



SOUTH KING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PARTNERSHIP

2016 Year End Report

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Introduction

Over the past eight years, South King County (SKC) stakeholders have met to deepen cross-jurisdictional coordination, create a common understanding for housing and homelessness needs and strategies for SKC, and implement strategies in the *SKC Response to Homelessness*. However, in the midst of a rapidly growing Seattle economy, poverty and unemployment has moved to the King County suburbs¹. This trend is particularly striking in South King County where an increase in poverty has created stark needs for human services that local governments feel ill-equipped to address alone. More than 35,000 SKC households are paying over half their income for housing costs², putting them at risk of losing their housing if faced with a household financial emergency. Furthermore, 2,869 SKC homeless students were identified in the 2014-2015 school year alone³, and the most recent One Night Count of unsheltered homeless individuals identified 1,013 individuals sleeping outside in selected areas of South King County. While the One Night Count saw a 19% overall increase in unsheltered individuals counted across the county, South King County regions saw an average increase of 53%, with some count areas seeing as much as 150% of their 2015 count numbers⁴.

SKHHP supports the groups that have been meeting in SKC to address these issues, including the Homelessness Action Committee (HAC) and the SKC Joint Planners and Developers workgroup. SKHHP aims to: regularly convene, organize, and expand the network of stakeholders working to end homelessness and address affordable housing needs in SKC; improve the alignment of county and state homeless and affordable housing interventions and funding opportunities with SKC interests; provide technical assistance to support the implementation of comprehensive plan policies; improve SKC stakeholders' understanding of promising practices and their potential for local impact; and determine and implement strategies that achieve program sustainability.

In January 2016, HDC hired a South King County Housing Planner responsible for the coordination of SKHHP and the implementation of these goals. Over the course of the three year grant period, this staff person will work with stakeholders across South King County on collective impact approaches to housing and homelessness issues. Through convening, informing, and supporting these

¹ <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/the-avenue/posts/2014/12/17-lessons-innovators-suburban-poverty-kneebone-berube>

² http://huduser.org/portal/datasets/cp/CHAS/data_querytool_chas.html

³ <http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/pubdocs/StatewideHomelessReportByDistrict2015.pdf>

⁴ http://homelessinfo.org/what_we_do/one_night_count/2016_results.php

stakeholders, SKHHP hopes to catalyze the network to implement the SKC Response strategies, speak with a united voice, implement comprehensive plan policies, and develop a sustainability plan for this work. Specifically, SKHHP intends to see the following results:

- County and state decision makers receive input from SKC stakeholders early in the decision making process to ensure a more effective and efficient public engagement process
- South King County stakeholders are better informed of opportunities to impact regional and state housing programs and policies, including regional plans, state legislative proposals, and funding opportunities
- South King County stakeholders are better able to speak with a united voice to ensure external programs and policies address local community needs
- South King County stakeholders, including those in the education, employment, and health sectors, are more engaged in housing and homelessness activities

Community and elected leaders in South King County recognize the importance of being coordinated in order to achieve results. Over the last six months of this project, SKHHP staff has worked to further these goals by convening key stakeholders, providing technical assistance and support, highlighting SKC voices at decision making tables, and supporting the exploration of a long-term regional framework beyond this project.

Progress Updates

County and State decision makers receive input from SKC stakeholders early in the decision-making process to ensure a more effective and efficient public engagement process.

- Connected and Engaged SKC stakeholders by establishing a physical and virtual presence
- Provided continued outreach to SKC decision makers
- Showcased opportunities for SKC stakeholder engagement with external groups
- Facilitated connections between community-based organizations and SKC decision makers

During the initial six months of the project after the SKC Housing Planner was hired, work immediately began to build relationships across sectors in SKC and continue to engage stakeholders in the two established South King County SKHHP groups: the Homelessness Action Committee (HAC) and the Joint Planners and Developers workgroup. Equally important was engaging in discussions from which SKC stakeholders felt excluded, including those at All Home (formerly the Committee to End Homelessness) and King County. A SKHHP webpage and mailing list were created, and the Housing Planner worked to establish a visible physical presence in SKC, including in existing community meeting groups.

