

Denver's Road Home

Performance Audit

April 2015

Office of the Auditor
Audit Services Division
City and County of Denver



Dennis J. Gallagher
Auditor

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City and County of Denver

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Dennis J. Gallagher

Auditor

April 16, 2015

Ms. Penny May, Executive Director
Denver Human Services
City and County of Denver

Attached is the Auditor's Office Audit Services Division's report of their audit of Denver's Road Home. The purpose of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of Denver's Road Home (DRH) program activities towards attaining the stated goal of ending homelessness in Denver within ten years. To accomplish this, auditors reviewed DRH's governance structure and its role in the City's efforts to reduce homelessness. In addition, we assessed the role of the Commission to End Homelessness (Commission).

The audit found that DRH has not taken advantage of important resources to reduce homelessness in Denver. First, DRH has not consistently gathered data from service providers it funds, nor has it analyzed this information to demonstrate whether progress towards ending homelessness has been made. In fact, only in year ten of Denver's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness has DRH begun to focus on analyzing the data it receives. In addition, DRH has not structured or managed the Commission so that this advisory group can help the City's policymakers develop solutions to homelessness in Denver.

Finally, the audit report contains an Other Pertinent Information section, which outlines the potential risks associated with Denver's Unauthorized Camping Ordinance (Ordinance). As reported in this section, it is disconcerting to see that Denver's homeless shelter situation has not significantly improved three years after the Ordinance was adopted. It is my view that the City should fulfill its commitments and ensure that every citizen has a place to sleep at night—particularly during Denver's cold winter months.

If you have any questions, please call Kip Memmott, Director of Audit Services, at 720-913-5000.

Sincerely,

Dennis J. Gallagher
Auditor

DJG/cth

cc: Honorable Michael Hancock, Mayor
Honorable Members of City Council

To promote open, accountable, efficient and effective government by performing impartial reviews and other audit services that provide objective and useful information to improve decision making by management and the people. We will monitor and report on recommendations and progress towards their implementation.

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Auditor

AUDITOR'S REPORT

We have completed an audit of Denver's Road Home. The purpose of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of Denver's Road Home (DRH) program activities towards attaining the stated goal of ending homelessness in Denver within ten years. To accomplish this, auditors reviewed DRH's governance structure and its role in the City's efforts to reduce homelessness. In addition, auditors assessed the role of the Commission to End Homelessness (Commission).

This performance audit is authorized pursuant to the City and County of Denver Charter, Article V, Part 2, Section 1, *General Powers and Duties of Auditor*, and was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

The audit found that DRH has not effectively utilized key resources. First, DRH has not used data analyses or performance measurement methodologies to inform its strategy and activities. Although DRH has started to gather data from the service providers and programs that it funds, DRH has not analyzed this information to measure the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of these providers and programs. Second, the audit found that the Commission is neither structured nor managed in a way that effectively supports DRH in its mission to end homelessness. As a result of these substantive issues, it is unclear what affect DRH and the monies it has allocated over the years has had on remediating the serious problem of homelessness in the City and County of Denver.

We extend our appreciation to DRH and the personnel who assisted and cooperated with us during the audit. In addition, we would like to thank the management and staff of Denver-area service providers, as well as the current and formerly homeless individuals with whom we met, for sharing their time, knowledge, and experiences with us.

Audit Services Division

Kip Memmott, MA, CGAP, CRMA
Director of Audit Services

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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS



Denver's Road Home April 2015

The audit reviewed the Denver's Road Home program, the City's initiative to reduce homelessness in Denver.

Background

In 2003, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness challenged mayors throughout the country to develop a plan to end homelessness in their cities within ten years. As a first step towards creating a plan for Denver, the City released a Blueprint report for addressing homelessness with strategies for ending and preventing homelessness, as well as accessing and coordinating housing and related services and enhancing certain services. The Blueprint also resulted in the formation of a commission that would subsequently create Denver's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in 2005, to be carried out largely by a newly created City entity, Denver's Road Home. The Plan expires in 2015 but will be succeeded by the new plan known as The Way Home to continue the work of Denver's Road Home.

Purpose

The objective of the audit was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Denver's Road Home program toward meeting goals and outcomes in the effort to reduce homelessness in Denver.

