


Today's weather
 **HIGH: 74**
LOW: 56
Sunrise: 7:03
Sunset: 7:44

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Group aims to mitigate homelessness

Jonathan DeLozier
The Gazette

MEDINA TWP. — Details of a coordinated homeless prevention and mitigation plan were laid out Thursday by the Medina County Housing Network at Heartland Community Church, 3400 Weymouth Road.

Columbus-based consultant Tom Albanese laid out specifics for a room of local officials and housing advocates that included representation from Medina Metropolitan Housing, United Way, law enforcement, Operation Homes, Medina County Battered Women's Shelter, and the Medina County Health Department.

"The scope of our endeavor here is to not just focus on people who are experiencing homelessness tonight," Albanese said.

"There are certainly people in Medina County who are outside or under a shelter tonight. We're also focusing on people who are facing imminent homelessness within a finite period of days. I'd argue that's our next priority group to focus in on so we can stave off literal homelessness and prevent it altogether."

Data is now being gathered for a countywide needs assessment with the help of local agencies such as Catholic Charities, Community Action Wayne/Medina, Love INC, Salvation Army, Operation HOMES, and Ohio Guidestone.

Findings will be presented to the housing network at its Oct. 14 meeting, Albanese said.

"Our plan is meant to encompass a variety of situations," he said. "The number of people who face housing instability on any given night in Medina County is



JONATHAN DELOZIER / GAZETTE

Columbus-based consultant Tom Albanese speaks to the Medina County Housing Network Thursday at Heartland Community Church. The advocacy group is gathering data for a local needs assessment to apply to its homeless prevention plan.

exponentially larger than the number of people who are literally homeless.

It's a basic idea we need to make sure we have our minds fully around.

At the top end of this funnel it becomes rather fuzzy and it's sometimes hard to know when prevention begins and ends."

While recent U.S. Census data points to Medina County's poverty rate being at a 20-year-low, a United Way study shows that roughly one third of residents are teetering on the brink of desperation.

The ALICE Report for Ohio is conducted by United For ALICE, a grassroots movement of 650 United Ways in

21 states, corporations, and foundations all using a uniform method to document financial hardship.

ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed — categorizing households that earn more than the federal poverty rate but less than the basic cost of living for their particular area. Combining the number of ALICE and poverty-level households amounts to to an area's total population that's struggling to afford monthly essentials such as rent, groceries, health care and utilities.

See **HOMELESS**, A3

HOMELESS

From A1

Latest results represent a “snapshot” of economic conditions across Ohio in 2018.

Over that period, the report shows Medina County having a 26 percent ALICE rate. That comes with a 6.8 percent poverty rate at the time and adds up to 33 percent of local residents experience some level of economic uncertainty.

Local advocates are putting together funding for Medina County’s first homeless shelter. Ohio District 69 Rep. Sharon Ray helped secure \$100,000 in state funding for that venture as part of the recently passed 2021 biennial budget. Federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) money is also expected to be put toward costs.

Medina County Commissioner Steve Hambley was in attendance Thursday and said it’s still too early to nail down a price tag or construction timeline for the new facility.

“We’re trying to get ahead

of things and identify our funding sources right now,” he said. “We have the second round of ARP money next year. This may be a matter of us putting a little bit in and they put some in then the other resources come around. It’s all about scale, how big you want to make the shelter. It’s also about our partnerships. We also have to think about wrap-around services.”

Hambley also touched on an exacerbated lack of affordable housing in Medina County townships.

“Where we have supportive housing and affordable housing is not in our townships,” he told the room. “We have nearly 1,000 new parcels that are being platted since the start of this year. None of those are going to be affordable housing. That increases the cost of housing and it really puts a lid on the ability of people to have access.”

Medina-based attorney Igor Petrovich works with clients across eight counties as part of Community Legal Aid, a non-

profit law firm serving low-income individuals and families.

He said Medina County’s eviction court proceedings are arguably the most difficult for his clients out of any coverage area.

“Throughout the pandemic, all of the (Medina County) hearings have been in person,” he said of local evictions. “No Zoom alternative has been provided like many other courts, including Akron. There is no pay to stay rules, which means someone can still be evicted even if they come up with the needed money. The housing is expensive around here and, even before the pandemic, there were fewer resources available.”

“If a person falls behind even by one day they can be evicted and they often haven’t had access to the help they need,” Petrovich added. “That’s what we’re trying to help with here.”

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