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Phoenix Asks Churches To Stop Street Feeding, Use Better Ways To Help Homeless

By Christina Estes

Published: Tuesday, September 20, 2016 - 4:37pm

Updated: Wednesday, September 21, 2016 - 9:06am

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Phoenix says some efforts to help homeless people actually hurt

Brenna Goth, The Republic | azcentral.com 11:58 a.m. MST December 23, 2016



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Does Downtown Phoenix Need Another Homeless Shelter?

BY MIRIAM WASSER

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2016 AT 5:31 A.M.

Phoenix Asks Churches To Stop Street Feeding, Use Better Ways To Help Homeless

By **Christina Estes**

Published: Tuesday, September 20, 2016 - 4:37pm

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(Photo by Christina Estes - KJZZ)

This man can often be seen on a downtown Phoenix corner across from city hall holding a cup to collect cash and a sign that reads "Help Food".

"Don't feed people living on the streets."

That's the message the city of Phoenix is spreading. Staff said it's necessary to protect vulnerable people, neighborhoods and businesses.

"It's usually a hard conversation to have at first because feeding is really something that's ingrained in communities as a good way to help," said Riann Balch, deputy director of Phoenix's Human Services Department.

When faith and community based groups deliver meals to homeless people or organize feeding times, they often hear words of gratitude, but Balch said they also need to hear this: "They are prolonging homelessness by giving the person what they need to stay out on the streets."

Balch said that puts the person's health — and life — at risk.

"What we want to do is bring people into services and improve their quality of life," she said.

Street feeding, as it's called, can also hurt neighborhoods and businesses because large groups tend to stick waiting for the next meal.

"Anytime you convene a large group of people things are left behind whether it's just waste, clothing, etc.," she said.

It also creates what Balch calls a "grouping effect" with people congregating in areas where they know food will be delivered.

"It's difficult sometimes to get into a business if there's lots of people walking around and you're not really sure about your safety," she said. "It's just not a welcoming environment and that really can be harmful to businesses."

The Human Services Department created the Street Feeding Collaborative in April to educate faith and community-based groups about the unintended consequences and develop new ways to help end homelessness.

Balch said some groups have partnered with established non-profits like St. Vincent de Paul and Andre House which provide meals at their facilities.

Some people are being trained to support and mentor individuals and families who have recently found housing. With winter and the holiday season approaching, another group is developing a public awareness campaign to share information about more effective ways to help.

If you would like more information on the city's community engagement efforts call 602-534-5463.



Phoenix Asks Churches To Stop Street Feeding, Use Better Ways To Help Homeless

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Phoenix Quarterly Homeless Update (April – June 2016)

Numbers housed through the regional homes services delivery system:

- 441 families
- 579 single, non-veteran individuals
- 315 veterans
- Of those housed, 107 were classified as chronically homeless

Source: Phoenix Human Services Department



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(Photo: Mark Henle/The Republic)

The city of Phoenix delivered a message to Life Elevation Church last year that Lead Pastor Cedrick Carter said was hard for members to hear: Handing out food and clothes at Sunnyslope parks wasn't helping the homeless people their faith called them to serve.

Food is a vehicle to reach those in need, Carter said, and days at the park allowed church members to pray with people and build relationships. Ending the events seemed like abandoning a Christian mission, he said.

But the Avondale church worked with the city to completely change its approach, he said, and now partners each month with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. This holiday season, Carter said, he's seen the impact of the type of giving his church used to do.

Established organizations have no shortage of food for those in need over Thanksgiving and Christmas, Carter said. And in December, he saw an influx in street-side donations pull people away from the monthly meal and service his church offers with St. Vincent year-round.

"It looks different when you see it from that side," Carter said.

Though controversial, the change is one Phoenix is encouraging for religious and community organizations who lead "street feeding," or offer food and supplies unconnected to service providers. A group organized earlier this year seeks a different approach, particularly over the holidays, when giving soars outside the campus of homelessness organizations near downtown Phoenix.

The city is calling the few dozen organizations the Success off the Streets Collaborative. Members are encouraging groups to trade street feeding for work with licensed providers, or to support formerly homeless people once they are housed.

Phoenix has no plans to strengthen policies or enforcement to prevent street feeding, said Riann Balch, deputy human-services and family-advocacy center director. But the city is working to educate organizations about the disruptions it can cause regarding safety, waste and the ability of providers to engage people about ending their homelessness, she said.

That message is rejected by some organizations who don't believe distributing food perpetuates homelessness. Other groups say the city should have no role in deciding how people give. Even some churches who adopted the city's stance said the transition has been tough.



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Carter said he understands why Phoenix's position is difficult for some faith-based organizations. But he thinks the groups can find more productive ways to address homelessness if they work with each other — and the city.

"The more we heard — the more we listened — we understood," Carter said.

Help becomes disruption

The heart of Phoenix's message is that street donations aren't helping people end their homelessness. Instead, they disrupt the efforts of the city and other groups to provide a long-term solution, Balch said.

The city works with a variety of other organizations [to engage people experiencing homelessness using a "housing first" model](#) that provides them a place to live before addressing other needs. Efforts and resources ramped up after the Human Services Campus at 12th Avenue and Madison Street [changed its overflow shelter strategy last year](#) after closing an old warehouse and fenced-off parking lot where people used to sleep.

