

THE PHOENIX™

A Solution with Dignity for the Unsheltered

Introduction

Many communities are struggling with effective solutions to provide dignified housing options for their unsheltered homeless citizens, and two-thirds of unsheltered homeless people have never spent time in a homeless shelter, in spite of community efforts.¹

Homelessness in general increases the risk of loss or damage to the health and property of the community,² and unsheltered homelessness increases those chances.³

As long as communities are already spending resources on their unsheltered homeless, there must be more creative, cost-effective solutions to achieve the common goals of helping them as well as safety, security and quality of life for all residents.

Background

It is usually undisputed that homelessness in general and unsheltered homelessness, specifically, is at crisis levels in some communities. While homelessness overall saw a slight decrease of 9% from 2015 to 2019, unsheltered homelessness increased a full 22% in the same time frame.⁴ Since the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, homelessness has grown about 1% with notable increases in rural areas, and more than doubling in Delaware, Vermont, Louisiana and Maine.⁵

Previous studies show that mortality rate, disease, and hospitalization rates are all higher among the unsheltered homeless population than the general population,⁶ and the direct and indirect cost to a community of caring for the unsheltered homeless can be staggering. Direct costs can include social services, law enforcement, health care and emergency services and cleanup costs, but indirect costs are often overlooked.

Sanitation, health and safety issues affect the usability and perception of a community. Cleaning and preventative issues such as removal of park benches, fencing, and architectural modifications are often indirect costs attempting to discourage unsheltered encampments.⁷

For example, between 2012 and 2017, the California Department of Transportation spent nearly \$30 million on cleanup costs associated with encampments - \$10 million just in 2017. On the other hand, in 2015 the Los Angeles Police Department estimated that they spent \$54 to \$87 million on law enforcement responses to homelessness.⁸ That is a wide monetary range but not quite quantifiable. Suffice it to say, each community should evaluate the expense of caring for its unsheltered homeless, but it is usually a significant amount.

Communities find themselves investing in initiatives such as “Housing First”, helping the unsheltered find initial permanent supportive housing, and then working to meet their social, mental and physical needs.⁹ Housing is acquired by building or arrangements with existing landlords and funded through state and federal programs. This approach seems to be quite successful in housing individuals, but according to a recent study it is not decreasing the number or presence of homeless people in the community.¹⁰ More importantly, the unsheltered homeless population must have the desire to be sheltered.

According to the Urban Institute December 2020 report on Unsheltered Homelessness, an analysis of 64,000 surveys from 15 communities showed the average unsheltered homeless person said they had been away from stable housing for 2,632 days - over 7 years. Those in shelters had been out of stable housing on average just over one year.¹¹ There is no magic wand that will eliminate unsheltered homelessness overnight.

Alternatives

Communities who are working towards a Housing First initiative must enlist support, resources, administration and approval within the community at large. However, the more difficult “unspoken” issue is persuading the unsheltered homeless to take advantage of the resources available to them.

As cited in the previous study, two-thirds of unsheltered homeless have never been in a shelter. “Respondents cited rules, religious requirements, threats of violence, and crowding at shelters as well as a lack of shelter bed availability and rental costs as reasons that they were not sheltered.”¹²

The four reasonable alternatives to this issue are:

- 1) Leave them to their own solution on the streets
- 2) Force them off the streets and public access areas
- 3) Push them to existing community and non-profit shelters
- 4) Provide an alternative short-term housing encampment in a manner suitable to the community

The first alternative, unfortunately, is probably the most common because it is the easiest. Although no community leader and residents desire the presence of sidewalk or street tents, tarps and boxes, it tends to be the easier option as they eventually move on and find a better solution on their own. The longer they are ignored, the easier it is for them to blend into the background and for the community to overlook their circumstances.