Highlights

In the final year of Denver's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness (Plan), it is clear that homelessness continues to be a problem in Denver. We found that Denver's Road Home (DRH) has failed to utilize key resources to reduce homelessness in Denver, including performance data and the Commission to End Homelessness (Commission). With regard to performance data, DRH does not have robust data about the effectiveness of service provider programs funded by DRH. As a result, DRH cannot evaluate whether the program is making progress towards its goals. Only in the final year of the City's ten-year Plan has DRH begun to establish the methods to analyze the data it receives from service providers. This is despite the fact that the Plan emphasizes the importance of annual data collection and analysis through evaluation systems. Until performance evaluation becomes a priority of DRH leadership, the program will continue to be unable to demonstrate the impact of its efforts or effectively strategize for the future.

With regard to the Commission, we found that it is not structured or managed in a way that effectively supports DRH's efforts. Commission members are unclear about their role and responsibilities as well as the overall purpose of the Commission, which does not appear to have an updated targeted vision and operates without the guidance of by-laws. Further, the format and frequency of Commission meetings fail to capitalize on member expertise. Meetings are infrequent and conducted in a way that minimizes opportunities for group discussion and member input. The membership of the Commission also reduces its efficacy; key stakeholders, such as mental health organizations, public safety officials, and City housing officials, are not represented on the Commission. These factors have prevented the Commission from serving as an effective advisory body, which would otherwise be well positioned to inform policymakers and help drive solutions for the homelessness issue in Denver.

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Homelessness remains one of America's most complex and significant social issues. In "The 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress," the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reported that on one single night in January 2014, 578,424 people were homeless in the country. HUD defines *homeless* as those individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. HUD also recognizes that there is a subpopulation of homeless individuals who are considered chronically homeless. People in this group typically:

- Live alone
- Have a debilitating condition
- Sleep in a place not meant for human habitation or in an emergency shelter
- Experience homelessness continually for one year or more or have four or more episodes of homelessness in three or more years¹

Although society imposes a variety of stereotypes onto the homeless population, including labels such as alcoholic, transient, drug addict, and mentally ill, homelessness encompasses many more types of people and circumstances. Within the Denver area, studies show that the homeless population is made up of all age groups, from children and teenagers to seniors. Many are considered "working homeless," as they have a full- or part-time job but do not make enough money to pay for housing.

Throughout this audit, we conducted numerous interviews with homeless individuals to gain an understanding of how homelessness has affected their lives. These perspectives provided us a unique opportunity to share their experiences with the public to present the reality of homelessness in Denver. We have included vignettes throughout this report providing a summary of the interviews; extended versions can be found in Appendix A. The names of the individuals and any identifying information have been changed to protect their privacy; the photos do not depict the individuals that were interviewed.

Families and individuals find themselves homeless for a variety of reasons. Studies cite the lack of affordable housing as the leading cause of homelessness. Nationally, the policy shift in favor of public housing assistance vouchers, rather than developing new affordable housing units, has contributed to the lack of affordable housing. Locally, Denver and the State of Colorado are considered places where housing costs continue to increase, creating this lack of housing affordability. In an attempt to address this issue, Denver Mayor Michael Hancock launched the 3x5 Initiative in 2013. This plan included

*Lack of affordable housing
is the leading cause of
homelessness in the United
States.*

¹ 24 CFR §91.5 (2011) https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HEARTH_HomelessDefinition_FinalRule.pdf.

developing, rehabilitating, and preserving three thousand housing units over a five-year period.

In November 2014, the Denver Office of the Auditor issued a performance audit report on affordable housing in Denver.² The audit found that while the City's Office of Economic Development (OED) recently increased its emphasis on housing, additional funding is needed.³ As such, the audit recommended that the City dedicate more of its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to housing. Although CDBG is only one of several federal and local funding resources available to OED, it is the largest source of funding from HUD. All benchmark cities we contacted during the course of the 2014 audit use more of their respective CDBG funds for housing than economic development.⁴ The audit also recommended that the City improve its affordable housing situation by utilizing additional leading practices to increase the supply of affordable housing, including tax abatements or exemptions and shared equity mechanisms.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors stated that, in addition to the lack of affordable housing, other factors contributing to homelessness among families with children include unemployment, poverty, and low-paying jobs. For individuals, additional causes of homelessness are mental illness, substance abuse, and the lack of needed services for both.⁵ Finally, the closing of mental health hospitals and institutions that housed and treated people afflicted by mental illnesses in the 1950s was and remains an additional contributing factor.⁶ Although the deinstitutionalization of people with mental illness was intended to move their care and support to their home communities, the funds to provide the necessary services did not materialize, which left many mentally ill people without housing and, consequently, homeless.