Since then, SKHHP staff has focused on making progress on this goal in three ways. First, it has been important for staff to provide continued outreach to decision makers. The SKC Housing Planner has remained active in workgroups as well as continued setting individual meetings, highlighting South King County specific concerns and perspectives. This has been especially important as our region continues to undergo large systems change in our coordinated response to homelessness. As individual conversations have occurred highlighting current issues, SKHHP staff and the HAC group have also provided consistent feedback highlighting the challenges of how decisions are currently made. While SKHHP staff are able to provide some technical support to groups such as Sound Cities Association, a decision making process that does not actively seek regional perspectives from city staff as well as elected officials will continue to create challenges.

It is crucial to have stronger participation of SKC stakeholders in external meetings, beyond SKHHP staff meetings with decision makers. Consistent engagement of a critical mass of SKC voices will highlight the needs of the region more effectively than individual meetings will ever be able to. However, as SKHHP staff learned in the first part of the project, balancing the need for multiple voices at decision making tables with the limited capacity of SKC stakeholders is a significant challenge. SKHHP staff worked to strategically highlight a few specific external opportunities for amplifying SKC voices during this period, including Senator Cantwell's Affordable Housing Round Table, the Senate Financial Institutions and Insurance worksession on affordable housing, and the Point in Time Count Steering Committee. These meetings, which included strong SKC participation, provided an opportunity for the unique characteristics of the region to be highlighted, including geography, public transit challenges and access to services, and age and quality of housing stock.

Lastly, in addition to working toward more strategic SKC participation in external spaces, SKHHP staff also focused on strengthening connections between community based organizations and SKC decision makers. As service providers in the community notice concerning trends or challenges their target populations are experiencing, their direct connections with city elected officials and participation in council spaces are crucial to developing responsive policy solutions and informing the city's state legislative priorities for the coming year.

South King County stakeholders are better informed of opportunities to impact regional and state housing programs and policies including regional plans, state legislative proposals, and funding opportunities.

- Built awareness and provided technical guidance on regional housing and homelessness issues and policies
- Provided issue briefs on local policy opportunities, including Source of Income Discrimination protections, Just Cause Eviction protections, and Rental Licensing and Inspection programs
- Provided in-depth technical support to cities that chose to move forward with Source of Income Discrimination protections
- Worked with SKC groups to identify and highlight regional challenges for state representatives

During the initial six months of the project, SKHHP staff worked to start bridging the gap between SKC stakeholders and regional and state decision makers. The SKC Housing Planner created an email mailing list of stakeholders and developed a bimonthly newsletter with information on resources, upcoming meetings, opportunities for feedback, action alerts, and highlights of work being done in SKC. Additionally, SKHHP staff worked with South King County cities on exploring the development and implementation of policies such as Rental Licensing and Inspection, Source of Income Discrimination (SOID) protections, and Just Cause Eviction Ordinance. Cities also received research done by students from the Evans School of Public Policy and Governance on their comprehensive plan commitments and progress.

SKHHP staff has continued their work to build awareness for regional housing and homelessness issues and the technical assistance and support available to SKHHP member cities. Since releasing and distributing the SKHHP six-month progress report, SKHHP has sent twelve newsletters and grown the subscriber list by 83 individuals. Each newsletter has contained resources to further housing

and homelessness work, including funding opportunities, potential partnerships, and reports on best practices. Staff has continued work on the creation and distribution of “issue briefs” focused on identified policy solutions of interest to SKC cities. Additionally, SKHHP staff has presented to numerous city councils and council committees on regional work being done to combat homelessness and housing insecurity and highlighted policy opportunities available to them that would help address the issues and further their Comprehensive Plans. Through SKHHP meetings, city council and committee meetings, and local service provider meetings, some identified areas of interest for policy solutions included impact fee reductions, zoning changes, and tenant protections, such as Source of Income Discrimination, Tenant Relocation Assistance, and Just Cause Eviction protections. Additionally, cities have been actively exploring solutions to address substandard housing in the region, most notably Rental Licensing and Inspection programs.

