

# Housing Network to hire a consultant to assess homelessness



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MEDINA — The Medina County Housing Network’s Homelessness Prevention Subcommittee is in the process of hiring a consultant to assess homelessness in Medina County.

Skip Sipos, director of the Medina Metropolitan Housing Authority and chair of the homelessness subcommittee, told Medina County commissioners Tuesday morning he has a candidate in mind, someone who is an expert on homelessness as well as an advocate. Sipos said he’d pay the consultant’s fee out of the network’s budget.

“Clearly, we need to study this,” he said.

He said when there is an abused child or a stray dog, there is a protocol to follow. Right now, if there is a homeless person, “there is no protocol.”

Several agencies — including the housing authority, the Medina County ADAMH Board, Salvation Army, Love INC, Operation: HOMES, Medina County Job and Family Services and the Veterans’ Administration — and a number of faith-based churches are attempting to offer assistance to homeless people as circumstances arise, but there is no official or streamlined method to provide support in Medina County.

After the consultant compiles the necessary data, Sipos will report back to the commissioners to move forward with a

solution. Eventually, a homeless shelter might be built. He said that proposal is still in its "embryonic stages."

Sipos said how many beds, where it would be located and a number of other questions have yet to be determined. There are no solid numbers on how many homeless people are in the county. The Point in Time count — a federally required count of homeless persons once a year — showed there were 49 homeless people in the county in 2020.

Commissioner Steve Hambley is not sure that is an accurate figure.

"We have individuals in a homeless crisis that might not meet the definition," he said. "They might be sleeping on a friend's couch."

If there was a shelter, some wraparound services could be offered to help with addiction and mental health issues and try to get to the root of the issue of why they are homeless. Those can't be offered if homeless people are staying at a local hotel for a night.

Sipos is hoping to tap into the millions of dollars coming to Medina County from the federally funded American Rescue Plan. Commissioner Bill Hutson said the deadline for rescue plan money is fast approaching.

"Time is of the essence," Sipos said. "We will not drag our feet."

He also asked that the county donate about a half-acre of land next to the Medina County Juvenile Detention Center on Lafayette Road that could be used for a shelter.

Sipos said momentum is building on the project, especially after Rep. Sharon Ray, R-Wadsworth, was able to secure \$100,000 "seed money" in the state budget.

He said Medina County would benefit from a comprehensive, coordinated response to homelessness, which would streamline program participants and provide comprehensive case management to enhance potential outcomes for those in need and save money overall.

Sipos said the stakeholders are “generous, thoughtful and caring, but not coordinated.”

Medina Mayor Dennis Hanwell got the ball rolling by starting the Homeless Coalition after being approached by members of Love INC and Grace Church East, who were “overwhelmed by the need of getting hotels to put people up.”

He said he’d like to “get a handle on the numbers (of homeless people) we are dealing with.”

Medina County Sheriff Terry Grice has also joined the conversation and hopes to find a shelter for those leaving jail who have no place to live.

Hambley said he spoke recently to Sen. Mark Romanchuk, R-Ontario, and he said he would support House Bill 110, otherwise known as the two-year state operating budget, which includes the \$100,000 for a homeless shelter.

“We can’t start this too soon,” Hambley said.

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