

JUSTIFICATION FOR PETITION

A PETITION to recognize *unsheltered* homelessness in King County as a public health disaster; AND to create and maintain disaster shelter infrastructure with supportive and navigation services sufficient to serve ALL unsheltered homeless people in King County before the seasonal return of inclement weather in Fall-Winter, 2018.

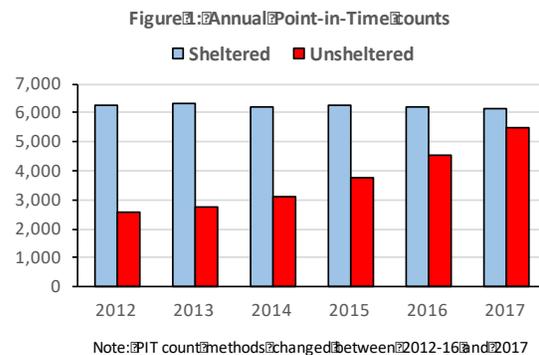
PETITION —See the accompanying PETITION for the SUMMARY and CALLS FOR ACTION.

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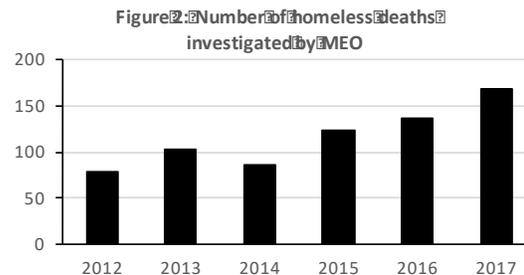
Scope of the problem

1. King County and the City of Seattle each proclaimed and have continued a State of Emergency for homelessness since November 2015. [1] *
2. King County has the 3rd largest homeless population in the U.S., exceeded only by Los Angeles County and New York City. [2,3]
3. The 2017 King County Point-in-Time Count identified 11,643 people experiencing homelessness throughout King County, including 5,485 unsheltered individuals in tents, vehicles, or abandoned buildings, or on the street. This is almost certainly an undercount. [4-6]

4. Between the 2012 and 2017 Point-in-Time Counts, the number of unsheltered homeless people in King County approximately doubled. However, there was no concurrent increase in emergency shelter and transitional housing placements (Figure 1). [4,7-10]



5. The King County Medical Examiner Office (MEO) reported a doubling between 2012 and 2017 in the number of MEO-investigated deaths involving presumed homeless people, including 169 homeless decedents in 2017 (Figure 2). The deaths occurred throughout King County, and particularly in downtown or central Seattle (27%), Beacon Hill or South Seattle (10%), and North Seattle or Shoreline (10%). [11,12]



6. Most homeless people in King County are truly our neighbors.

In the 2017 King County Count-Us-In survey of 1,178 people experiencing homelessness: 77% lived in King County before they most recently became homeless, another 10% lived in Pierce or Snohomish Counties, and only 9% came from outside Washington. Furthermore, one-third (34%) had lived five years or longer in King County, and 22% were born or grew up in King County. In the 2016 City of Seattle Needs Assessment, 93% of surveyed unsheltered respondents said they would move into affordable housing if it was offered. [4,13-14]

7. Seattle is disproportionately impacted by homelessness, compared to the rest of King County.

More than two-thirds (70%) of unsheltered homeless people identified in the 2017 Point-in-Time Count were

* Numbers in square brackets indicate reference sources, listed at the end of this Justification document

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in Seattle. In contrast, the total population of Seattle is one-third (33%) of the King County population. [4,15]

8. Homelessness in King County is not just a Seattle problem.

As noted in item #6, a large fraction of homeless people in King County lived here when they most recently became homeless. In addition, the complex mix of socioeconomic phenomena that cause homelessness — and that create barriers to exits from unsheltered or sheltered homelessness — exist throughout King County. Although homelessness has been present in this region for decades, key drivers in recent time include but are not limited to: the 2008 economic recession, home losses and evictions, gentrification and displacement, a regional economic boom that feeds widening economic inequality, growing housing unaffordability and costs of living, constraints on ability to relocate, changes in national housing policy, the worsening opioid epidemic, and waning behavioral health resources. [16-39]

Regional homelessness system

9. Regional expenditures for homelessness and affordable housing initiatives are already substantial, and recent estimates suggest even larger sums will be needed.