As city staff, elected officials, and service providers took a deeper dive into barriers to housing stability, a worrisome trend became apparent in the South King County region; large numbers of individuals utilizing Section 8 vouchers were facing evictions or lease terminations. This issue, highlighted most notably in Renton, where at least 65 families were facing potential loss of their homes, was identified as particularly disturbing given the low vacancy rate and increasing instances of homelessness. Source of Income Discrimination (SOID), which occurs when a landlord chooses to not rent to or renew the lease of a tenant due solely to their use of a Section 8 voucher, SSI, Veteran’s (VASH) housing voucher, or other legal income source, is currently legal in most parts of South King County. However, local municipalities have the option to provide SOID protections, which help to ensure that people already facing high barriers to housing are not discriminated against and have access to available housing that they can afford. A 2001 study showed that Section 8 voucher holders experience higher success rates in areas with SOID Protection legislation in place. Without SOID protection, many public benefit programs cannot achieve their goals of stabilizing individuals and preventing homelessness.

When the issue of SOID became apparent in Renton, city staff and elected officials, in partnership with the Renton Housing Authority and local stakeholders, acted swiftly to respond. In addition to negotiations with the property management companies and securing emergency funds for those forced to move, the city started exploring policy options available to them. After city staff and elected officials met with impacted individuals, tenant and housing advocates, and local landlords, the city council passed an emergency ordinance banning discrimination based on the use of a Section 8 voucher. This

process highlighted the ability of cities to respond quickly and efficiently to a local crisis while still taking the time to hear from diverse stakeholders.

Due in part to the media attention on SOID in Renton, other cities in South King County have moved forward in their exploration of this issue. The SKC Housing Planner has provided support and data for staff or city council in Kent and Tukwila as they explore local options. Additionally, recognizing the challenge of a local patchwork of protections, some SKC cities have chosen to support SOID protections at a state level in their 2017 State Legislative Agenda.

South King County stakeholders are better able to speak with a united voice to ensure external programs and policies address local community needs.

- Convened stakeholders to develop shared goals and priorities
- Identified barriers to external stakeholder engagement with SKC
- Ensured strong SKC participation and voicing of unique community needs and geographic challenges in ongoing homeless system changes
- Provided support for exploring long-term responses to homelessness and affordability

In interviews conducted during the first six months of this project, South King County stakeholders consistently identified a goal to speak with a united South King County voice. The lack of this voice is seen as a significant barrier to stronger funding and political influence across the county. At the same time, key decision makers outside of SKC also expressed a hope for a stronger SKC voice to ensure that they are hearing clear input on proposed systems and policy change. In order to effectively present a unified position on housing and homelessness issues in South King County, city staff, service providers, and developers had to come together to develop an agreed upon set of priorities and policy positions.

In the initial six months of this project, both the Joint Planners and Developers Workgroup and the Homelessness Action Committee (HAC) developed goals for 2016 and beyond to direct the energy and focus of the group. The specific strategies identified serve as a basic framework for cities to explore local opportunities to positively impact housing and homelessness in their community. The SKHHP goals document has also served as the first step towards a united South King County voice for housing and homelessness issues.

Since then, regional goal-setting work has continued in these groups, and incorporated concrete actions for furthering their work. The HAC created a workplan for their top four prioritized goals that clarified what success would look like and what the specific role of the group should be in working toward it. The group has made progress on increasing access to tenant rights information in South King County and highlighting tenant protections issues they're seeing in their local communities.

In September, members of SKHHP came together to discuss themes of what housing and homelessness challenges they are seeing in South King County and what issues should be made apparent to legislators in the 2017 session. Although the role of this group is not to endorse specific policies, members of SKHHP are uniquely suited to inform decision makers of regional challenges. The SKHHP 2017 Legislative Considerations document, which was released to SKHHP members and local decision makers, highlights these challenges and places them in the context of the South County region. SKHHP staff is hopeful that this document will help emphasize a SKC specific voice as decision makers explore solutions to regional issues.

A stronger SKC voice continues to be a challenge at a county level as well as in Olympia. There have been continued structural changes in our homeless response systems over the past six months, and the lack of suburban city engagement in the decision making process is still a challenge. SKHHP staff has continued to share concerns and hold meetings for SKC stakeholders to provide feedback on how decisions are made and implemented. Further work is needed to ensure that SKC stakeholders are brought in to inform the process, rather than simply being informed of it. Additionally, the challenge remains of whose voice is at the table; decision makers who include both elected officials and city staff in the decision making process will meet with greater success in local implementation than those who engage with only one or the other.