Over the last year, many Denver area service providers reported that the number of families, women, and seniors in need of shelter has increased. There is also a steady flow of homeless people with substance abuse problems and mental health issues in need of assistance. Generational homelessness is also more prevalent as multiple generations within one family find themselves without housing. Finally, more people with service animals and pets have been appearing at shelters needing housing assistance. Although a few shelters allow service animals, none allow pets, which is a serious issue for those needing housing with nowhere to place their pets.⁷

² "Denver Affordable Housing Performance Audit," City and County of Denver. Office of the Auditor, accessed January 26, 2015, [http://www.denvergov.org/Portals/741/documents/Audits%202014/Denver Affordable Housing Audit %20Report 11-20-14.pdf](http://www.denvergov.org/Portals/741/documents/Audits%202014/Denver%20Affordable%20Housing%20Audit%20Report%2011-20-14.pdf).

³ The 2015-2019 Housing Denver-A Five-Year Plan includes some actions intended to benefit the homeless. Examples include prioritizing available housing resources for critical needs and homeless housing and supportive services and investing in a pilot micro-unit development designed for workforce and critical needs housing.

⁴ Municipalities have flexibility in how to allocate CDBG funds across housing, economic development, and other funding categories; however, auditors found that Denver's Office of Economic Development allocates more CDBG funds towards economic development than towards housing-related activities.

⁵ "Hunger and Homelessness Survey: A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities," The United States Conference of Mayors, accessed January 27, 2015, <http://www.usmayors.org/pressreleases/uploads/2014/1211-report-hh.pdf>.

⁶ "A Blueprint for Addressing Homelessness in Denver," Denver Homeless Planning Group and Denver Department of Human Services, accessed November 6, 2014, http://www.udmercy.edu/ldi/Homelessness/10yr_plans/denver%20homelessness%20blueprint.pdf.

⁷ At one time, a program with the Denver Dumb Friends League allowed dogs and cats to stay in the animal shelter while the owners were homeless but a lack of space forced the organization to end the program.

Addressing Homelessness in Denver

In January 2003, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) put forth a challenge to mayors to develop a plan to end homelessness in their cities within ten years.⁸ In June 2003 the citizens of Denver elected John Hickenlooper as mayor. As a first step towards creating a ten-year plan, Mayor Hickenlooper formed the Denver Homeless Planning Group (Planning Group), consisting of stakeholders representing City agencies, service providers, neighborhoods, businesses, homeless advocates, and homeless individuals. With assistance from the Denver Department of Human Services (DHS), in September 2003 the Planning Group released a report entitled “A Blueprint for Addressing Homelessness in Denver” (Blueprint), which recommended that the City adopt new strategies and policy changes. These new strategies involved not only ending homelessness but also preventing homelessness, accessing and coordinating housing and related services, and enhancing services for special needs populations. The Blueprint recommended that the City develop a plan to end chronic homelessness in Denver and to create a “Blue Ribbon” Task Force that would oversee the plan and its implementation. The Blueprint also recommended the creation of a senior-level liaison with a direct line of communication with the Mayor and City Council responsible for integrating homeless policies and services for the City.

In response to the Blueprint’s recommendations, in October 2003 Mayor Hickenlooper appointed forty-one individuals to the Denver Commission to End Homelessness (Commission) with the mission of creating and implementing Denver’s plan. The Commission was originally made up of stakeholders from government, the homeless community, nonprofit organizations, funders, City Council, neighborhood organizations, and the business sector. Structurally, the Commission included a chair, co-chair, and four sub-committees, which focused on implementation, evaluation, fundraising, and oversight.

Denver’s Ten Year Plan—As the City continued to examine homelessness as part of its response to the USICH challenge, in 2005, it created its own ten-year plan to end homelessness. Denver’s Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness (Plan)—created by the Commission—identified eight goals to address

NINETEEN AND ON THE STREET



At the age of 14, Chris was sent to jail. Five years later, he was off parole but found himself homeless, trying to find places to stay or sleeping in parks.

