MEMORANDUM

Date: August 28, 2025

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: Jan Lesher
County Administrator

Re: **Additional Information for Board of Supervisors September 2, 2025 Addendum Item 3 – Update on County Initiatives to Address Homelessness and Public Safety**

At the August 5, 2025 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Director of the Office of Housing Opportunities and Homelessness Solutions, Jen Darland, provided an update on the progress made in response to the May 6, 2025 request from Chair Scott for a shelter feasibility study and work plan to address the need for approximately 1,300 additional shelter beds in Pima County, which was as follows:

> *The Director of the Office of Housing Opportunities and Homeless Solutions has previously told the Board of Supervisors that there is a need in Pima County for approximately 1300 additional shelter beds. By way of direction, the Chair requests the County Administrator to report back to the Board of Supervisors with a feasibility study and work plan as to how the County, both on its own and working with our local partners, will meet that need. The study and plan should also address how to increase usage of the underutilized beds already in place and the different types of shelter beds needed to meet the needs of various segments of the unhoused community. In addition, the study and plan should clearly delineate areas where the County can act on its own and where it may need to partner with other entities, especially other local jurisdictions.*

Attached is a summary of Director Darland's presentation to the Board, which addressed the evaluative effort that included a broad review of national, state and local programs and efforts, including current shelter system challenges and programming constraints. Recommendations focus on system improvements, as well as modifications to the approach to outreach with individuals in crisis.

Further, Director Darland notes the importance of a coordinated, regional approach strengthened by community and jurisdictional partnerships will be foundational to an effective strategy. The development of a regional approach would be partly informed by the strategic planning being conducted by the Tucson Pima Collaboration to end Homelessness (TPCH).

Additionally, County staff and the Pima County Regional Affordable Housing Commission are developing a draft housing strategy and funding plan, guided by Board Policy D 22.17, *Closing the Gap in Affordable Housing, Tackling Housing Insecurity, and Preventing an*

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors
Re: **Additional Information for Board of Supervisors September 2, 2025 Addendum Item 3
     – Update on County Initiatives to Address Homelessness and Public Safety**
August 28, 2025
Page 2

Escalation of Homelessness. The strategy will address four (4) areas of strategy development. These four areas are Gap Funding, Preservation, Housing for Households Exiting Homelessness, and Market Rate Housing.

Director Darland will provide the Board an update on the strategy for Housing for Households Exiting Homelessness at the September 2, 2025 Board meeting, which was also presented to the Pima County Regional Affordable Housing Commission on August 19.

JKL/anc

Attachment

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator
       Steve Holmes, Deputy County Administrator
       Jen Darland, Director, Office of Housing Opportunities and Homeless Solutions

Date: August 28, 2025

To: Jan Lesher   From: Jenifer Darland
        County Administrator   Director, Office of Housing
                                                             Opportunities and Homeless
                                                             Solutions

**Re: Summary of the August 5, 2025 Board of Supervisors Meeting, Agenda Item No. 19
"Update on County Initiatives Addressing Homelessness and Public Safety" – Update
on Requested Shelter Feasibility & Work Plan**

At the August 5, 2025, meeting of the Board of Supervisors, an update was provided on the progress made in response to the May 6, 2025, request from Chair Scott for a shelter feasibility study and work plan to address the need for approximately 1,300 additional shelter beds in Pima County (ATTACHED).

Specifically, the request was as follows:

> *The Director of the Office of Housing Opportunities and Homeless Solutions has previously told the Board of Supervisors that there is a need in Pima County for approximately 1300 additional shelter beds. By way of direction, the Chair requests the County Administrator to report back to the Board of Supervisors with a feasibility study and work plan as to how the County, both on its own and working with our local partners, will meet that need. The study and plan should also address how to increase usage of the underutilized beds already in place and the different types of shelter beds needed to meet the needs of various segments of the unhoused community. In addition, the study and plan should clearly delineate areas where the County can act on its own and where it may need to partner with other entities, especially other local jurisdictions.*

The evaluative effort in response to the Chair's request focused broadly on:

- Evaluation of Challenges: Those within the request made by the Chair as well as those as previously reported on during monthly updates and / or memoranda to the Board. These challenges include the rising rates of homelessness across all populations, the lack of affordable housing for low to middle-income households, and the increase in mental health and addiction issues contributing to chronic homelessness.

Jan Lesher, County Administrator
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No. 19 "Update on County Initiatives Addressing Homelessness and Public Safety"
– Update on Requested Shelter Feasibility & Work Plan**
August 28, 2025
Page 2

- Opportunities: Strategies that can be supported by available resources, including local collaborations / efforts underway.

- Recommendation to Inform a Work Plan: Capacity and access while also addressing system improvement and improved coordination with stakeholders, including County, City and community agencies. The development of recommendations aimed to address capacity and access while also focusing on system improvement and stakeholder coordination.