That model relies on bringing people into a system that will help them, Balch said. Efforts are complicated when people know where they can meet their basic needs without interacting, she said.

As a steady stream of people cycled through the St. Vincent de Paul dining room at the campus for eggs, toast and potatoes on a recent morning, dozens more stayed outside under blankets or inside tents lining 12th Avenue and surrounding streets.

"It's even more difficult for us to engage them and bring them inside."

Riann Balch, Phoenix deputy human-services and family-advocacy center director

With street donations, people without shelter can start to collect items and "bed down" in the area, Balch said. They become less mobile and sometimes more adverse to leaving encampments, she said.

"It's even more difficult for us to engage them and bring them inside," Balch said.

It's a year-round issue at the campus, Managing Director David Bridge said. But Thanksgiving launches a period of holiday giving that brings thousands of people carrying donations to the neighborhood, he said.

The crowds bring logistical challenges. Trash and leftover food cause blight in the area, Bridge said.

The city needs extra police to keep distribution safe, Balch said. A person might save leftovers and get sick after eating them. People congregating where groups regularly serve meals create concerns for nearby neighborhoods and businesses.

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Phoenix appreciates the giving, Balch said, but wants to redirect it. The city launched a website of licensed organizations those seeking to help can partner with.

Additional opportunities include providing holiday-meal supplies to recently rehoused people, or donating starter kits of home essentials.

"We're just looking for ways that are better for everybody," Bridge said.

'I will not stop'



Volunteer Leo Ramos (center) hands out free burritos, December 20, 2016, to the homeless at 12th Avenue and Madison Street, Phoenix. (Photo: Mark Henle/The Republic)

But some people who distribute food near downtown say they are providing a service for people in need. Homelessness numbers are hard to calculate, but Maricopa County's 2016 point-in-time survey — a regional one-night count of homeless people — put the population at 5,702 individuals.

Nearly a third of those people were not staying in a shelter. The unsheltered population is up about 27 percent from the 2015 count but lower than it was five years ago. The survey doesn't provide enough information to determine why, though rising housing costs is one guess of service providers, said Anne Scott, human-services planner for the Maricopa Association of Governments, which coordinates the survey.



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The efficacy of outreach teams tasked with finding homeless people outside of shelters also could have affected the street count, Scott said.

But Scott said she thinks "there's concern in the community homelessness is increasing."

Michael Reyes, owner of the Paz Cantina food truck, said he has a social responsibility to offer free breakfast burritos and bowls to people who could use them. He said he has heard Phoenix's street-feeding message but has no plans to stop his weekly "Grateful Tuesday" food-distribution event outside the Human Services Campus.

Fresh food and supplies like blankets and socks don't just fill the gaps in what other organizations offer, Reyes said. They come with the message that people who are down matter and are part of the community, he said.

It's a service Reyes said he doesn't need permission to provide.

"I will not stop," Reyes said. "I will do it more."

Street-feeding bans or discouragement are controversial throughout the country. A recent report by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty found 6 percent of cities surveyed restrict publicly sharing food, but that outright bans have faced successful legal challenges.

In Phoenix, the Human Services Campus is in an area where "unscreened charitable outdoor food serving" is prohibited, though the ban is unenforced. Still, the anti-street-feeding message alone comes across as dehumanizing, said Amy McMullen, co-founder of the Maricopa Alliance for Shelter and Housing.

McMullen said shifting street feeding inside has no impact on the root causes of homelessness, and disagrees that it enables people to stay unsheltered. People should be able to give food to people who need it outside if they are compelled to do so, she said.

"I don't think it's up to the city," McMullen said.

"There are so many people who need so much."

Andy Reiter

The donations are an extra resource for people like Andy Reiter, who has stayed at Central Arizona Shelter Services for the past five months. Reiter, 45, said he is ready to sign a lease for housing and uses campus services in addition to benefiting from the clothes, shoes and other items provided outside the campus by "really good people."

For every service on the campus, there are hundreds of people who could use it, Reiter said.

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"There are so many people who need so much," Reiter said.

Some groups worry about what will happen to people who aren't connected to licensed organizations. The Phoenix Dream Center, an organization that provides a variety of services to homeless and at-risk people, stopped its regular meal service near the campus months ago based on the city's input.

The center sees merit in Phoenix's message, Executive Director Brian Steele said. Volunteers now partner with St. Vincent de Paul.

Their distribution and outreach efforts continue elsewhere in the Valley, Steele said. But near the campus, Steele realized faith organizations had inadvertently created a separate system outside of existing services, he said.

The Phoenix Dream Center, though, is still considering how to help people in the area who are on the fringe. He said that population is still out there — but now with fewer resources.

"Our hearts really kind of do hurt a little bit," Steele said.

Doing 'God's work'



The homeless line up while waiting for Michael Reyes to serve free burritos from his Paz taco truck, December 20, 2016, near 12th Avenue and Madison Street, Phoenix. (Photo: Mark Henle/The Republic)

Other faith groups changing their approaches said the transition can be tough, but that they see new opportunities in how to help homeless people.