During this time, he was regularly told that he had to be in a shelter for 60 to 90 days before he could receive services. From Chris’ point of view, requiring young people or even families to stay in shelters with adults, some of whom may be on drugs, is unreasonable.

Chris essentially raised himself. He got involved with a service provider’s youth program and initially enjoyed the experience. However, after his program term expired, he was homeless again and without any income. Luckily, he was able to join the program again and get a housing voucher. Chris’ New Year’s resolution is to get his GED in 2015. Recently he’s worked in construction and customer service but he hopes to get a position working for a non-profit.

⁸ The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness is an independent federal agency within the executive branch and comprises the heads of nineteen federal departments and agencies including the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Veterans Affairs, Education, and Agriculture.

homelessness in Denver before the expiration of the Plan in 2015. The goals included housing provisions, enhanced services, prevention and workforce skills, and outreach to the homeless community. Specific action steps were also developed to carry out each goal. For additional details on the Plan’s goals, refer to Table 1.

Table 1: Goals from Denver’s Ten Year Plan To End Homelessness		
Goal	Description	
1	Permanent and Transitional Housing	Develop 3,193 permanent and transitional housing opportunities to meet the needs of people at 0-30% of Area Median Income (AMI) or less than \$15,050 annual income
2	Shelter System	Make safe and legal shelter beds and activities available for all populations both day and night until adequate permanent housing is in place
3	Prevention	Provide Denver residents facing homelessness more tools to keep them from ending up on the streets or in emergency shelters
4	Services	Provide better access to supportive services that promote long-term stability and improved functioning for those in need and movement into permanent housing as soon as possible
5	Public Safety and Outreach	Improve public safety by increasing homeless outreach efforts to reduce panhandling, loitering and crimes against people while better linkages are built between homeless people and service agencies
6	Education, Training and Employment	Assist people who are homeless to obtain skill and knowledge necessary to participate in the workforce
7	Community Awareness and Coordinated Response	Build community awareness and support for coordinated responses to eliminate homelessness in ten years
8	Zoning, Urban Design and Land Use	Reform Denver’s zoning, building and development codes to facilitate an adequate supply of emergency and affordable housing

Source: Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness Report.

Efforts are currently underway to develop a subsequent plan to reduce homelessness in Denver. The new plan, *The Way Home*, will keep certain goals from the previous Plan, such as housing, support services, and prevention, and focus on critical populations including homeless veterans and the chronically homeless.

Denver’s Road Home—In April 2007, Mayor Hickenlooper issued an Executive Order to create a formal function within DHS to coordinate homeless services. Executive Order 91

assigned the following duties and responsibilities to DHS:

- Coordinating and streamlining City resources to quickly respond to homeless needs
- Informing a clear written policy for the City regarding homelessness
- Pursuing public-private partnerships to promote long-term solutions to the homeless situation
- Providing the Mayor with updates and recommendations to address homeless issues

DHS employs six professionals to carry out these responsibilities, and the group is known as Denver’s Road Home (DRH). The budget for DRH in 2014 was approximately \$6.6 million. Table 2 provides more detailed information on the DRH budget during the last twelve years.

Year	Budget
2003	\$568,000
2004	\$568,000
2005	\$825,000
2006	\$2,825,000
2007	\$4,825,000
2008	\$4,825,000
2009*	\$4,436,388
2010*	\$4,374,294
2011	\$4,990,308
2012	\$4,964,510
2013	\$6,719,620
2014	\$6,600,128

Source: Denver Department of Human Services.
Note: City Budgets follow the calendar year.
 *In 2009 and 2010 General Funds in the amount of \$362,000 and \$1,250,000, respectively, were allocated for DRH activities; these funds are included in the totals listed above.

Denver’s Road Home Activities

DRH primarily serves as a coordinating entity and resource clearinghouse that allocates local funds generated by mill levies to service providers who directly support homeless individuals. Although DRH is not a direct provider of services, DRH supports approximately thirty programs that work directly with homeless individuals. Programs supported by DRH include those that assist with finding transitional housing, permanent affordable housing, shelters, and cold weather emergency accommodations; providing health care, behavioral health, counseling, and detoxification treatment; conducting point-in-time studies; and performing outreach to the homeless population. In addition to supporting

service providers, DRH organizes an annual event for the homeless and uses three approaches to raising additional funds.