The *Seattle Times* estimated that city, county, state, federal and private philanthropic spending in 2017 exceeded \$195 million. McKinsey & Company recently estimated “it would cost between \$360 million and \$410 million a year to tackle current levels of homelessness [in King County]—that’s twice today’s spending. Action would be needed on three fronts: preventing more people from becoming homeless in the first place, assisting the homeless to find accommodation, and most important, providing more affordable housing. Investments in affordable housing account for about 85 percent of the extra funding required.” [40-41]

The *Puget Sound Business Journal* estimated, “The Puget Sound area spends more than \$1.06 billion per year addressing and responding to the homelessness crisis,” including \$746M (million) on “a disjointed patchwork of programs,” \$119M on health care, \$155M in real estate value committed to shelters and housing, \$27M on law enforcement, and \$6M on lost business. [42]

In search of funds, the City of Seattle in May 2018 approved a controversial large-employer jobs tax, projected to generate \$47 million in annual revenue. However, opinions are strongly divided on how to use the tax revenues. As summarized in the *Seattle Times*, “The approach backed by Durkan, Councilmember Sally Bagshaw and council President Bruce Harrell focuses on an immediate, visible response, including more spending on cleanups of the city’s hundreds of unauthorized homeless encampments and a surge in emergency shelter beds. On the other hand, a spending plan backed by [Councilmembers] M. Lorena González, Lisa Herbold, Teresa Mosqueda and Mike O’Brien focuses on a long-term strategy of building affordable housing while shifting away from the city’s focus on more emergency solutions. Each strategy has allies and detractors, and pros and cons.” [43-45]

10. Strategic policy development for regional homelessness efforts have matured over time. However, inconsistencies in strategy, implementation shortcomings, dysfunctional coordination, and below-target outcomes have been and remain common.

The King County *Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness* (2005-2015) was followed by the current *All Home Strategic Plan*. The former Committee to End Homelessness in King County transitioned to All Home in 2015, as the official Continuum of Care program for King County, designated by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, and with fiduciary oversight by City of Seattle and King County. Expert consultants to City of Seattle and King County made recommendations in 2016 to improve coordination and prioritize initiatives that lead to placement in permanent housing. City of Seattle introduced its “person centered” *Pathways Home* action plan in 2016. As described in items #3 and #4, the number of people experiencing homelessness, and particularly the number who are unsheltered, has continued to rise. In 2017 monitoring by All Home, performance of regional homelessness efforts fell short of targets for three of five major metrics. [46-55]

The ongoing “One Table” Work Group was convened in 2017 by King County, City of Seattle, and City of Auburn; includes representatives of government, business, service providers, philanthropy, advocates, people with lived experience of homelessness, and local residents; and aims to develop innovative solutions to homelessness. The April 2018 One Table draft priority actions were aptly described as underwhelming. [56-58]

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The King County Auditor's Office examined the regional homelessness system and concluded in May 2018 that regional efforts are challenged, not just by the tight housing market, but also by loose coordination and diffuse authority, burdensome funding and contract processes, delays and racial disparities in the coordinated entry system, inattention to federally required annual gaps analyses of homeless needs and services, and All Home's "[lack of] authority to unify local funders into an efficient and nimble crisis response system." King County and City of Seattle subsequently created a new regional partnership to strengthen coordination, but governance recommendations are not expected until December 2018. [59-61]

As noted in item #9, City of Seattle leaders are divided on strategy for using upcoming revenues from the newly passed large-employer jobs tax.

11. Regional efforts to address homelessness and affordable housing have been a recurring subject of criticism, debate, and alternative proposals. Tensions and divisions are rising.