Church for the Nations was disheartened when Phoenix asked them to stop giving food to people in parks a few years ago, said outreach pastor Lindsay Winebarger.

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The church listened, though, and shifted its events to its north-central campus. The church was inspired to funnel its resources more effectively to eradicate poverty, Winebarger said, and is launching a program to mentor homeless families.

Volunteers are undergoing training and will "be a friend" to the chronically homeless families moving into public housing. The church wants to work with the city on a common vision rather than fight against it, Winebarger said.

"If we all come together, we can do something great," she said.

A new non-profit called reKindle also is expanding its efforts to go beyond "just stuff," said Chris Hooley, who co-founded the organization with his young daughter. ReKindle started by hosting a monthly "Second Chance Saturday" outside the Human Services Campus to provide people with supplies like backpacks, a chance to hug volunteers and services like haircuts or massages.

"If we all come together, we can do something great."

Lindsay Winebarger,
Church for the Nations
outreach pastor

Those events will continue, though Phoenix has influenced what is offered at them, Hooley said. But now, Hooley hopes to launch the "Work First" program piloted this fall.

The idea is to engage homeless people before they are ready to work with employment organizations, Hooley said. Participants who complete a daylong beautification project receive lunch, a prepaid gift card and the chance to learn a new skill.

The changes have also boosted St. Vincent de Paul, said Jerry Castro, director of Food Services. Phoenix is referring street-feeding organizations to work with the provider, among others.

The volunteers and donations fulfill a need for St. Vincent, which serves thousands of meals around the Valley each week to anyone who arrives, Castro said. The dining room at the Human Services Campus also doubles as an overflow shelter at night.

Castro said he encourages people to work with the organization to distribute clothing in its lobby, or minister in the facility. It keeps the surrounding area cleaner than when that's done outside, he said.

Some groups appreciate the increased safety and structure partnering with the organization instead of on the street, Castro said. He said he has seen some faith groups connect more closely with people to help them find work or other services to help "get them going."

"To me, that's God's work," Castro said.

Does Downtown Phoenix Need Another Homeless Shelter?

BY MIRIAM WASSER

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2016 AT 5:31 A.M.



The Men's Overflow Shelter and East Lot one afternoon in spring 2015, before the emergency shelter opened.

Miriam Wasser



Every afternoon, after the lunch crowd finishes up and leaves the **St. Vincent de Paul** dining room on the Human Services Campus near downtown Phoenix, a small group of volunteers starts breaking down the setup. The tables are washed and then rolled to a corner, the blue plastic chairs are stacked and arranged to form dividers in parts of the room, the floor is swept and mopped.

After that's done, the volunteers head to a storage room in the back of the building filled with thin blue mats and begin loading them onto dollies. They make dozens of trips, wheeling well over 200 mats into the dining room. The mats are arranged in tight rows on the floor so as to provide a sleeping space for as many homeless men as possible. Mats are similarly arranged in a separate, smaller room for women, and a few are more spaciouly placed in a section of the dining room reserved for those who are physically disabled.

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The transformation from dining room to emergency overnight shelter is usually complete by 3 p.m. Meanwhile, a small line forms outside the gate that marks the eastern entrance to the campus. The doors to SVDP won't open until 7:30 p.m., but by 4 p.m., the crowd often swells past 50. Some stand and talk with those near them in line, others sit on the ground and read. At least a few people lean against the fence and doze.

Once the doors open, it takes about an hour for shelter employees to check everyone in. Mats are claimed, blankets laid out. "Lights out" comes at around 9:30.

Wake-up is at 5 a.m., and by 7 the mats are put away, the tables and chairs back in their spots, and breakfast is served. After lunchtime, the cycle begins again. Seven days a week, 365 days a year, 200 to 275 homeless men and women spend the night here.

No one is pretending that sleeping on a thin mat in a crowded room is ideal, but compared to the situation about two years ago, when the closest thing Phoenix had to an emergency shelter was a rodent and bedbug-infested parking lot across the street from the Human Services Campus, this is clearly a step up.



From September through November 2016, St. Vincent de Paul sheltered an average of 179 men and 62 women per day. (Pictured: the dining room, where the men sleep.)

Miriam Wasser

The question is: Is an improvised overnight shelter enough?

"St. Vincent de Paul is not a shelter," says Amy McMullen of the [Maricopa Alliance for Shelter and Housing \(MASH\)](#). "It was a baby step, but they need to keep moving."

McMullen says she often hears people talk about how great it would be to build a low-demand shelter on or near the Human Services Campus. The main shelter in the area, the [Central Arizona Shelter Service \(CASS\)](#), doesn't meet the need — not only is the 470-person shelter at capacity every night, but it has historically maintained strict work, behavior, and sobriety policies. By contrast, a so-called low-demand (or emergency) shelter asks little of its guests beyond requiring that they don't pose a public nuisance or danger. It's not going to require that a client be sober, do chores, present proper identification, et cetera.

"It seems like the powers that be can never get their act together to build a low-demand shelter," McMullen continues. "They thought throwing housing-voucher money at it would solve it, but it's not. There's always going to be new people coming into homelessness."