The second alternative has not proven effective. Cities have attempted many expensive solutions such as removing benches, sweeping the streets, turning on sprinkler systems, trimming overgrown shrubs and the like, in order to make life as uncomfortable as possible for the unsheltered homeless. The result of this alternative is forcing the unsheltered out of public view and into outlying or hidden areas which can significantly affect the safety and usability of an area. It also makes it very difficult to provide any connection to community services.

The third alternative is usually used through law enforcement to move the unsheltered off the street and into a community solution. Unfortunately, shelters are more likely to be used by those who have previously used the services of a shelter or mission. Many shelters have restrictions and rules that apply in order to obtain services. When two-thirds of unsheltered citizens have never even been in a community shelter, it seems evident that most will not take advantage of those resources, and instead move on to another area or community.

The fourth alternative provides some unique options that can help meet several criteria. An organized "village" of individual one- or two-room temporary shelters

- 1) gives the community an alternative location to house the unsheltered;
- 2) maintains a sense of independence and autonomy for the unsheltered who resist conforming to sobriety or religious rules;
- 3) provides a dignified, climate-controlled housing solution for people that would otherwise be housed in tents, tarps sleeping bags and boxes;
- 4) provides initial housing as a possible first step towards the concept of Housing First;
- 5) provides sanitary conditions for restrooms and showers rather than using the streets
- 6) localizes the community of unsheltered homeless citizens for better access to services; and
- 7) centralizes a location where services can be administered.

Proposed Solution

A community solution that would likely meet the needs of a significant number of unsheltered homeless citizens in their community should address two main segments of the population: Those who are mobile (having their own transportation), and the transient unsheltered who are mostly on foot, provide their own cover and carry their own belongings.

1. To meet the needs of those who are mobile, communities should consider providing a large, open parking area with a central bathhouse. Community officials, signage and local law enforcement could direct vehicles who are overnighing in other areas to this new location.
 - a. Locate an unused or vacant property, preferably already owned by the community, in a suitable location with appropriate space buffer to other residential or commercial property.
 - b. Provide a fenced, lighted parking lot where the unsheltered homeless with vehicles can overnight without charge.
 - c. Provide ample green space, including dog-runs, for refreshment and pet care.
 - d. Provide a restroom/shower house with durable, self-cleaning facilities where sanitary needs can be met in a safe and healthy way.

RATIONALE:

- a. Repurposing community-owned property will significantly reduce the initial investment involved in developing the site.
- b. The proposal provides a central location alternative for those who are otherwise overnighing in parking lots, vacant lots, or residential areas. Community ordinances can provide legal and legitimate migration to this facility and away from less desirable or unsafe areas.
- c. Provides an area for pet care.
- d. A community bathhouse facility provides a sanitary alternative for personal hygiene.
- e. Provides a central location for security and safety - for the community and for the unsheltered.

2. To meet the needs of the transient unsheltered homeless people, consider establishing a village of individual one- or two-room “cottages” (Alternative 4) that provide dignity, autonomy, safety and security without infringing on their independence.
 - a. Partner with existing ministry and/or non-profit organizations for managing the facility. Utilize the expertise of those who are already providing services.
 - b. Locate an unused or vacant property, preferably already owned by the community, in a suitable location with appropriate space buffer to other residential or commercial property. Consider an area within a reasonable distance of a present location where unsheltered homeless congregate, and reasonably close access to public transportation.
 - c. Provide a fenced “village” of “cottages” based on available resources, space and need.
 - d. Provide an administrative facility to administer the lease or use of the cottages. The facility might also be a central location for homeless services.
 - e. Provide restroom/shower houses with durable, self-cleaning facilities where sanitary and personal hygiene needs can be met in a safe and healthy way.
 - f. Provide a large pavilion for eating and clean-up.
 - g. Provide ample green space, including dog-runs, for refreshment and pet care.