Throughout this first project year, SKC stakeholders have consistently met to discuss the future of regional collaborations on housing and homelessness. Mayors, City Managers, staff, and other interested parties have met to explore potential models and their feasibility in SKC. Most recently, Arthur Sullivan from A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) discussed the creation of their collaborative model on the Eastside, and what specific support their staff provides to local municipalities. These conversations have provided an opportunity to dive into the unique needs and desires of SKC cities as they explore the preservation and development of safe, healthy, and affordable

housing. SKHHP expects these meetings to continue in the coming year, and will provide staff support as needed.

SKC stakeholders, including those in the education, employment and health sector, are more engaged in housing and homelessness activities.

- Participated in regional workgroups across sectors to highlight issues related to affordable housing and homelessness
- Provided presentations to SKC city councils and community groups on SKHHP progress and opportunities for further policy action
- Provided technical support and outreach for events focused on regional health and housing issues

Multiple community and professional groups across SKC work to positively impact regional outcomes related to health, financial wellbeing, housing access, education, and employment. In the initial six months of the project, SKHHP staff connected with many of these groups, provided additional capacity to targeted groups doing housing and homelessness work, and provided technical support for cross-disciplinary projects. In addition to holding extensive individual stakeholder meetings and attending community gatherings, the SKC Housing Planner presented to community groups and city councils on the SKHHP and the state of housing affordability in their community.

The SKC Housing Planner has worked to ensure that there is a voice for SKC housing and homelessness issues across sectors both in and out of the region. The newsletter, email blasts, and coordination at SKC meetings have highlighted opportunities for engagement to stakeholders. However, an ongoing challenge identified in the initial project period is the work to be done to ensure that SKC stakeholders have the capacity to show up to these spaces and provide the consistent engagement that will bring a SKC perspective to the forefront.

In the last six months, SKHHP staff has provided outreach to and participated regularly in regional workgroups across sectors to voice issues and considerations related to housing and homelessness. These workgroups have focused primarily on health equity, diverse community engagement, and workforce development. One of the challenges that has become clearer through this process is that further coordination is needed within these sectors as well. Over the past year, there has been a concerted effort in SKC to better coordinate workforce development programs. As these efforts continue, it will

become easier to create strong cross-sector connections that avoid duplication of services and provide greater capacity for all.

Although efforts such as King County and The Seattle Foundation's Communities of Opportunity work to break down barriers, there is still a need for stronger coordination between the housing and health sectors. Housing and health are inextricably linked, and studies such as Enterprise Community Partners' "Health in Housing: Exploring the Intersection between Housing and Health Care" demonstrate the clear impact that approaching health issues with a housing lens (and vice versa) can have⁵. SKHHP staff has engaged regularly in groups such as the Healthy King County Coalition (HKCC) to highlight policy solutions, connectedness between sectors, and ways for HKCC members to get involved in housing and homelessness issues.

In order to have strong and successful cross sector engagement, it is important to start with an accurate assessment of what each sector looks like. In the affordable housing sector, staff are often faced with widespread misinformation of what affordable housing looks like in a community and what impact it is likely to have at a local level. Despite studies showing that affordable housing has no negative impact on housing values⁶ and violent crime⁷, these misconceptions continue to be stated in meetings and public spaces. As a result, HAC identified a goal of creating messaging about affordable housing that would give service providers, city staff, and community members the tools and data they need to respond to these false narratives. In addition to messaging, the SKC Housing Planner has also worked to highlight openings of affordable housing complexes, support tours of existing developments, and share stories that reflect the impact of affordable housing in our local communities.

Next Steps

In 2017, SKHHP will continue to move forward on these four overarching goals. In January, the SKC Housing planner will work with the Homelessness Action Committee and Joint Planners and Developers workgroup to develop a set of specific actions for 2017, building off of the progress that SKHHP member cities have made in the last year. SKHHP staff will continue to work on promoting stronger engagement from across sectors, including from city elected officials. In

⁵ <http://www.enterprisecommunity.org/resources/health-housing-exploring-intersection-between-housing-and-health-care-13387>

⁶ <https://www.trulia.com/blog/trends/low-income-housing/>

⁷ <http://nlihc.org/article/studies-examine-effects-affordable-housing-crime-patterns>

2017, SKHHP will explore opportunities to host regional events for elected officials and city staff to gain expertise on a range of policy solutions to address homelessness prevention and affordable housing development in their community. As the time frame of this program is limited to 3 years, SKHHP staff will continue to support discussions that explore options for sustainability planning, led by SKC cities, which will work towards the long term goal of a stronger, more united South King County voice.