Review of National Trends

The evaluation was expanded to include a review of how states and municipalities are confronting homelessness and leveraging local resources and partnerships to address the needs of at-risk, sheltered, and unsheltered individuals and families.

Challenges include the rising rates of homelessness, the lack of affordable housing, and the increase in human crises such as mental health and addiction issues. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of states and municipalities passing or updating ordinances related to camping in public places following the June 2024 U.S. Supreme Court decision on Grants Pass v. Johnson which upheld ability for states and municipalities to establish and enforce ordinances which prohibit camping in public spaces and enforcement of these ordinances do not violate the Eighth Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

In terms of trends, a few notable strategies stood out. Broadly, strategies to confronting homelessness are bifurcated between addressing episodic or economic and chronic homelessness. Episodic or economic homelessness means those occasions when housing is lost due to an unexpected loss of income or traumatic event, such as fleeing an unsafe living situation. Whereas chronic homelessness is when an individual may be experiencing multiple months or several episodes of homelessness over a period of years. In terms of addressing episodic or economic homelessness, some states and municipalities are targeting upstream interventions such as homeless or eviction prevention to prevent first time or a return to homelessness.

In terms of chronic homelessness, the human crisis such as untreated mental health and substance use disorders, which can be both a cause and a consequence of homelessness, can present significant challenges in addressing chronic homelessness. While homelessness is still a matter of lack of housing, communities are adopting enhanced street outreach strategies to confront the challenges prior to moving individuals into shelter and / or housing. These strategies employ a multi-disciplinary, relationship-based approach, leveraging partnerships with first responders, such as fire and emergency medical and law enforcement.

The multidisciplinary team model focuses on timely engagement with individuals to make connections to the most appropriate resource that will aid in resolving their homeless crisis, which could be shelter or could be medical care or treatment for substance use disorder or a mental health condition.

State & Local Trends

In Arizona, various efforts have been undertaken across the state. In Phoenix, the Phoenix Navigation Center and Respiro have expanded resources and access to shelter options, including the creation of Safe Outdoor Space, an outdoor area that can accommodate 200 tents and 300 individuals. Flagstaff has focused on hotel/motel conversions and investment in affordable housing development. In Sedona, where there is a lack of housing that is affordable for the local workforce, a proposal for a safe parking location was presented to the voters for approval in November of 2024, though it ultimately failed.

Locally, the Tucson Pima Collaboration to End Homelessness (TPCH) has been a convening body for housing programs and strategic planning, bringing in models like the Housing Central Command to move individuals from unsheltered settings directly to housing.

Jurisdictions also play key roles in interrupting / addressing homelessness. The City of Tucson has several initiatives led by the Housing and Community Development Department, which manages public housing units and low-barrier shelter programs, as overseen and supported by Housing First, Community Safety Health Wellness, and Encampment Assessors. Additionally, the City is the Public Housing Authority, which manages public housing units as well as distributes the region's share of housing vouchers. The Tucson Police Department's Community Outreach Resource Engagement (CORE) and Mental Health Support Team (MHST) units also play a critical role in these efforts to connect individuals in crisis to treatment support.

Pima County also has a robust programming portfolio which compliments community efforts to address homelessness. The Homeless Services Division of the Community & Workforce and Development (CWD) department provides resources and workforce support for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The Pima County Emergency Eviction Legal Services (EELS) and the Craycroft Shelter program focuses on homeless prevention at the time housing is lost due to eviction. The Pima County Health Department's Healthy Companions program removes barriers to healthcare for the county's unhoused and unstably housed individuals and pets through mobile clinics. The Transition Center, operated by the Pima County Justice Services Department in partnership with the City of Tucson, connects individuals who have been released from the County jail with resources they need, including shelter and housing. In terms of homelessness being a lack of access to affordable housing, the County general funds have been distributed as gap funding for the development and preservation of housing that will be affordable for households earning at or below 80-percent Area Median Income (AMI). The County's leadership in this space has now been fortified by

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No. 19 "Update on County Initiatives Addressing Homelessness and Public Safety"
– Update on Requested Shelter Feasibility & Work Plan**
August 28, 2025
Page 4

the Board's adoption of Board Policy D 22.17, *, Closing the Gap in Affordable Housing, Tackling Housing Insecurity, and Preventing an Escalation of Homelessness*, a policy focusing on a ten-year funding commitment to further advance efforts to confront housing affordability, reduce housing insecurity, and prevent homelessness.

<u>Shelter System Constraints</u>

In terms of the Chair's request, *"to address bringing additional beds into the system and address how to increase usage of the underutilized beds already in place",* required an evaluation of the current system in which shelters operate and present barriers to shelter access, which include:

- <u>No Uniform Operational Practice</u>: Shelters are not operated on a uniform set of operational protocols, meaning that there are varying program requirements, hours of operation, and no real-time information on bed availability, program and entry requirements.