RATIONALE:

- a. Partnership with existing non-profits permit common goals and utilize expertise of organizations who already know the community and have a mission toward serving the homeless,
- b. Repurposing community property significantly reduces the initial investment of the project, but studies have found that the unsheltered homeless will not relocate to areas that are distant from their normal, familiar territory.
- c. A fenced area provides security for the unsheltered and for the community.
- d. An administrative office, staffed to manage accessibility to the housing units and general management of the facility is required. It would serve as the point-of-contact for community services, and could be housed in a larger, additional unit instead of a separate administrative building.
- e. Restrooms and showers would provide a dignified, healthy and safe way for personal hygiene.
- f. The unsheltered homeless have already found a means to provide their food, but a preparation and eating pavilion would allow for healthy clean-up of utensils and garbage.
- g. Many people who are unsheltered have pets as companions, and will not use services where their pets are not welcome.

Conclusion

A community that uses this two-fold approach as a solution should see two major benefits to their citizens:

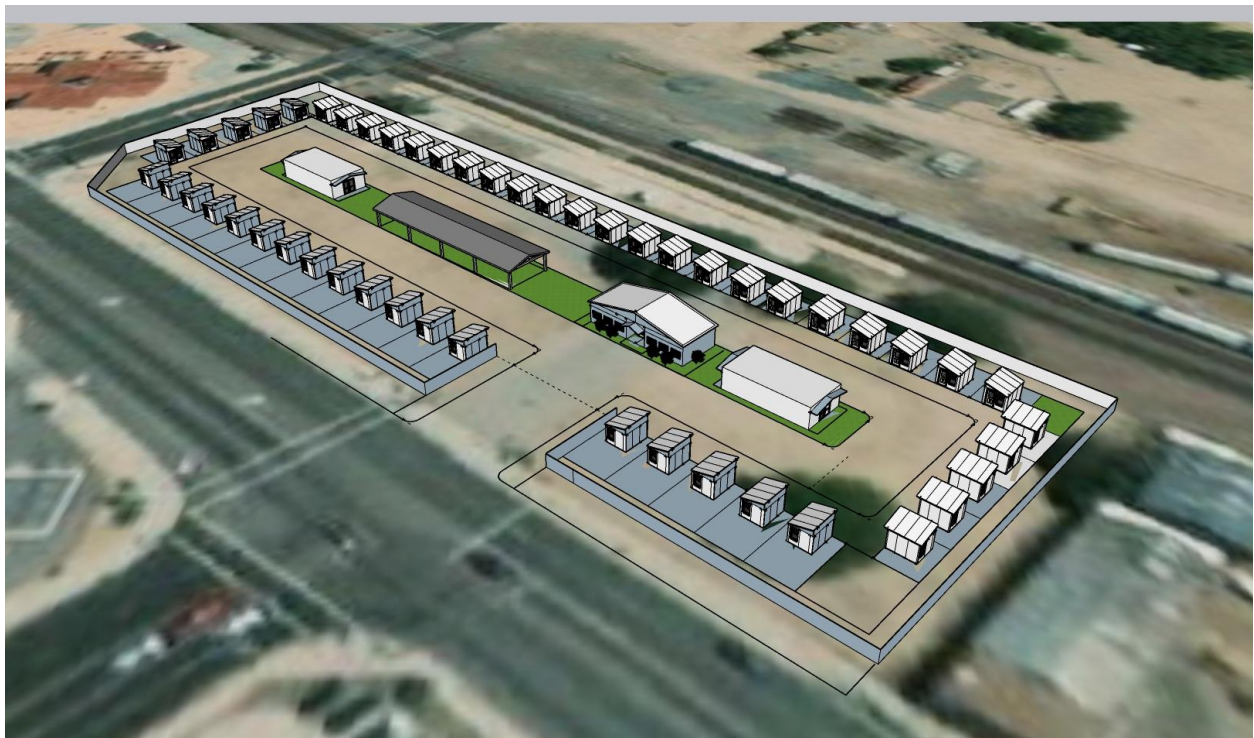
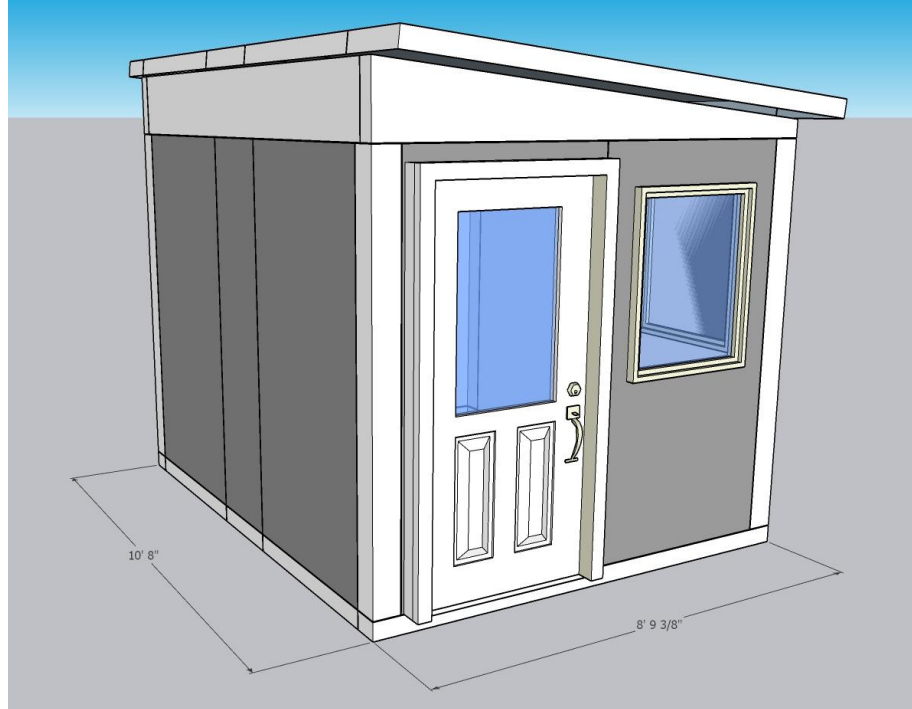
- 1) The unsheltered homeless population who are living in vehicles would be encouraged to migrate to a central location that provides safety, security and sanitary conditions for personal hygiene, rather than overnighting in parking lots, vacant lots, parks and residential neighborhoods. This site could serve as a location for connecting the homeless with community services.
- 2) The transient unsheltered would be encouraged to migrate to the central village location with low-barrier access (no restrictive rules or requirements on partners, pets or sobriety), giving them voluntary access to community services and potentially their first exposure to individual housing. This individualized housing potentially increases the chances of relocating to permanent supportive housing through services presently available.