Community concern with unauthorized encampments and seemingly failed initiatives is growing. The number of complaints to City of Seattle about unsanctioned encampments has risen markedly over time, including 3,290 complaints between January 1 and April 20, 2018. KUOW described a May 2 Town Hall in Ballard as "a cacophony of grievances that Seattleites have quietly nursed for years" and "The day Seattle Nice died." These grievances are echoed continuously on Facebook sites for groups like Safe Seattle and Neighborhood Safety Alliance; and on the NextDoor neighborhood social media app. A petition at MakeltBetterCityCouncil.com invites people to hold City Council accountable: "City Council is spending millions without results. Homelessness has risen by 37%, despite more than a 50% increase in spending on services by the city." [62-64]

Amazon and Starbucks expressed vehement opposition to May 2018 passage of the large-employer tax, even after a compromise that cut the originally proposed tax by about half. Amazon specifically decried "city council's anti-business positions [and] its spending inefficiency" and stated this "forces us to question our growth here." [65,66]

Prominent calls have been made for a more cohesive and broadly regional approach to homelessness and for greater shared responsibility. [67-69]

Health risks: Non-communicable disease

12. In the 2017 King County Count-Us-In survey, half of respondents (50%) reported at least one disabling condition, including: psychiatric or emotional conditions (45%), drug or alcohol abuse (36%), post-traumatic stress disorder (34%), chronic health problems (30%), and physical disability (26%). [4]
13. The 2017 King County Point-in-Time Count found serious mental illness, substance use disorder, and HIV/AIDS are 2 to 3 times more common among unsheltered adults than sheltered adults. [4]
14. The King County Medical Examiner Office identified "natural causes" as the leading cause of death (37% of deaths) among 697 homeless decedents during 2012-2017, followed by drug overdose or alcohol poisoning (30%). About half of the deaths occurred outdoors. [11]

Health risks: Communicable disease

15. People experiencing homelessness face increased risk for communicable diseases, particularly diseases that can be made worse in individual cases and/or spread to other people because of inadequate housing, sanitation, and hygiene resources. Noteworthy examples include: hepatitis A; diarrheal illnesses, such as *Shigella*; bodily clothing, and bedding infestations by ectoparasites, such as fleas, bedbugs, lice, scabies mites, and ticks; ectoparasite vector-borne infectious agents; and bacterial skin infections, such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* ("MRSA") or Group A *Streptococcus* infections (which can cause "flesh eating" wounds). [70-72]
16. A large hepatitis A outbreak in California began in San Diego in November 2015, then spread to Santa Cruz, Los Angeles, Monterey, and other counties, until the outbreak finally slowed in March 2018. The majority of patients were "people experiencing homelessness and/or using illicit drugs in settings of limited sanitation." The California outbreak resulted in 704 cases, 461 hospitalizations, and 21 deaths as of April 11, 2018 (when reporting ended). Hepatitis A is spread in unsanitary, unhygienic conditions by contaminated food and water and by personal contact. [73]

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17. Subsequent hepatitis A outbreaks are ongoing in multiple cities in each of four other states. The outbreaks (including California) have produced in total more than 2300 cases and 50 deaths. On average, about two-thirds (70%) of cases have required hospitalization; this is inordinately high for hepatitis A, for which hospitalization is ordinarily uncommon. [74-78]
18. Public Health-Seattle/King County has issued recent Public Health Advisories because of outbreaks among homeless persons involving group A *Streptococcus*, *Shigella*, and body lice-transmitted *Bartonella quintana* infections.
19. Similarly, Harborview Medical Center reported “the winter flu outbreak arrived a month early and hit homeless people unusually hard, and a particular strain of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), a highly contagious virus, had spread through homeless people.” [79-82]