Project Homeless Connect—Every year, DRH co-hosts a one-day event called Project Homeless Connect, which allows individuals and families experiencing homelessness to access services and resources free of charge. DRH organizes and sponsors the event in partnership with the nonprofit organization Mile High United Way (MHUW).⁹ Last year’s event, held in November 2014, was supported by 1,000 volunteers and 125 vendors.¹⁰ Examples of services offered by vendors included legal, medical, and health care services; direct access to vital records such as birth certificates and drivers’ licenses; employment assistance including résumé development and an on-site job fair; registration for health and other benefits; food and clothing; child care; and haircuts.

Fundraising—DRH benefits from three fundraising activities to supplement the funding it receives through mill levies and charitable donations from individuals, corporations, and foundations. Donations have generated \$17.5 million since 2005 as shown in Table 3 which provides the breakdown of contributions to DRH by fiscal year, and illustrates a significant decrease in contributions beginning in Year 6.¹¹

Table 3: Donations to Denver’s Road Home

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7*	Year 8	Year 9
Year End 6/30/06	Year End 6/30/07	Year End 6/30/08	Year End 6/30/09	Year End 6/30/10	Year End 6/30/11	Year End 6/30/12	Year End 6/30/13	Year End 6/30/14
\$1.7M	\$2.7M	\$4.6M	\$2.1M	\$2.5M	\$1.7M	\$1.1M	\$621,000	\$535,000

Source: Mile High United Way data.

Note: Donations are recorded by Mile High United Way (MHUW) for each fiscal year. *In year 7, MHUW no longer acted in a fundraising capacity for DRH.

The three primary fundraising activities include:

- **Parking Meters**—DRH receives additional funding through donations made through dedicated parking meters. Scattered around the City in locations such as Denver International Airport and the 16th Street Mall, these converted parking meters offer an opportunity for people and organizations to contribute to the homeless cause by donating their spare change or larger amounts through credit card transactions.
- **PJ Day**—PJ Day, typically held every February, is a fundraiser that encourages businesses, public and private organizations, and schools to raise funds for the

⁹ According to the DRH Program Manager, DRH and MHUW split the annual event costs which are approximately \$50,000.

¹⁰ DRH reported that approximately 1,000 people were in attendance at the 2014 Project Homeless Connect event, which was 1,200 individuals less than the previous year. DRH management cited two possible reasons for lower attendance: cold weather shelters were open for twenty-four hours and homeless individuals chose to forego the event to secure their shelter bed, and another event connecting homeless veterans to services occurred a week earlier.

¹¹ To help DRH manage the donations, DHS entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with MHUW to be DRH’s fund manager. At the time of the audit, the City was finalizing a contract agreement with MHUW instead of renewing the MOU, which expired in June 2014. MHUW activities include managing and receiving donations, maintaining detailed donor records, and processing disbursements to vendors and grant recipients as authorized by DHS.

homeless. The name and nature of the event serve to remind participants of every-day conveniences that are easily taken for granted, including having pajamas to wear and a bed to sleep in; for thousands of homeless people throughout Denver, these items are a luxury. PJ Day encourages participants to wear their pajamas to work or school on the day of the event to show support for the City's efforts to help Denver's homeless population.

- **Ticket Revenue**—On occasion, DRH receives revenue from local professional sports events. For example, the state's professional lacrosse team, the Colorado Mammoth, has donated to DRH a percentage of revenues from tickets sold.

Denver Area Service Providers

Service providers partner with DRH to provide a range of services for homeless individuals including shelter, housing, medical and mental health services, counseling, and food and job skills programs. Service providers can be government agencies, nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) status, or faith-based organizations. Although more than eighty service providers work with the Denver area's homeless population, specific information on the variety of services provided by five large providers is presented below.

