or “any encroachment” on the City sidewalk, making it an unlawful encroachment punishable as a misdemeanor offense of a fine not to exceed \$2,500 or by confinement for a term not to exceed 12 months. “Any encroachment” has been determined by the City Law Department to include a tent, cardboard boxes, or similar structure.

Article III, Sec. 42-213 – No person shall place, build, erect, construct or maintain, or cause or permit to be placed, built, erected, constructed or maintained, any encroachment beyond the true building line of the streets, highways, lanes and alleys of the city, except as provided by this article.

City of Wilmington Code also prohibits people from staying in City parks past dusk.

Article III, Sec. 38-60 It shall be unlawful for any person to be upon any park property owned by the city, whether maintained by the city, or by the county, or by the state, on any day of the week, from dusk of one day to dawn of the following day unless otherwise authorized by the department of parks and

recreation. Any person lawfully may be upon any such park at any time between dawn and dusk of the same day, unless otherwise provided by the said department.

Attorney General's October 2024 Determination on State and City Loitering and Panhandling Laws

In October 2023, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Delaware filed a federal lawsuit in U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware against the City of Wilmington, the State of Delaware and Delaware Attorney General Kathleen Jennings alleging that the State and City's laws regarding loitering, panhandling and begging are unconstitutional.² In October 2024, Attorney General Jennings agreed to not enforce, charge, or prosecute individuals for violations of said state and city loitering and panhandling laws. Following a "Stipulation of Dismissal Without Prejudice" signed by all parties, on October 24, 2024, Wilmington Police Chief Wilfredo Campos sent a letter to ACLU of Delaware Legal Director, Dwayne J. Bensing, Esquire, acknowledging receipt of Attorney General Jennings decision regarding enforcement of the state and city laws at issue. Chief Campos wrote,

As Chief of the City of Wilmington Police Department ("WPD"), I am writing to advise you that the City and WPD agree with and accept the instruction of the Attorney General of Delaware that because of the constitutional concerns raised by the ACLU with regard to the enforcement of 1 Del. C. § 1321 ("Loitering; violation"), and 21 Del. C. § 4147 ("Pedestrians soliciting rides or business"), that her office will not be enforcing either statute against any Delawarean until the Delaware General Assembly acts to amend these statutes. As such, the City will not be enforcing these statutes as they are currently constituted. For the same reason and after consultation with the City Law Department, I am directing WPD not to enforce the City's nearly identical loitering ordinance embodied by Wilmington City Code Section 36-68.

The City will also instruct its police officers that they may not rely on either the State or the City loitering laws for any law enforcement activity, including any stop, search, or arrest, and that to the extent that there has been any such reliance to date, it will cease immediately. The City will request Wilmington City Code Section 36-68 be removed as a charging option from DELJIS and, with regard to pending charges under this provision of the City Code, if there be any, ask the prosecuting authority to enter a nolle prosequi on the court docket.

² 11 Del. C. §1321 ("Loitering; violation") and 21 Del. C. §4147 ("Pedestrians soliciting rides or business") and City of Wilmington Code Article III, 36-68(b)(3) and Sections 36-221 through and including Section 36-227 relating to the regulation of panhandling.

The City and WPD will provide training as described in the AG's letter concerning these matters and will take steps to amend WPD's internal policies accordingly.

Subsequently, the Delaware Department of Justice provided the following guidance to Delaware Police Chiefs in December 2024, titled: "Charging Alternatives for 11/1321 LOITERING." The guidance outlines five Delaware criminal code provisions that remain enforceable beyond the loitering law.

- 11 *Del. C.* § 1321(2) is covered by **11 *Del. C.* § 1323, OBSTRUCTING PUBLIC PASSAGES**...which states – “A person is guilty of obstructing public passages when alone or with other persons and having no legal privilege to do so, the person intentionally or recklessly renders any public passage unreasonably inconvenient or hazardous to use, or the person willfully enters upon or tampers with or obstructs any public utility right-of-way.”
- §1321(3) is covered (to the extent it applies to state-supported schools) by **11 *Del. C.* §1320, LOITERING ON PROPERTY OF A STATE-SUPPORTED SCHOOL/COLLEGE**...which states – “A person is guilty of loitering on property of a state-supported school, college or university when the person loiters or remains in or about the buildings or grounds of a school, college or university supported in whole or in part with state funds, not having any reason or relationship involving custody of or responsibility for a pupil or student, or any other specific, legitimate reason for being there, and not having written permission from anyone authorized to grant the same.”
- §1321(5) is covered by **11 *Del. C.* § 1341, LEWDNESS**.. for public sexual acts not involving money and 11 *Del. C.* § 1343(a)(3) for sexual acts related to prostitution:
 - o **§1341, LEWDNESS** – “A person is guilty of lewdness when the person does any lewd act in any public place or any lewd act which the person knows is likely to be observed by others who would be affronted or alarmed. Lewdness is a class B misdemeanor.”
 - o **§1343(a)(3), PATRONIZING A PROSTITUTE** – “A person is guilty of patronizing a prostitute when: [. . .] (3) The person solicits or requests another person to engage in sexual conduct with the person in return for a fee.”
- **§1321(6)**, is covered by 11 *Del. C.* § 1301(2), **DISORDERLY CONDUCT**... which states – “The person engages with at least 1 other person in a course of disorderly conduct as defined in paragraph (1) of this section which is likely to cause substantial harm or serious inconvenience, annoyance or alarm, and refuses or knowingly fails to obey an order to disperse made by a peace officer to the participants.”

- **§21 Del. C. § 4147(a), PEDESTRIANS SOLICITING RIDES or BUSINESS...**
(a) No person shall stand in a highway for the purpose of soliciting any employment, business or contributions from the occupant of any vehicle. (b) No person shall stand on or in proximity to a highway for the purpose of soliciting the watching or guarding of any vehicle while parking or about to be parked on a highway.

Section 8 – Conclusion

Based on the most recent Point in Time survey, an initial goal this Task Force seeks to set through its recommendations is creating or identifying 80 to 100 additional shelter beds over the next 12 to 18 months in the City of Wilmington. As detailed in this report, achieving such a goal demands a sustainable funding source, which will require approval from the Delaware General Assembly and the Meyer Administration.

Establishing a modular “tiny homes” shelter village that can house about 60 individuals at any given time, before transitioning people to more permanent supportive housing, will go a long way toward achieving this goal. Further closing the gap will require identifying open shelter beds and housing options at existing providers, including the Sunday Breakfast Mission, Ministry of Caring, and the Wilmington Housing Authority’s nonprofit organization, the Delaware Affordable Housing Group.

The five areas of focus highlighted in this report represent an attempt to structure a spectrum of coordinated services for unhoused individuals in the City, including: establishing a location(s) in a City-owned park for a safe site for unsheltered homeless individuals; building a “tiny homes” shelter village; providing additional day centers in partnership with service providers for unsheltered individuals to have a place to go to during the day; creating storage facilities for personal items; and, addressing the need for more affordable housing options.

Task Force members acknowledge recommendations in this report represent the first steps in a broader, multi-tier effort that must include federal, state, county, and nonprofit resources and collaboration. As Mayor Carney’s Administration considers these recommendations, Task Force members encourage continued communication, accountability, and measurable goals that members of the public and City leaders can track in our collective objective to help unhoused individuals live in safe places and maintain our City as a thriving, safe, clean place for families and businesses.