- <u>Shelter Occupancy</u>: Shelter stays capping out at 90 days. In May of 2024, two meetings were held with regional? shelter staff to discuss overall operational challenges, as well as shelter program designs and limitations. Most reported consistently being at or nearly fully utilized, with participants and staying over the maximum time.

- <u>Shelter does not Equal Housing</u>: Limited housing also means little if any access to housing opportunities for those already in shelter. Shelter lengths of stay may vary, but shelter staff in 2024 reported having max length of stay at 90 days.

<u>Additional System Challenges</u>

In terms of the Chair's request to address recommendations for regional partnerships *"how the County can both on its own and working with local partners, including where County may need to partner with other entities, especially other local jurisdictions,"* required an examination of how the existing partnerships are presently operating. It is important to note that the evaluation is not of any particular operation or program, but rather a review of how programs are presently aligned as part of an integrated regional approach. Presently there are areas within the system which present barriers to timely access to resources, including shelter and housing.

Broadly, these challenges are:

- Siloed Systems: Existing systems and various partnerships are presently operating in siloed systems, with crisis supports not broadly integrated into outreach strategies or teams. Shelter is not broadly connected to crisis support and / or housing, and housing is not connected to shelter or crisis supports.

- No Uniform Strategy or Regional Objective: There is no uniform strategy or regional objective that unites jurisdictions, nonprofit, faith-based organizations, business, and other community stakeholders.

- Congesting Housing System: The 2024 Gaps Analysis prepared for TPCH by the Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROW) highlighted the lack of movement of individuals from homelessness – sheltered and unsheltered – to housing and fewer who were exiting homelessness to housing stability. Limited homeless prevention programs are those which must comply with HUD requirements, requirements which delay timely access to needed financial support.

- Need for Central Resource & Referral "Hub": Navigating individuals experiencing homelessness to needed resources often involves a series of phone calls to various different agencies for both outreach / service providers as well as for individuals experiencing homelessness. A central shelter resource and referral "hub" could be beneficial in reducing the "headache" this causes.

Developing Recommendations

Addressing the request from the Chair, and informed by national, state and local efforts, as well as taking into consideration the existing systems in which those resources are presently being deployed, the developing recommendations are for a strategy that identified both what the county can do, but also the region and the need for a regional plan. The work plan should avoid creating any further silos that delay timely response and coordination and should be grounded in a regional collaboration to ensure effective resource utilization and clearly defined roles between jurisdictions, TPCH and community stakeholders.

- Improve System Efficiency: Establish a centralized system that can support information on shelter bed availability. which can centralize information on available resources as well as support navigation of individuals / families from unsheltered settings to available shelter and make connections to care, such as detox or medical resources.

- System Relief: Increase movement of individuals and families to permanent housing from low-barrier shelters by targeting new or emerging housing supports for those

currently in high-demand, low-barrier shelter settings. Focusing on housing support for those already in low-barrier shelter provides an opportunity to increase bed availability in those programs that are presently at capacity and best equipped to support those with complex service needs.

- Street Outreach and Mobile Crisis Efforts: Multidisciplinary teams to include medical, detox and behavioral health professionals to engage unsheltered individuals to address crisis while navigating individuals to appropriate care.

Development of a Work Plan

Addressing the needs of unsheltered individuals requires an evaluation beyond brick-and-mortar spaces to consider the current system in which programs and services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The strategy and work plan should be one that is part of a coordinated, regional approach that improves system efficiency, strengthened by community and jurisdictional partnerships, and connects individuals experiencing homelessness to critical resources as well as long-term housing. A unified work plan grounded in collaboration and clear strategy will be essential to making meaningful, sustainable progress.

To that end, the following are areas of continued effort:

- Regional Dialogue: The summary of the evaluation of the local efforts captures programming inventory more at a macro level and does not fully capture the contributions of numerous nonprofit partners, some of whom are contracted partners to both the County and the City, nor does it count many of the faith-based programs also working in this space. The reoccurring theme in multiple conversations during conducting this evaluation was the absence of a regional mission that includes jurisdictional representatives, housing and services providers, faith-based organizations, business representatives, and community stakeholders. The objective would be to establish a clear set of goals, which could create a means of establishing collective accountability and expand participation of community stakeholders in addressing challenges. While there is active interest in convening a regional discussion, no plans have been established to date.

- TPCH Strategic Plan: At the July 15, 2025, meeting of the Board, Kat Davis, the Continuum of Care Program Manager for the City of Tucson provided information on TPCH and the progress in writing their five-year strategic plan. The plan will address programming goals for the HUD allocation of funding and will be to how those goals

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August 28, 2025
Page 7

align with County priorities.

