

February 3, 2021

Dear Chair Gomez and Members of the Preventing Homelessness Division:

We are writing in support of HF 42 (Howard) which provides additional funding for the emergency services grant program (ESP).

The City of Rochester City Council passed [legislative priorities](#) earlier this year that include **“supporting targeted funding for temporary homeless sheltering, warming houses and other support, including increased mental health and chemical dependency treatment programs to reduce future growth in homelessness and to protect our residents struggling with these issues. This include support for the Emergency Services Grant Program (ESP).”**

**Cities around the state are impacted by homelessness, and Rochester (pop. 119,000) is no different.** We have seen the impact that a lack of shelter space has on people experiencing homelessness, residents, and visitors in the community. People experiencing homelessness were forced to seek shelter in unsafe and unsanitary spaces including skyways, parking ramps, and other similar places in the city.

In 2019, the City was involved as a partner with Olmsted County in the development of the Rochester Community Warming Center, which Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota operates. The Warming Center emergency shelter is open from 8p.m.-8a.m. and 42 beds are available for individuals to have a warm place to sleep, shower, utilize laundry and received food each night.

In March 2020, during the onset of the pandemic, several community organizations serving people experiencing homelessness were forced to close. The City quickly transformed the Mayo Civic Center, which was already closed to public events, into a collaborative day center to provide a safe space and basic needs for people experiencing homelessness.

In October 2020, the City allocated the one-time federal Coronavirus Relief Relief/CARES funding to retrofit a former fire station into a temporary Day Center space. The Day Center is operated by The Landing MN, a local nonprofit, and provides food, laundry, and showers to an average of 59 guests each day. Please see the enclosed handout for more information.

**Both the Warming Center and the Day Center utilized ESP funding during 2020 to operate.** Additional ESP support is needed for these services to continue further into 2021. We are trying to do what we can with the limited resources we have, especially now with the pandemic, but **we need additional assistance.**

Thank you for your work and consideration on these important resources during the pandemic, and beyond,



Mayor Kim Norton  
City of Rochester



Brooke Carlson  
Council President, Rochester City Council

# COVID-19 IMPACTS PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



In March 2020, COVID-19 resulted in the closure of local organizations that serve people experiencing homelessness in Olmsted County. In response, the City of Rochester, Olmsted County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), and non-profit organizations partner to provide compassionate and welcoming service including shelter, clean water, sanitation facilities, meals, social services, telehealth, and more. This multi-sectoral community collaborative provides 24-hour/7-day service through Warming & Day Centers.

## FACTS

- 59 guests on average visit the Day Center daily (The Landing MN 12/31/2020)
- 155 single adults & 40 youth identified as experiencing homelessness during 3 day count (HRA 1/19/2021)
- 91 individuals identify as unsheltered (streets, camps, buildings, vehicles, etc) (HRA 1/19/2021)
- COVID-19 positivity rate for people experiencing homelessness reached 26.8% (HRA 12/16/2020)

## OUTCOMES

- 31.9% decrease in average police incidents with people experiencing homelessness Mar. 2020-Nov. 2020 (42.1 per month) compared to Apr. 2019-Feb. 2020 (61.8 per month) (Rochester Police Department 11/30/2020)
- 143 individuals secured either transitional or permanent housing (HRA 1/21/2021)

## DAY CENTER VOICES

"We want our own places, but are really grateful to have a place to eat, sleep, and be out of the elements."

"Somewhere to safely store your belongings."

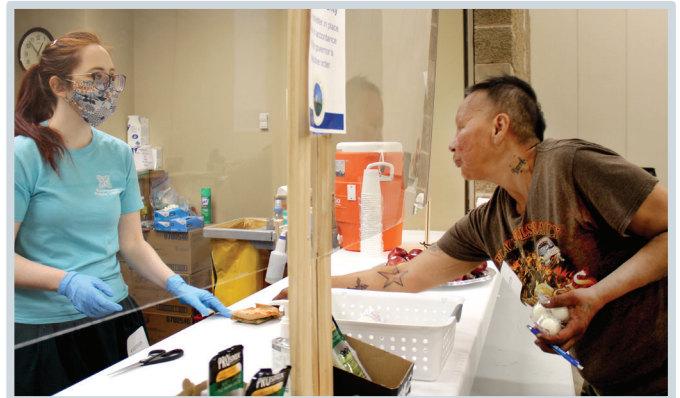
"Somewhere to go where you aren't judged."

"Should have thought about people down on their luck a long time ago."

"Day Center has really helped make things more comfortable."

"A safe place to be."

"Place where people can go and not be harassed."



## City of Rochester supports

targeted funding for temporary homeless sheltering, warming houses and other support, including increased mental health and chemical dependency treatment programs to reduce future growth in homelessness and to protect our residents struggling with these issues. This includes support for the Emergency Services Grant Program (ESP).