- **Colorado Coalition for the Homeless**—The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) is the local branch of the national organization, the Coalition for the Homeless. CCH provides services for both urban and rural communities, including housing, health services, and support services such as job training, childcare, and substance abuse treatment services. More specifically, CCH provides transitional housing, recovery-oriented housing—such as the Fort Lyon facility—permanent supportive housing, and mixed income housing serving low- and moderate-income families.¹² Healthcare services provided by CCH include pediatric care, eye and dental clinics, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, respite care, and pharmacy services.¹³ CCH's new Stout Street Health Center and Renaissance Stout

HOMEOWNER TO HOMELESS AND ON THE HOUSING WAITLIST

Beth has lived in Denver since she was 12 years old; in fact, she remembers when the City was a “cow town.” Now 68 years old, Beth is disabled and relies on an oxygen tank to breathe and an electric wheelchair for mobility.

In her prior life, she was a building manager and owned two homes. However, after her husband passed away seven years ago, her children “turned on her” and she found herself homeless with no money, a situation that continues to this day.



As a disabled person, finding suitable housing is a constant struggle; she also has bad credit which further complicates her ability to find a place to live on the mere \$1,100 she gets in monthly disability payments. She is currently on several wait lists for housing, including the Denver Housing Authority wait list which she has been on for seven years. She tries to stay positive but she admits she feels traumatized by her situation.

¹² The Fort Lyon Education, Employment and Treatment Collaborative brings together many community partners, including the State of Colorado's Division of Housing, CCH, and many others, to provide integrated transitional housing, substance abuse, and mental health treatment along with education, vocational, and employment services for homeless individuals in Colorado.

¹³ Respite care refers to the provision of temporary care for a patient who requires specialized or intensive care or supervision that is normally provided by his or her family at home.

Street Lofts enable the organization to provide integrated health care and treatment services for up to 18,000 homeless individuals in addition to housing for 78 individuals or households. CCH also provides supplemental support services that include employment and job training, nutritional counseling, and public benefit acquisition services for veterans.

- **Denver Rescue Mission**—The Denver Rescue Mission (DRM) offers a variety of services and programs including emergency shelter, the STAR Transitional Program, the Family Rescue Ministry, and a mentoring program. The STAR Transitional Program is for working families that simply need assistance with paying rent; in late 2014, there was a waiting list of 110 families (mostly single mothers with children) hoping to participate in the program. The Family Rescue Ministry is for those who need even less housing assistance, perhaps only the first month's rent and the security deposit. DRM's mentoring program assigns mentors from the community, or from faith-based organizations, to families in need of assistance. These families may receive money for the first month's rent and a security deposit as well as help with developing family budgets, all with the aim of keeping the family in housing.
- **Urban Peak**—Founded in 1988, Urban Peak is a nonprofit organization that provides a wide spectrum of services for youth, ages fifteen through twenty-four, who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless. Programs and services include shelter, education, employment and training services, and housing. In addition, Urban Peak operates a drop-in center that provides meals, lockers, laundry services, and basic medical care.
- **Volunteers of America**—Volunteers of America (VOA) is a national, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping vulnerable populations, including the homeless. VOA provides services throughout the country that are designed locally to address specific community needs. The Colorado branch serves the Denver metropolitan area's most vulnerable groups, providing services to at-risk youth, the elderly, low-income families, homeless individuals and families, women and children escaping domestic violence, and those seeking affordable housing solutions. VOA programs offer permanent, temporary, and transitional residents with support services designed to foster self-sufficiency.
- **The Gathering Place**—The Gathering Place is a daytime drop-in center for women, children, and transgender individuals in Denver experiencing homelessness or poverty. The organization offers basic need services such as meals, hygiene supplies, laundry, showers and locker rooms, and access to phones, mail, and computers. The organization's educational and social programs focus on physical and mental health, job readiness and employment assistance, and computer skills, among other areas. The Gathering Place strives to build a culture of acceptance and appreciation towards individual differences through its programs.

Intergovernmental Collaborations

As homelessness is not correlated to specific geographical borders and political boundaries, it is a regional issue. There are two major regional efforts in place organized by the federal government that capitalize on cooperation and collaboration to address homelessness throughout the country: HUD's Continuum of Care Program and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' 25 Cities Initiative. Denver is involved in and benefits from both efforts.