Sanitation and hygiene

20. Adequate shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure can control or eliminate the spread of food-borne, water-borne, contact-transmitted, and ectoparasite-borne communicable diseases. [83-85]
21. Public Health-Seattle/King County established and recently updated guidelines to ensure adequate sanitation, hygiene, and general safety at *sanctioned* homeless encampments (tiny villages). [86]
22. In Seattle, there are seven City-sanctioned encampments, with capacity for only about 400 residents. [87]
23. In Seattle, there are at least 400 *unauthorized* tent encampments. The 2017 King County Point-in-Time Count identified 3,857 unsheltered homeless people in Seattle. County-wide, only about one quarter (28%) of unsheltered homeless people were counted in tents; and the majority were in *other locations* such as in vehicles (42%), on the street (27%), or in abandoned buildings (3%). [4,88]
24. The City of Seattle expends substantial resources to remove and cleanup (“sweep”) unauthorized encampments and to tow vehicles used for unauthorized shelter, because of safety and sanitary hazards for camp residents and the surrounding community. The total cost for Navigation Team and Encampment Removals in 2017 was \$10.2 million. The “sweeps” and tows are controversial and incompletely effective, because of limited shelter capacity and the resultant displacement of residents to other unauthorized locations. [89-96]
25. The King County Board of Health approved Resolution 18-06.1 on March 15, 2018, that “supports the implementation of a system for sanitation and hygiene infrastructure for homeless and unsheltered populations and calls upon governments and service providers to add publicly accessible hygiene facilities in cities and unincorporated areas across King County.” The Resolution briefing did not include any needs characterization, feasibility assessment, strategic options, or cost projections. The Resolution was presented late in the meeting agenda, leaving minimal time for Board member discussion. [97]
26. Global experience and widely accepted international standards for humanitarian response indicate that effectiveness of sanitation and hygiene depends on having, at a minimum: continuous toilet accessibility, ideally no more than 50 meters from dwellings; dwellings in established locations; an ideal maximum of 20 people using each toilet; established systems for security, cleaning, and maintenance; and means to wash hands with soap or an alternative after using toilets, before eating, and before preparing food. [98-100]
27. The City of Seattle identified about 170 existing locations throughout the city with toilet or hygiene services that are *potentially* accessible by unsheltered homeless people but are not purposefully sited to be readily and continuously accessible where unsheltered homeless people reside or congregate. The City has plotted these locations on a interactive online map of City-funded restrooms and hygiene services, which has undefined and probably limited value for homeless people who lack shelter or internet access. [101,102]
28. Expanding sanitation and hygiene infrastructure to fully meet the needs of unsheltered homeless populations in King County – and meet minimal international humanitarian response standards – will probably be most effective and least costly if that infrastructure is purposefully sited near established shelter spaces with large concentrations of homeless people, where there is no risk of removal or displacement.

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Shelter and housing

29. The City of Seattle and King County have made commendable commitments to prevent homelessness and increase the number of affordable permanent housing units. However, All Home, the central entity for coordinating King County homelessness efforts has limited authority, and transitions to stable housing are not meeting milestones (see item #10). It may be many years before there is sufficient permanent housing capacity for all homeless people in Seattle and King County. [103-111]
30. City of Seattle and King County funding and contract policies on homelessness place highest priority on “exits to permanent housing” as performance metric to guide funding and contractor selection. As noted in item #10, All Home found that 2017 performance fell short of targets for three of five major metrics. There is no comparably prioritized metric to reduce and eliminate unsheltered homelessness. []
31. The existing emergency shelter and transitional housing capacity in King County is increasingly inadequate for the thousands of unsheltered homeless people (see Figure 1), whether living in tents, vehicles or outdoors, and particularly for individuals who need low-barrier shelter or who have high needs for supportive services. [103,112,113]
32. The City of Seattle in February 2018 enacted “Building a Bridge to Housing for All” legislation, which sanctions “bridge shelter or bridge housing options including but not limited to mass shelter tents, hard sided tents, wood-frame sheds, portable modular bunkhouses or cabins, backyard cottages, and the master leasing of existing apartments.” [114,115]
33. City of Seattle currently sustains seven sanctioned encampments, and has demonstrated that such sites can meet or exceed contracted performance measures. [87,116]
34. The Seattle sanctioned encampments primarily rely on “tiny houses” or tents for individual shelter. Tiny houses generally offer weatherproof spaces with lockable doors, electricity, and heat. However, they are more appropriately labeled as tiny shelters, to avoid confusion with the popular tiny houses that are marketed to people with second properties or downsizing their lifestyle.