What McMullen and others in her group envision is a CASS-like facility: a shelter with real beds, showers, lockers, enough bathrooms, and a modicum of privacy. And with more than 200 people crowding SVDP each night and many others sleeping in the streets, in camps by the canal or railroad tracks, or in places like Papago Park – it's not hard to see why they'd want one.

McMullen says she understands that the so-called funders' collaborative – the group of representatives from the state, county, city, and nonprofit sector that meets weekly to discuss shelter operations and raise money for rapid re-housing efforts – is focused on getting people into permanent homes. It's a noble pursuit, she says, but it can't be a singular priority.

"Pretending that this low-demand-shelter need is going to go away is ridiculous. They're just kind of putting things off." - Amy McMullen, Maricopa Alliance for Shelter and Housing



"Pretending that this low-demand-shelter need is going to go away is ridiculous," she says. "They're just kind of putting things off, putting things off."

To those in the funders' collaborative, however, the situation isn't so cut and dry.

"At this point, I don't think there's really any evidence to support building a new low-demand shelter or even acquiring a new facility," says Bruce Liggett, director of the Maricopa County Human Services Department. "The number of people using [the SVDP shelter] is trending down in the right direction, and no one is being turned away. We've not been operating it that long to declare that's where the numbers are going to stay, but that supports not doing anything like building a new shelter, and to keep monitoring the numbers."

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According to Liggett, about 250 people stayed in SVDP every night in November – the high was 278 and the low was 218. (The numbers tend to fluctuate based on weather and time of the month, because many receive benefit checks on the first.)

To Liggett, who has been the public face of the county's year-and-a-half-long rapid-rehousing effort, there are better ways to serve the homeless than building a permanent low-demand shelter.

He sees the way forward as a three-pronged approach: First, continue to house as many people as possible; second, maximize the efficiency of existing shelters across the Valley and reduce the barriers to entry; and third, continue to engage with and collect data about the homeless population to help inform future actions.

Since the shelter opened in May 2015, through October of this year, it's served 10,627 unique individuals, and as of the end of November, 611 people have been placed in housing.

"Right now, we're taking it month by month," he says about the emergency shelter operation at SVDP, the contract for which is set to expire in February. "I think that after the first of the year, we're going to have to make a decision about whether we have to continue [it] for some period of time. I believe [SVDP is] prepared to continue if there's the need, but I for one am not feeling pressure to make that decision right now."

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Part of the problem is cost. Operating the SVDP shelter costs about \$40,000 per month, plus another \$10,000 for overnight emergency medical technicians, and a few thousand more for various other things like extra security and extending the hours of bag and tag, the free storage space for those staying in the shelter to store their belongings overnight. Liggett says they're working to reduce some of these costs, but that no one can guarantee that the funding will be available long term.

McMullen is not dissuaded by the current budget constraints.

"There's always funding available. I think the money can be found, I really do," she says. "I think we need more engagement with the business folks, because I think you can get enough people to support this type of facility."

It is worth mentioning that the funders' collaborative was able to cobble together \$2.5 million last year to get the emergency shelter and rapid-rehousing program going, and they've managed to sustain both for a year and a half.

It is worth mentioning that the funders' collaborative was able to cobble together \$2.5 million last year to get the emergency shelter and rapid-rehousing program going, and they've managed to sustain both for a year and a half.

"It's a matter of will," McMullen says. "When I hear people say we're doing all we can - we're not. We're accepting a status quo that shouldn't be."

But the question of whether downtown Phoenix needs a permanent low-demand shelter is a tricky one. Even setting aside the funding issue, each side of the debate makes a compelling argument.

To delve deeper into the issue, *New Times* spoke with 10 people who work with this population every day, either on the Human Services Campus or through policy work, to get their thoughts about the need for a permanent low-demand shelter. Interestingly, yet perhaps unsurprisingly, the answers overall were not black and white.

But before hearing what they have to say, it's important to explain how the current situation and debate came to be.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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- Arizona Coyotes vs. Anaheim Ducks
Sat., Jan. 14, 6:00pm **TICKETS**

When the Human Services Campus opened in 2004, its CASS-run shelter quickly reached capacity every night, leaving many who used services on the campus during the day to sleep on the street or in small makeshift camps.

There had been talk of finding more indoor space, but little action was taken until the *advertisement*

summer of 2005, when a heat wave killed 30 homeless men and women in the Valley during a two-month period. The county agreed to let CASS lease a former county-records warehouse across the street from the campus and use it as extra indoor space for people to sleep.

The building, which came to be known as the Men's Overflow Shelter, or MOS, was supposed to be a temporary solution. But soon enough, CASS was running a low-demand shelter for about 200 men - at times packing up to 300 into the building.

Though the MOS was better than the street, the conditions inside the squat, largely windowless building were far from optimal. The ventilation wasn't very good, and the place reeked of urine, mildew, and body odor. As *New Times* wrote in March 2015, "It's the kind of place that smells so bad staff will ask you two or three times if you're sure you really want to go inside."

But on the plus side, it helped get people off the street – and ideally it got them to begin the process of ending their homelessness by engaging with CASS staff.

In 2013, eight years after the MOS opened, the Phoenix Police Department asked CASS if they would consider accommodating more people in an adjacent parking lot.