Continuum of Care Program—The Continuum of Care (CoC) Program is a federal program administered by HUD that is designed to encourage communities to work together to end homelessness. The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI) is the CoC administrator for the City and County of Denver, as well as six additional counties in the metropolitan area: Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Douglas, and Jefferson. MDHI is a coalition working with homeless assistance agencies to coordinate the delivery of housing and services to homeless persons, families, youth, veterans, and persons with disabilities. In addition to MDHI, Colorado has two other CoC administrators—Homeward

PIT surveys are only a snapshot in time of the homeless situation and cannot be used as quality indicator of need

Pikes Peak and the Balance of State. Homeward Pikes Peak includes Colorado Springs and El Paso County; the Balance of State represents all other Colorado communities.

Entities that receive CoC funding are required to report certain information about services rendered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Although HUD is ultimately responsible for coordinating the

collection of data, overseeing HMIS rules and regulations, and reporting to Congress about the results collected, CCH manages HMIS, under the direction of MDHI.¹⁴

HUD also requires that each CoC across the country conduct a Point-in-Time (PIT) survey every two years within the last ten days of January. The results from these surveys are combined to generate an estimate of the number of homeless persons across the country at that point in time. PIT survey information is also used by HUD, MDHI, local governments, and service providers to assess and plan strategies and services to prevent and eliminate homelessness. Although the measure is widely used to report on the homeless population, there are multiple factors that affect the quality of the data. First, the survey methodology chosen by each CoC ultimately impacts who may or may not be counted. For example, a decrease in the homeless population was reported in the City's 2014 PIT study when compared to the previous year; however, while many homeless individuals may have become housed, the decrease was also due in part to a refusal to fill out the survey by approximately one thousand homeless individuals. In addition, the methodology does not account for those homeless individuals staying in single-room-occupancy hotels, with friends or family members, or in jails, hospitals, or

¹⁴ "Colorado HMIS Info," Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative, accessed February 9, 2015, <http://mdhi.org/colorado-hmis/colorado-hmis-info/>.

rehabilitation centers as they are not counted under the federal definition of homeless.¹⁵ Finally, PIT surveys are widely recognized to be only a snapshot in time of the homeless situation, so they are estimates and cannot be used as a quality indicator of need or to determine the entire population of homeless people.

The 25 Cities Initiative—Spearheaded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the 25 Cities Initiative is an effort involving a variety of groups including MDHI, VA, HUD, USICH, city governments, housing authorities, and service providers. The Initiative aims to bring these groups together to coordinate efforts and dedicate resources to end veteran and chronic homelessness in each participating locality by the end of 2015 and 2016, respectively. To do this, the Initiative is striving to build a Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement System (CAHPS) and to improve the integration of data systems used to provide services for each city’s homeless population.¹⁶ This Initiative could provide a more efficient and effective delivery of services such as locating permanent supportive housing and matching individuals with behavioral health and employment services, or training opportunities, as needed. Table 4 lists all participating cities.

Atlanta	Las Vegas	Riverside
Baltimore	Los Angeles	San Diego
Boston	Miami	San Francisco
Chicago	New Orleans	Seattle
Denver	New York City	Tampa
Detroit	Orlando	Tucson
Fresno	Philadelphia	Washington, DC.
Honolulu	Phoenix	
Houston	Portland	

Source: Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative.

According to the Executive Director of DRH, the metro Denver area has chosen a regional approach in executing the 25 Cities Initiative. Specifically, DRH has provided the resources for a Homeless System Outreach Coordinator, housed within DRH, to administer the system and act as a central coordination point for the overall effort. Additional personnel resources include Americorps Vista volunteers acquired by MDHI and a paid, part-time intern provided by Denver Foundation for the purposes of assisting with the Initiative’s implementation.¹⁷

¹⁵ Another flaw in PIT data is that different types of information have been collected over the years making it difficult to compare and identify trends in multi-year data for the City and County of Denver. For example, the number of “unsheltered” homeless people (i.e., those living on the streets, in cars, and under bridges) was not counted until 2011. In addition, the HUD definition for individuals considered to be “chronic homeless” changed between 2005 and 2006 in a manner that reduced the count of homeless who fell into this category.

¹⁶ Requirements of the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act call for communities to develop coordinated entry systems based on common assessments to identify the most vulnerable homeless individuals.

¹⁷ Americorps Vista volunteers are part of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The mission of CNCS is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

SCOPE

The audit focused on assessing Denver's Road Home's (DRH's) progress toward meeting the goal of ending homelessness.