Tiny shelters generally have separate and shared kitchen, toilet, shower and laundry areas. Of note, Ms. Barbara Poppe, homelessness consultant to City of Seattle, has strongly advised against “any form of ‘housing or shelter’ that does not meet basic human needs (i.e. power, sanitation, and heat in accordance with city building codes) and are not stigmatizing (i.e. surrounded by fences, limited to only “homeless” people).” Others argue, tiny shelters are pragmatic options, better than tents or no shelter, but are at best short-term options and may not be suitable for all people otherwise lacking shelter. The confined, isolated space may be particularly unsuitable for people with mental health issues. [87,52,117-121]
35. The City of Seattle Navigation Center demonstrates the feasibility of combining low-barrier shelter with enriched navigation and supportive services for high-needs homeless adults. [122]
36. There is substantial evidence that “housing first” and “supportive housing” policies and programs can improve outcomes and reduce costs by providing housing-linked, person-centered services, such as behavioral and medical health, income and benefits, and employment services. Although this evidence derives from programs affiliated with permanent or long-term housing, the principles are potentially applicable to a program with stable emergency shelter (and are being applied as such in San Diego; see item #40). [123-128]
37. The Washington State Medical Association in 2017 adopted Resolution C-1, “RESOLVED, that the WSMA work with the Washington State Health Care Authority and the state’s Accountable Communities of Health on policies to mitigate chronic homelessness, up to and including the use of state and/or private funding for housing. (Directive to Take Action).” [129,130]
38. Vacant and underused public land might provide locations for temporary, large-scale disaster-response shelter.

The City of Seattle is considering strategic plan alternatives for publicly owned **golf facilities**, because “revenues have been declining and have been insufficient to offset all golf related expenses.” The facilities include three 18-hole courses, three 9-hole short courses, three driving ranges, one mini-golf putting course, and four clubhouses. [131,132]

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King County Assessor, John Wilson, mapped vacant and underused **public property** in King County and, according to *Crosscut* in October 2017, found “more than 300 spaces that are larger than 20,000 square feet and are located within a quarter-mile of transit.” Although Wilson identified barriers to using parcels for shelter or housing, the barriers were described as not insurmountable, and the King County and Seattle States of Emergency might expedite solutions for zoning issues. [133,134]

Seattle Times columnist, Danny Westneat, points out the City of Seattle plan to sell 5 acres of public land near Yesler Terrace, when it could alternatively be used for a large-scale affordable housing project (or conceivably for disaster shelter). [135]

39. Vacant and underused industrial land also might provide location options for temporary, disaster-response shelter (or longer-term affordable housing), although any proposal would encounter justifiable resistance from industry groups.

Real estate developer, Jeff Thompson, proposed at a Seattle Homelessness Forum in February 2017 that some industrial land could be used for lower cost housing: “Take 5 percent of that [565 acres of vacant industrial-zoned land], or 28 acres, and you could do 4,000 units of housing tomorrow.” The *Puget Sound Business Journal* reported, in response to expected objections, “Thompson contends putting housing in industrial land makes sense. It allows people who work in warehouses and at manufacturing plants to live nearby. In Denver, at a project called Taxi, residences have been built in buildings above industrial facilities, Thompson said, using a model much like commercial-residential mixed-use facilities.” [136-140]

Sightline Institute made a similar case in May 2018 that “Outdated notions of ‘industrial areas’ [may be] hiding a giant housing opportunity,” and posed the question, “Is it time for mixed industrial-housing zones?” [141]

40. Large-scale and/or innovative efforts in other cities or countries might provide potential models to rapidly expand emergency shelter capacity in King County.