Mark Holleran, CEO of CASS, says the organization had rejected that move in the past but decided to take the step because crime and other problems like vandalism and litter were on the rise in the neighborhood. In April 2013, they opened what became known as the East Lot – essentially an overflow shelter for the overflow shelter.



The East Lot

Miriam Wasser

The crime rate fell, police were called to the area less often, and neighbors stopped complaining about human waste, open drug use, and violence on the street. But many of the problems were now just contained inside the fenced parking lot, which some took to calling "the cage."

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In early 2015, after the fire marshal enumerated multiple safety violations in the MOS, the county and CASS decided that fixing the dilapidated building to bring it up to code wasn't a good investment: The MOS had to close.

"Philosophically, the MOS isn't a good idea or a solution," Holleran said at the time. "I'm all for it going away, as long as we have a plan to replace it."

But **there was no plan**. What's more, CASS's lease on the East Lot was set to expire in June, and many worried it wouldn't be renewed. As the April 1, 2015, closing date neared, media attention increased. Local activists formed the Maricopa Alliance for Shelter and Housing and began holding community meetings and protests to **pressure local leaders to take action**.



Miriam Wasser

Though the Human Services Department's Bruce Liggett made a public promise that the county would not let **hundreds of people "be put out on the street,"** March 31 came and went **without much fanfare**. The MOS closed and the numbers in the East Lot swelled.

But behind the scenes, Liggett and other representatives from the county, city, state, and nonprofit sector were meeting regularly to figure out what to do.

After weeks of meetings and strategizing, they announced two initiatives: a rapid-rehousing program - for which the planners, who began calling themselves the funders' collaborative, raised \$2.5 million and obtained 275 housing vouchers from the city

JOURNALISM PROJECT

of Phoenix— and a plan to turn the day room of the Lodestar Day Resource Center (LDRC) and the dining room of St. Vincent de Paul into temporary overnight shelters.

Signaling a philosophical shift in how Phoenix and Maricopa County intended to approach homelessness, the shelter would be staffed with professionals trained to engage clients and help them navigate the complicated system of services offered on the campus. (In September of this year, SVDP took over the operation and moved all of the shelter beds into its facility, keeping the same staff and the same philosophy.)

According to everyone involved, it has been a success. Whereas in the days of the MOS and East Lot, there was little, if any, formal effort to help people end their homelessness, it's now the top priority.

In conjunction with the campus Welcome Center, everyone staying in the shelter is given the same coordinated assessment tool, the Vulnerability Index: Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (known colloquially as the VI-SPDAT), to help determine their specific needs and identify the proper pathway to get them housed or out of homelessness. (Example: Do they need permanent supportive housing or just rent assistance for a few months and help finding a job?)

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Liggett often speaks of how the VI-SPDAT led the county to discover that about 20 percent of people who arrive at the shelter do not need to enter the system. Many just need help paying a utility bill or buying a bus ticket so they can stay with family or friends in other cities, he says, explaining that diversion is a good policy because it reduces the burden on the shelter system and prevents individuals from becoming homeless. The VI-SPDAT also helps caseworkers identify the most vulnerable within the greater homeless population and figure out what type of housing might be appropriate.

"Components of the system are starting to work much better, but we still have a ways to go," Liggett says, adding that before we start talking about building a new low-demand shelter, he wants to figure out what extra resources and capabilities exist and make everything more efficient.

For example, he and others in the funders' collaborative are working with CASS and other shelters across the valley to help house some of their long-term, more capable clients in order to free up space for those whose need is more dire.

"No one wants to see people who are seeking a safe place indoors not to be able to. But at this point, I don't think we can commit to that always being available." - Bruce Liggett, Maricopa County Human Services Department



"CASS is [also] moving in the direction of having fewer rules and fewer requirements, and we've been working with them on that. People are using CASS now who formerly would not have been allowed in," Liggett says. The goal is for it to become the low-demand shelter on-site.

"We've also explored expanding some existing shelters – not just in downtown Phoenix but also in the East Valley," he says. Because in a world of limited funds, adding capacity to existing shelters is more fiscally responsible (and more of a possibility) than building a new shelter.

Asked about his now-infamous comment that they would find an alternative to the MOS and East Lot because they wouldn't let "people to be put out on the street," Liggett pauses.

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"No one wants to see people who are seeking a safe place indoors not to be able to," he says.

"But at this point, I don't think we can commit to that always being available."

Liggett and Amy McMullen from MASH aren't the only ones with strong opinions.

New Times

interviewed others close to the situation to see what they thought about building a new low-demand shelter.

After the jump: what they told us. (The Phoenix Police Department declined to comment.)



Miriam Wasser



Steve Atwood, chief operating officer at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

In the last year and a half, SVDP and the LDRC have sheltered 10,627 unique individuals for at least one night, Atwood says. "So all of these permanent supportive housing initiatives which we support, even if they doubled or tripled it, there's still tremendous need for shelter," says Atwood.

"I think what Bruce [Liggett] is hoping, like everyone else, is that enough of these permanent housing vouchers will take effect so we'll only have a certain number of people [needing emergency shelter]. I don't see that happening. I would love to get to the end of February and only have a handful of people. I'd say mission accomplished. But it's a pipe dream."