- Pima County Regional Affordable Housing Commission: Prior to the Board's adoption of Board Policy D 22.17, *Closing the Gap in Affordable Housing, Tackling Housing Insecurity, and Preventing an Escalation of Homelessness*, staff had been directed to begin developing a draft housing strategy and funding plan as informed by the ECOnorthwest Housing Needs Assessment and Market Analysis. Staff and Commission working group have identified four (4) areas of strategy development. These four areas are Gap Funding, Preservation, Housing for Households Exiting Homelessness, and Market Rate Housing. Staff will present recommendations for the FY2025/26 Affordable Housing appropriation. The Regional Strategy and Ten-Year funding Plan will be completed by the end of December 2025.

The next update from the Office of Housing Opportunities and Homeless Solutions scheduled for the September 2, 2025, meeting of the Board and will focus on the strategy to address Housing for Households Exiting Homelessness, which was presented at the Tuesday, August 19 meeting of the Pima County Regional Affordable Housing Commission.

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator
       Steve Holmes, Deputy County Administrator

Priorities of the Office of Housing Opportunities & Homeless Solutions

Priority No. 1: Inventory existing County and partner programs addressing homeless / at-risk populations.

Priority No. 2: Describe and illustrate the homeless response system and care coordination.

Priority No. 3: Develop County and public facing communication strategies to enable individuals to understand where and how to access information and resources.

Priority No. 4: Develop a Strategic and Continuous Improvement Plan with the goal of ensuring County programming is responsive, sustainable, and equitably distributed.

Priority No. 5: Develop means of tracking the efficacy of County assistance programs and work with departments and partner agencies and governments to develop attainable measure of success.

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Progress of the Shelter Feasibility Study & Work Plan

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Evaluation of Challenges

- Underutilized shelter beds
- Diverse needs of individuals
- Coordination of access

Opportunities

- Evaluation of effective models
- Locally available resources

Development of Recommendations to Inform a Work Plan

- Addressing system improvement
- Increasing access to low-barrier settings
- County, jurisdictional partners and community stakeholders

Review of National Trends

Challenges

- Rising rates of homelessness
- Lack of affordable housing
- Increase in human crisis (mental health / addiction)
- Increase number of states / municipalities passing camping bans

Strategies / Trends

- Bifurcated approach
  - Episodic / Economic vs Chronic Homelessness
- Upstream strategies
  - Prevention
- Increase multi-disciplinary approach to street outreach
- Connecting care at crisis point as transition to housing

State & Local Trends

Arizona

- Phoenix, Flagstaff
  - Safe outdoor spaces, hotel to shelter / housing conversions
- Sedona
  - Safe Place to Park / November of 2024

TPCH / local Continuum of Care

- Continuum of Care Funding
- Supplemental Notice of Funding Opportunity Housing Central Command

City of Tucson

- Housing First Department
  - Low-barrier Shelter: Wildcat Inn / Amphi

Pima County

- Emergency Eviction Legal Services (EELS) & Craycroft Shelter
- Healthy Companion Clinic / mobile health support
- Transition Center
- Gap Funding for Affordable Housing

Shelter System Constraints

System Complications

No uniform or standard process to access shelter

Shelter Occupancy

90-day length of stay

Utilization trends vary

Shelter ≠ Housing

Few if any shelters have any access to housing subsidies / programs

PIMA COUNTY
HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES
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System Challenges

- Siloed systems
  - Crisis
  - Shelter
  - Housing & Housing Supports
- No uniform strategy or regional objective
- Congested housing system
  - Lack of movement between shelter to housing
- Lack of critical "hub" to centralize and support navigation from unsheltered settings to care and / or shelter

Developing Recommendations….

System Efficiency Improvements:

- Address strategies to transition individuals / families to permanent housing from low-barrier.
  - Individuals / families who are "timing out" of shelter.
  - Creates needed opening in existing, in-demand low-barrier shelters.
- Centralize support of information on shelter bed availability.
  - Shelter Hub
- Support for transitioning from shelter to housing.

Strategic Street Outreach and Mobile Crisis Teams:

- Multidisciplinary teams (medical, substance use, and behavioral health professionals) to engage unsheltered individuals.
- Address crises to while navigating individuals to appropriate resources.
- Create support "hub" for resource referral, care coordination / navigation.

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Developing a Work Plan: What's Next

- Regional Dialogue
  - Create a common goal
  - Create accountability and expanded participation in addressing challenges

- TPCH Survey on Strategic Plan
  - Goes before TPCH General Council for review and adoption

- Pima County Regional Affordable Housing Commission
  - Housing Strategy for Households Exiting Homelessness
  - FY2025/26 Funding Recommendations to the Board
  - ECOnorthwest Housing Study
  - Regional Housing Strategy & Funding Plan end of December 2025

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