Both of these solutions should meet criteria for Housing First funding and grants, but more importantly improve the aesthetics, health, safety and dignity of unsheltered homeless citizens, while improving the quality of life for all residents through safe public spaces, parks, shopping, residential and commercial areas.

The PacMod Phoenix is available in 8'- 10' and 12'- wide models and a variety of lengths. Model 810 shown.

Each PacMod Phoenix includes these standard features:

- 4" insulated walls, floor and ceiling (R-34)
- 36" steel door
- Two fire-egress windows
- 5000 BTU air conditioner
- 1500 watt wall heater
- Convenience outlets on each wall
- Smoke/CO alarm
- Wall mounted fire extinguisher if required





Phoenix Cottage Specifications

Model	Nominal Dimensions	Width (OD)	Length (OD)	Interior Height (Min/Max) **	Interior (Sq. Ft.)
808	8 x 8	8' 9 3/8"	8' 9 3/8"	7' 9" / 8' 7"	66
810	8 x 10	8' 9 3/8"	10' 8"	7' 9" / 8' 7"	81
812	8 x 12	8' 9 3/8"	12' 8"	7' 9" / 8' 7"	97
814	8 x 14	8' 9 3/8"	14' 6 5/8"	7' 9" / 8' 7"	113
1010	10 x 10	9' 8"	10' 8"	7' 9" / 8' 8"	90
1012	10 x 12	9' 8"	12' 8"	7' 9" / 8' 8"	106
1014	10 x 14	9' 8"	14' 6 5/8"	7' 9" / 8' 8"	125
1016	10 x 16	9' 8"	16' 6 5/8"	7' 9" / 8' 8"	143
1212	12 x 12	12' 8"	12' 8"	7' 9" / 10' 6 1/2"	144
1214	12 x 14	12' 8"	14' 6 1/2"	7' 9" / 10' 6 1/2"	166
1216	12 x 16	12' 8"	16' 6 5/8"	7' 9" / 10' 6 1/2"	190
821***	8 x 21	8'9 3/8"	21' 0"	8' 0" / 8' 0"	162
1021***	10 x 21	9' 8"	21' 0"	9' 0" / 9' 0"	180
1225***	12 x 25	12'8"	25'0"	9'0" / 9'0"	288

*Because of rapidly changing costs of raw materials, specific pricing must be quoted. Prices range between \$125 and \$200/sq. ft. Shipping charges vary based on site location. Volume discounts available.

** 800 series and 1000 series interior height based on 1:12 pitch. 1200 series based on 3:12 pitch. Two-room models have 8' or 9' flat ceiling and 3:12 pitch roof.

***Two-room configurations. All models are available in two-room configurations; these are provided as an example. Two-room models come with two A/C and heaters, Contact PacMod Solutions for additional details.

Phoenix Utility Cost Considerations

5000 BTU air conditioner (460 watts)

(Assumptions: 8 hrs/day, 90 days/year, 13.19

cents/per kwh) = \$44.31/year

1500 watt heater

(Assumptions: 3 hrs/day, 10 days/month, 13.19

cents/kwh = \$71.23/year

Total = \$115.54/year

References

¹Summary of Responses to Homeless Encampments, ASU Center for Problem Oriented Policing, Arizona State University, page 21.

<https://popcenter.asu.edu/content/homeless-encampments-summary>

² Chandler Blvd. Pallet Shelter Project (North Hollywood Recreation Center- Proposed CO2 Pallet Housing Project), page 5.

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³Research Report, Unsheltered Homelessness Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories. Samantha Batko, Alyse D. Oneto, Aaron Shroyer. Urban Institute, December 2020, page 22.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103301/unsheltered-homelessness.pdf>

⁴Research Report, Unsheltered Homelessness Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories. Samantha Batko, Alyse D. Oneto, Aaron Shroyer. Urban Institute, December 2020, page 9.

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⁵Homelessness in America 2023: Statistics, Analysis and Trends. Security.org Team, published January 25, 2023.

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⁷Tars, Eric S. 2017. Tent City, USA: The Growth of America's Homeless Encampments and How Communities Are Responding. Washington, DC: National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty.

⁸Research Report, Unsheltered Homelessness Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories. Samantha Batko, Alyse D. Oneto, Aaron Shroyer. Urban Institute, December 2020, page 26.

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⁹Research Report, Unsheltered Homelessness Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories. Samantha Batko, Alyse D. Oneto, Aaron Shroyer. Urban Institute, December 2020, page 27.

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¹⁰Research Report, Unsheltered Homelessness Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories. Samantha Batko, Alyse D. Oneto, Aaron Shroyer. Urban Institute, December 2020, page 21.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103301/unsheltered-homelessness.pdf>

¹¹Housing First and Homelessness: The Rhetoric and the Reality, Stephen Eide, April 21, 2020

<https://www.manhattan-institute.org/housing-first-effectiveness>

¹²Research Report, Unsheltered Homelessness Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories. Samantha Batko, Alyse D. Oneto, Aaron Shroyer. Urban Institute, December 2020, page 32.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103301/unsheltered-homelessness.pdf>