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"I would love to get to the end of February and only have a handful of people. I'd say mission accomplished. But it's a pipe dream." - Steve Atwood, Society of St. Vincent de Paul



Atwood believes the city and county need more affordable housing, and he says that more should be done to make CASS a low-demand shelter because there are always going to be people coming into homelessness, meaning there will always be a demand for emergency shelter.

"I'm not as optimistic that CASS can handle it all," he continues. "I don't know what the answer is, and I really don't think anyone does. Clearly, the shelter for the last year and a half has served its purpose and is helping people, and I imagine the need will continue.

"There seems to be recognition that in all likelihood, we'll be renewing the contract [after it ends in February]," Atwood says. "And quite honestly, if someone said, 'We'll build another permanent low-demand shelter down at the campus,' and they were looking for people to help operate it, I would throw my hat in the ring. We'd be happy to help."

Kim Koenig, manager of shelter operations at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

"I think there is a need for a permanent low-demand, emergency-overflow shelter, and there's always going to be a need. As much as anyone tries to end homelessness, there are situations where individuals are going to need a place to go. I've been down here for a while, and I've seen the grants and nonprofits and how every six months, they say maybe the need will go away. But the need's not going to go away. The needs may change, so the place needs to be flexible, but there's always going to be a need."

Asked what she hears from clients who stay at SVDP, she says that occasionally people will voice their concern about the future and whether they'll be back on the street, but that for the most part, while it's something they're acutely aware of, "it's not something they communicate openly about."

Koenig says she absolutely believes Phoenix needs more affordable housing and a greater focus on preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place, but that everyone needs to be realistic.

"I think that sometimes with all these housing initiatives, [people] think we're not going to need low-demand shelter," she says, adding that she's completely supportive of the efforts to rapidly rehouse as many people as possible. "But I can't see that there's not ever going to be a reason for an emergency-overflow shelter.

"We need to ask what our community's tolerance is for people living on the street and how much we want to invest in this." - David Bridge, Lodestar Day Resource Center



"I would say that maybe a year from now, maybe we don't need 250 beds. Maybe we just need 100, because so many people are working on these housing initiatives and helping people overcome barriers," Koenig continues. "But the actual need? I mean, the campus has been here for 10 years, and it's getting bigger and bigger."

And these are just the people who are actually coming to the campus, she notes. "There are hundreds more that never even come down here. I did outreach for a number of years with another provider, and it's the communication and human connection [that are important], because you're not going to change your behavior or lifestyle if you don't have a connection to another one."

She says she's really worried about the future of the SVDP shelter. "It scares everyone involved: It scares me, my staff, my clients, the newspapers, the government. But what happens is when you get down to that last month [of the contract], when you think about it realistically – how is the county, city, and state going to be okay with putting 400 people out on the street all at once? They don't want that either."

"It's a love-hate relationship," Koenig concludes. "[But] I'm optimistic in general."

David Bridge, managing director at the Lodestar Day Resource Center

"I'm in full support of the larger strategy, but personally it does look like we have the need for some sort of low-barrier shelter," says Bridge. "What I have a harder time committing to is what the actual physical structure should be."

"I would hope we maximize all of our existing resources before we do anything new," he goes on. "Without picking on any agency, do the shelters that exist have the capability of doing low-demand? Are we maximizing the existing facilities within reason? If there is a capacity within a given facility, are we using that appropriately? Are we tying in the other shelter assets so we're not putting all of the burden on one community? I think it's a fair request from city or any neighborhood."

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"We need to ask what our community's tolerance is for people living on the street and how much we want to invest in this." - David Bridge, Lodestar Day Resource Center



"We need to ask what our community's tolerance is for people living on the street, and how much we want to invest in this."

"I think one of the things [we need to do] is something other communities have done within their overall homeless strategies: They've defined what their tolerance for homelessness and their goal for shelter is going to be. Some say, 'We're going to have shelter for everybody who needs it.' Others have said, 'We will not build additional shelters and we will live with X number of people on the street, because we think it's a more prudent effort to build more affordable housing.'"

Rather than reacting and renewing a temporary shelter lease every six months, he says, Phoenix could lay out a bigger plan.

"Every year, we have an issue about shelters closing and what are we going to do, where will people go," says Bridge. "[But] if you plan for the right capacity – unless you had something you didn't anticipate – in a given year, the numbers don't vary that much. You should be able to figure out what you need and how you balance it with other needs of the communities."

That said, Bridge continues, if the solution is to build, there are options.

"I know a lot of communities, instead of building one large shelter, they build several 150-bed shelters. They're easier to get into neighborhoods, have less security issues, and might be a little more flexible to the needs of the community. I think we need to keep all of the options open."

Bottom line: "We've made a huge change in a year and half, and I don't want to lose that in this [discussion]. We've gone from a parking lot – we've got data, we've housed people. It's all a learning curve. And that's the most important thing: We're getting better. What I've said isn't a critique but about how we might be able to move forward."