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of homelessness among higher income countries, with an estimated 40,000 people in a county of 4.7 million. In May 2018, the Prime Minister announced a NZ \$100 million emergency funding package (\$69M USD) to place all homeless people into accommodations before their winter (i.e., June-July in southern hemisphere). [142]

San Diego has deployed Temporary Bridge Shelters that “offer a centralized location and safe place for men, women, and children experiencing homelessness to receive temporary housing and appropriate services needed to expedite placement into permanent housing using the principles of Housing First” (click here to see [video](#)). The first tent opened in December 2017. Three tents now have total capacity to serve 674 individuals. Monthly reporting as of March 2018 showed a cumulative 965 people served, and 130 exits to permanent housing, but “higher than anticipated exits to unknown destinations, as well as clients who enter and exit multiple times.” [143-146]

41. State-level policies in other regions might provide potential models.

California enacted legislation in 2017 to expedite shelter construction on public land during a designated shelter crisis. In May 2018, California Governor Brown proposed using \$359 million from surplus state revenue for statewide homelessness efforts, although this is far short of the \$1.5 billion that mayors from 11 cities requested. [147-149]

Equity, race, and social justice

42. King County and local municipalities including City of Seattle maintain Comprehensive Emergency Management Plans (CEMPs) that anticipate population needs in a disaster, including potential locations and resources for emergency shelter. [150-153]
43. Homeless people in King County can be regarded as refugees who are internally displaced by a slow-onset disaster, attributable to multiple past and ongoing socioeconomic phenomena (see item #8), and warranting a disaster response. [16,26,154]
44. King County and City of Seattle proclaimed homelessness States of Emergency in 2015, but they have not

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invoked CEMP Emergency Support Functions or comparable programs sufficient to provide shelter for all unsheltered homeless populations. [152]

45. The King County Equity & Social Justice ordinance and the City of Seattle Race & Social Justice initiative prioritize consideration of equity, race, and social justice in strategic planning, policy development, and program implementation. [155,156]
46. The 2017 King County Count-Us-In survey demonstrated that homelessness disproportionately affects the most vulnerable people in our society, including: people of color, particularly people identifying as Black or African American or as American Indian or Alaska Native; as well as veterans, youth who identify as LGBTQ, people with chronic disabilities, and people who report histories of domestic violence, partner abuse, and foster care. [4,157,158]
47. Our region has one of the healthiest economies in the U.S. One recent report ranked Washington state highest of all states, based on 27 measures of economic activity, economic health, and innovation potential in 2016. U.S. Department of Commerce data show that the Seattle-Bellevue-Tacoma metropolitan area had the 11th highest *total* GDP (gross domestic product) and 5th highest *per capita* GDP in 2016, and the 38th highest *annual growth* in GDP during 2012-2016 (out of 382 U.S. metropolitan areas). [159-162]
48. However, Seattle had the 4th most rapidly widening rich-poor income gap in the U.S., as of 2011-2016. [26]
49. The United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights – co-authored and adopted by the United States in 1948 – declares that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including...housing.” [163]
50. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing concluded in 2015 that homelessness is a growing global problem, affecting lower- and higher-resource countries, and called for homeless people to be recognized as a protected group in laws and policies: [164]

“Widespread homelessness is evidence of the failure of States to protect and ensure the human rights of the most vulnerable populations. It is occurring in all countries, regardless of the phase of development of their economic or governance systems, and it has been occurring with impunity. The nature and scope of homelessness globally suggests society’s lack of compassion for the full scale of deprivation and loss of dignity associated with being homeless. It is a phenomenon requiring urgent and immediate action by the international community and by all States.” [paragraph 85]

“Homelessness is one of the least examined consequences of unabated inequality, unfair distribution of land and property and poverty occurring on a global scale. It is a result of State acquiescence to real estate speculation and unregulated markets — a result of treating housing as a commodity rather than as a human right. It is rooted in a global privileging of wealth and power, and scapegoating and scorning of those who do not have a home.” [para 86]

“Homeless people must be recognized as a protected group in all relevant domestic anti-discrimination and hate-crime laws, including where relevant in national Constitutions, national and subnational human rights legislation and in city charters.” [para 91f]

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