



Church leaders praise city, county for committing fed funds toward homelessness

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Leaders from 50 religious organizations around Travis County have praised the work of city and county leaders who have dedicated more than \$200 million toward ending homelessness in Central Texas.

In an online forum on Tuesday, leaders of congregations from Central Texas Interfaith gathered with their constituents to discuss the significance of Austin City Council and the Travis County Commissioners Court deciding to use federal Covid-19 relief funds for housing and services and other resources for the homeless. Those needs were identified during a spring summit that put the total cost of ending homelessness in the Austin area at \$515 million, with roughly 80 percent of that money committed from local governments, foundations and other sources.

Rev. Michael Floyd, a leader with CTI, said he and other religious leaders have been involved in conversations with elected officials for years about the problems caused by homelessness and the

increasing need for affordable housing. He said prior to the money that came available as part of the American Rescue Plan Act, the most likely source of significant funding around homelessness would have been a bond proposal.

“We did have to twist a few arms with the city and the county but because of the leadership of the mayor and the judge it became a doable thing. With our constituency we can see firsthand that this is the most urgent need we have,” Floyd said. “There are lots of urgent needs competing for these funds ... so it became about who can make the strongest claim for the need, and we could see families in some of our churches being evicted so we could see how urgent it was to get things like money for rental relief.”

Mayor Steve Adler said smaller efforts addressing homeless children and veterans showed there could be success if enough housing and support services were available. He said the pressure that CTI put on him and other political leaders helped to make a strong case for using the federal funds on combating homelessness.

“With your help in pushing the city and the county forward, others are now joining us and we’ve raised over \$400 million of the \$515 million needed. We’re months away from being able to put ourselves in the position to over a three-year span to house 3,000 people we’d otherwise not have housed, and other than diversion, set up a system of permanent supportive housing that people

need,” Adler said. “You guys know what you’re talking about. You have pretty phenomenal reach to different parts of the city through faith institutions that people in the community are looking to for guidance and direction. That kind of validation is critical for the legitimacy of this ... that pressure is an important part of the work to get this done.”

Travis County Judge Andy Brown said the county is continuing to push for more help related to housing, recently requesting an additional \$7.6 million in federal funding for rental assistance. He said the county also can play a role in increasing the supply of affordable housing, as well as housing stock in general.

“On housing supply there are a lot of things the county can do to make it easier for people who are waiting 18 months for permitting and other processes that need to take place before they can start construction of affordable housing or housing in general,” he said. “In coordination with Commissioner (Jeffrey) Travillion we hope to make that process shorter and hope to employ more reviewers so when we have someone hoping to build affordable housing here that process can go quicker.”

Floyd said housing insecurity remains the top concern of his congregation at All Saints’ Episcopal Church. Resources such as more funding for rental assistance will be the most pressing need in the short term, but he said there is enthusiasm throughout his organization for the comprehensive plan to end homelessness.

“I don’t sense any fundamental change yet. I think people are glad that there is finally a plan. It makes a difference that there’s a comprehensive plan with all the major players and all the dates and goals and needed results. People are feeling good about that.”

Editor’s Note: Andy Brown is on the board of the Capital of Texas Media Foundation, which is the parent nonprofit of the Austin Monitor.