Amy Schwabenlender, vice president of community impact at Valley of the Sun United Way (member of the funders' collaborative)

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"At United Way, we've been focused on the housing aspect [of the homelessness crisis] and we want to align resources and raise money to create more housing options," Schwabenlender says. "We're not promoting more emergency shelter, and we've been saying that for years."

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Philosophically, she and others at United Way agree with Liggett in that they think it's premature to talk about building a new low-demand shelter.

"People see the symptom of people on street and wonder why we don't have more shelters. What we do know is that the numbers [in SVDP] have gone down, and that we've housed over 600 people in the last 18 months, so we're not really advocating for building more shelters.

"We're looking at [whether] the system we have, the shelter capacity we have, is performing as it should

be. We keep getting more and more data, and what we really want to do is use that data to see if the capacity we have in Maricopa County is sufficient."

Schwabenlender adds that she does believe the county needs a low-demand shelter, but that she's behind the effort to make CASS's entry requirements less stringent.

"Homelessness is a regional issue," she says. "And we're working on connecting all pieces of the system, so that across the county people have an equitable and fair shot at getting housing.

"We also know there are finite resource to funding any of this."

So the real question becomes: "How are we going to be smarter about using resources, knowing that they're not going to be increasing anytime soon?"



Miriam Wasser

Mark Holleran, CEO of Central Arizona Shelter Services

It's no secret that over the past two years, CASS is often portrayed as the villain. It operated the MOS and East Lot and it allowed them to close; it runs a shelter with strict conduct rules that many feel exclude the most vulnerable portions of the homeless population. But behind the scenes, Holleran explains, CASS has been working to become more low-demand.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Phoenix Suns vs. Cleveland Cavaliers
Sun., Jan. 8, 6:30pm [TICKETS](#)
- Arizona Diamondbacks
Wed., Jan. 11, 7:00pm [TICKETS](#)
- Arizona Coyotes vs. Winnipeg Jets
Fri., Jan. 13, 7:00pm [TICKETS](#)
- Arizona Coyotes vs. Anaheim Ducks
Sat., Jan. 14, 6:00pm [TICKETS](#)

"Do we need a low-demand shelter? I think so," Holleran says. But part of the problem is that there's a shortage of housing options for those staying in CASS who are ready to move out on their own.

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He hopes the city, county, and state can find more housing vouchers, because "then maybe we could have a greater impact. We probably have 100 people in CASS that we could move out, and then we'd have 100 beds that could absorb those in the [SVDP] shelter."

Holleran says CASS has 470 beds and is operating at full capacity. "I hope we get to a place where that can be enough," he says. "I don't want people to get comfortable here."

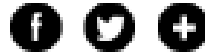
Asked what a low-demand shelter might look like, Holleran responds that he's not entirely sure – those who work with the homeless have not reached consensus regarding a definition of "low demand," and though he maintains that CASS is already low demand, he acknowledges that the standards to entry could be lower.

"Low demand' means you need to remove as many barriers as possible but still provide a safe place for everyone. It comes down to how you handle yourself. If you go outside general norms, then it raises concerns, because people's safety and security is not a topic of debate. If you're going to come into a facility, you should be safe, and that's not negotiable. If they feel that's a barrier, then the shelter services we offer are not going to be a solution for them tonight. But maybe it will be tomorrow," he says.

"If someone is intoxicated, getting them inside and off the street is a good idea for them and us, [because] if we don't deal with it, then our police department is probably going to somehow get engaged. If they get booked, they're put in jail, [which is] more costly and puts them into correctional services where they probably don't need to be. Rather than using higher emergency-response services like police, it's more cost-effective, and better for the people, to use housing services. And a low-demand shelter is part of the puzzle."

No one knows the precise answer, says Holleran. "We've tried different things. We tried the Men's Overflow Shelter, then the parking lot, then it came onto the campus [in the LDRC and SVDP]. Each one had varying degrees of success and challenges. I hope that our ultimate solution is one that gets us to a place where we have a building that's designed for that purpose. St. Vincent is a dining room, not a dormitory. I think it would be better to have a place with beds, but still with some attempt at engagement."

"The more we know about our customers, the better we can provide solutions that can be long lasting. And I think that's where the conversation is going." - Mark Holleran, Central Arizona Shelter Services



Holleran is optimistic about the campus' new coordinated-entry process and the data it's yielding.

"I think the more we know about our customers, the better that we can provide solutions that can be long lasting. And I think that's where the conversation is going," he says.

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"Maybe CASS needs to become something else. It's about providing the services people need. When CASS was first created, it was supposed to be a temporary solution. I think we need to be very open to questioning if we're still viable. I think we are, and I think CASS has delivered and we've become a mainstay. We opened 30-plus years ago and have never closed, ever. But that doesn't mean that's what we should continue to do, and do it mindlessly. We need to keep our minds open and ask questions."

But in the meantime, should we stick with St. Vincent de Paul?

"I'm sort of out of that part of it," Holleran offers. "I don't know what sorts of resources are used, and where it comes from. But as long as everyone is safe over there and St. Vincent is willing to do it, [then it should continue] until we can figure out a more permanent solution."



