



City of Bellevue

February 10, 2023

To: Marc Dones, Chief Executive Officer
King County Regional Homelessness Authority
400 Yesler Way
Seattle WA 98104

Dear Marc,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Five Year Plan. We commend KCHRA for presenting a bold vision and an equity-focused, person-centered approach for addressing homelessness across King County. We also appreciate the ongoing collaboration between your subregional planning team, staff in our city, and others on the Eastside.

Bellevue and neighboring cities have a strong history of working together to address the evolving homelessness crisis across our communities. This has included prioritizing the development of affordable housing, supporting enhanced 24/7 shelter capacity, implementing an effective joint application process for service providers, allocating millions of dollars annually to social services and homelessness response, directly employing outreach staff, and implementing a safe parking pilot program, among other initiatives.

Bellevue city staff have reviewed the Draft Five Year Plan and provide the following high-level comments to be addressed in the final Plan:

- **Equity and Families (Goals 4, 5, 6):** We support the Plan's emphasis on explicitly reducing the impact of racism, and prioritizing ending unsheltered homelessness for families with children, youth, and young adults.
- **Severe Weather Response (Strategy 2.4):** KCRHA's severe weather response work has already been of great value to our community and local providers, particularly the improved coordination, information-sharing, and emergency funding for providers during severe weather events. We appreciate your work in this area and support continued growth.
- **Implementation Costs:** The estimated implementation costs are a significant feature of the Plan. For clarity, the Plan needs a single summary table of total implementation cost estimates in each category – directly contracted services by KCRHA, prevention funding (by others or KCRHA, please clarify), and temporary or housing development (by others or KCRHA, please clarify). The costs associated with this Plan, particularly those identified for increasing housing supply, clearly far exceed any currently available funding in the region. Further, housing development is beyond the scope of KCRHA's mission and relies on other housing providers. In order to support successful implementation, we recommend that the final Plan more clearly identify KCRHA's role in that work.
- **Data analytics, utilization and exit rates (Strategy 1.1):** The Plan notes low utilization rates for congregate shelters and rates for people existing homelessness to permanent housing: "vacancy

rates for KCRHA-funded shelters have ranged from 11% in 2019, their lowest rate in recent years, but have grown steadily to 23% in 2021.” While this may be true in other parts of the region, the Eastside has not experienced this. The four congregate shelters on the Eastside are regularly at capacity, with average subregional bed utilization rates across these shelters of over 90% (2021). The Plan should acknowledge that in certain subareas, shelters are a critical component of the current service environment, and utilization will remain high in the absence of other alternatives. KCRHA’s funding allocations must also reflect this.

- **Congregate shelters (Strategy 1.1):** We appreciate that the Plan acknowledges the significance of emergency congregate shelters in the current service environment, by “recognizing that congregate shelters continue to play an important role in addressing unsheltered homelessness, any new transitions from congregate to non-congregate models would need to be phased in over time and implemented in collaboration with cities and service provider partners.” Within the Eastside subregion, public and private funders have supported two relatively new congregate shelters plus a new permanent building for the CFH Men’s Shelter opening this spring. The City of Bellevue and our partners have made significant investments in this critical service. Congregate sheltering is currently an essential component of the limited shelter and emergency housing options in this subregion. Any transition to an emergency housing model in the future will require (1) continued or increased funding to maintain current service levels until such time as an appropriate local alternative is available and (2) funding to support transition costs for existing facilities and programs. The Plan must explicitly reflect these commitments.
- **Vehicle Residency (Strategy 1.1):** The Five-Year Plan considers Safe Parking and RV parking under expansion of shelter and housing even though vehicle residency is technically unsheltered homelessness. The proposed investment over 5 years is nearly \$200 million, with estimated on-going costs of about \$24 million. The plan should emphasize ways to lift individuals and families out of their vehicle residency and into temporary and permanent housing.
- **Micro-modular shelters (Strategy 1.1):** The Five-Year Plan indicates this is not a desirable option (temporary or permanent) and does not contemplate any additional expansion beyond what is available today. This option, while not permanent housing, has seen success in some locations providing individual shelter spaces as an alternative to sleeping outside, and can support exits to housing. It should be considered as a viable temporary option while additional affordable housing is constructed.
- **Service Contracts (Strategies 2.6 and 2.7):** While beyond the scope of this high-level plan, additional clarity is urgently needed regarding rollout and potential criteria for the proposed 2023 KCRHA rebid process with service providers. As noted above, at least maintaining existing shelter funding and capacity on the Eastside must be a near-term priority. Current service levels for eastside shelters are already strained by limited funding and a history of under-funding from King County. Further, while we support livable wage requirements, available funding must also ensure that providers are fully funded for their services plus receive increases to address wage increases. Finally, we recognize that growing and diversifying the portfolio of service providers will be challenging in this employment climate.
- **Subregional Implementation Plans (Strategies 7.1 and 7.3):** These goals identify performance measures for funding consolidation from all 39 cities in King County and completion of seven subregional implementation plans. This may be better worded as *working toward* this goal. Further, the performance measure for subregional plans identifies that these plans are to be “affirmed” by

the Sound Cities Association Public Issues Committee – please clarify the intent of this additional process step. Developing and affirming or approving subregional plans should be the role of individual jurisdictions within a subregion, and the performance measure should reflect this. We look forward to being active participants in the subregional planning process, along with other Eastside stakeholders. It will be important for our Council and community to have input on and be able to support the Subregional implementation plan and to have a direct seat at the table

- **Coordinated Entry (Strategy 7.2):** We have previously discussed with KCRHA staff our concerns regarding the Coordinated Entry system. The Plan identifies that significant improvements are needed, and we strongly support that sentiment. In particular, it is essential that CE allow residents to be prioritized for housing within their communities (this is particularly impactful for families with children in local schools) and ensure appropriate matches between individual needs and on-site service levels.

We recognize that while each community has unique needs, homelessness is not limited by jurisdictional boundaries, and that supporting our most vulnerable residents requires a broad collaborative approach. We are eager to build on the strength of our existing partnerships to continue this critical work.

Sincerely,



Brad Miyake
City Manager

CC: KCRHA Implementation Board
KCRHA Governing Committee
David Hoffman, Executive Director, Sound Cities Association