Courtesy of the Maricopa Alliance for Shelter and Housing

Mike McQuaid, president of the board of directors for the Human Services Campus

"The short answer would be no, we don't need to build a permanent low-demand shelter," McQuaid says. "And my thinking is that we have focused so much of our efforts on moving people through the Human Services Campus and into housing that it goes against that grain to say, 'Let's build another shelter.' I don't think we need more shelter beds, but I think we need to utilize the shelter beds we have in a more efficient way."

"I don't think we need more shelter beds, but I think we need to utilize the shelter beds we have in a more efficient way." - Mike McQuaid, Human Services Campus board of directors



Over the past two years, he continues, "We as a community have come together like we never have before to focus on how to get people into housing, not keep them in shelter. And I think at the campus here, it's going to take a while, but if we really utilize the beds here more and concentrate on those that are hardest to serve, [the number of people using the SVDP shelter] will really go down."

McQuaid says the numbers have been going down: Whereas 400 to 500 men used the Men's Overflow Shelter and the parking lot, now fewer than 200 use SVDP.

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"It tells us that what we're doing is working. We just need to be more efficient with the resources we have," he says. "Rather than focusing on having more shelter beds, I would much rather see capital expenditures going into permanent housing or more affordable housing."

He believes there also should be more of a focus on getting people out of the campus system, particularly those who have been in it for a while.

"Our first job is to house all the chronically homeless, because then the whole system will work better," he says, adding that he believes the city and county can attain functional zero – the point when the number of new people coming into homelessness in a given time period is no higher than the number being placed in housing.

"There are no easy answers," he cautions. "I know some people think we need a permanent low-demand shelter, but I don't."

Mike Traylor, director of the Arizona Department of Housing

"At the end of the day, shelters do not end homelessness. Houses do. So we have to balance how we're using resources toward shelter and housing. The evidence is pretty clear that when you provide effective housing options, you reduce the demand on shelters," Traylor says, adding that "80 to 85 percent of people who get housed don't end up experiencing homelessness again."

From a philosophical and financial perspective, Traylor agrees with Liggett and McQuaid that building a new shelter isn't the best use of resources right now.

"What I'm on board with – again, looking at our resources – I think that there's still opportunity within the programs that we have to make them more efficient and effective. One of my beliefs is that at least 20 percent of funds are not being utilized efficiently and effectively. So let's redirect those dollars."

"Let's look at it another way: A mat on the floor with a sheet and a blanket in St. Vincent de Paul is a heck of a lot better than sleeping on the street." - Mike Traylor, Arizona Department of Housing



Asked to give an example of an inefficiency, Traylor says that maybe there's a shortage of case managers, for instance. That means people who enter the shelter system might stay longer than necessary, because there aren't enough people on staff to assess their needs and get them placed.

That's a problem that building a new shelter wouldn't solve, he says.

"Again, it's a matter of the resources. Let's look at it another way: A mat on the floor with a sheet and a blanket in St. Vincent de Paul is a heck of a lot better than sleeping on the street," he says. "We all agree that the system could be more efficient and more effective, and we're analyzing every day how we and our partners can do this and remove barriers. And the other side of the equation is providing more affordable-housing opportunities in our communities, so that people don't end up homeless."

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If we can help prevent people from becoming homeless by, say, increasing the availability of affordable housing and expanding substance-abuse-prevention and -treatment programs, and we can house those whose crisis stems from financial problems, then that frees up space in CASS and other shelters for the most vulnerable, he explains.

Traylor, like everyone *NewTimes* spoke with, says he's particularly concerned about homeless people who are also mentally ill.

"Being homeless and mentally ill is very different than being homeless because of an economic crisis – we can't confuse one with the other," he says.

Those differences, in turn, require a different set of resources. And, Traylor stresses, compassion.

Moises Gallegos, director of the Human Services Department for the City of Phoenix
"Emergency shelter is just that: a shelter. But it's not a solution. We are focusing on the solution – *housing* – because we know that's where the answer is," Gallegos says. "Eighteen months ago, we had 500 people between a building and a parking lot, now we have some 200 a night in St. Vincent de Paul. We know that housing is working."

"Also, homelessness is a condition where today you're not, but tomorrow you are. It's not something that is going to be eradicated, but I think that when our system is working right, we can make the duration of homelessness short, and not continuous or episodic."

"Temporary answers are not real answers. They are a piece of the solution, but we can't let them deter us from the real answer: housing." - Moises Gallegos, City of Phoenix Human Services Department



He says the city is working with the funders' collaborative to tackle multiple elements of the problem at once, but that there are no quick or easy fixes.

"These things cannot be fixed overnight, and building a temporary thing that just shelters people and doesn't end their homelessness is not the answer. We wish we could house everyone, but that's not going to happen overnight. We could have easily put all that money into shelter and not housing, but it wouldn't have been a solution."

"Temporary answers are not real answers. They are a piece of the solution, but we can't let them deter us from the real answer: *housing*. It wouldn't be good for those we serve, or for taxpayer dollars."

By the Numbers:

- Total number of unique people to stay in the emergency shelter from May 2015 to October 2016: 10,627
- Total number housed as of November 30, 2016: 611
- Daily averages for the emergency shelter:
September: 178 men, 59 women (total: 237)
October: 173 men, 62 women (total: 235)
November: 185 men, 65 women (total: 250)

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