OBJECTIVE

The audit objective was to evaluate DRH's effectiveness toward meeting goals and outcomes in the effort to reduce homelessness in Denver.

METHODOLOGY

We applied various methodologies during the audit process to gather and analyze information pertinent to the audit scope and to assist with developing and testing the audit objectives. The methodologies included the following:

- Interviewed key employees and management from DRH to gain an understanding of the homeless situation in the City and County of Denver
- Interviewed a cross-section of homeless individuals to understand their struggles and successes with finding assistance for their circumstances
- Reviewed and analyzed the Commission to End Homelessness (Commission) meeting minutes for 2014 to understand the Commission's role in the reduction of homelessness in Denver
- Interviewed select service providers to understand their roles in providing services to the homeless as well as their perspectives on DRH and the Commission's role within the City
- Reviewed and analyzed Rebound Solutions' Findings Report published in January 2013 to determine the extent to which DRH has addressed recommendations in the report
- Researched and reviewed best practices regarding the recommended structure and procedures necessary to create and maintain a successful commission
- Reviewed and analyzed Denver's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness
- Reviewed and analyzed DRH's financial expenditures and donation funding to understand what funds are expended by DRH each year
- Identified other municipalities that have had success with homeless program initiatives
- Conducted research to identify best practices and strategies regarding the reduction of homelessness
- Conducted research to identify best practices and strategies regarding data analysis to enable performance measurement of homeless programs

- Conducted a focus group with local service providers to determine the extent to which DRH collaborates with service providers and what areas of improvement exist for DRH and the Commission
- Attended a Commission meeting to observe the structure and dynamics of the meeting
- Attended Project Homeless Connect to observe the services coordinated by DRH
- Conducted research regarding the Unauthorized Camping Ordinance in Denver as well as other cities with similar ordinances to understand the possible effect of the Ordinance on the homeless
- Reviewed City Council meeting minutes to understand the history of the Unauthorized Camping Ordinance
- Analyzed citation and arrest data from the Denver Police Department to identify possible trends

FINDING

Denver's Road Home Has Failed to Utilize Key Resources to Reduce Homelessness in Denver

In the final year of Denver's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness (Plan), the issue of homelessness is still present in Denver. Based on our assessment of the City and County of Denver's (City's) progress to reduce homelessness through the Denver's Road Home (DRH) program, we found that DRH has not taken full advantage of key resources that would allow it to better achieve its mission. Specifically, DRH has not analyzed performance data on homeless programs to measure their effectiveness. Not only do industry organizations recommend the use of performance measurement to identify gaps or needed improvements in homeless programs, but DRH has yet to formalize and implement an evaluation process as recommended by a consultant in 2013. In addition, DRH has not structured or managed the Commission to End Homelessness (Commission) in a manner that maximizes the ability of this advisory group to help the City's policymakers develop solutions to reduce homelessness in Denver.

Denver's Road Home Has Not Used Existing Data to Track and Demonstrate Progress towards Ending Homelessness

DRH has not focused its efforts on prioritizing the development and implementation of a program evaluation strategy and therefore lacks key processes for governance over the service providers it funds. Specifically, DRH does not fully analyze the program data it receives from service providers about their progress towards reducing homelessness in Denver. Only in 2015, during the final six months of the ten-year plan, has DRH begun to establish the methods it will use to analyze the data it receives from service providers. Without conducting regular analysis of performance data to assess progress towards measurable program outcomes, DRH cannot determine whether the programs it funds are effective and whether the limited financial resources available are being optimally allocated.

HOMELESS WITH NOWHERE TO TURN

Before becoming homeless, Sally earned a Bachelor's degree and worked as a director of human resources. She lived in an upscale community in the Denver area until she lost her house to foreclosure. Although Sally has family in Colorado and California, this family network has not prevented her from experiencing homelessness.

Last fall, Sally was attacked by a person who wandered into the home of a friend who had taken her in, leaving her severely burned. She had to undergo six hours of surgery. Within a few weeks, Sally was placed with a Denver service provider.



Despite her hardships, she hopes to own her own business some day. Sally explained that many people who become homeless don't know what to do about their situation; often times their circumstances make it even harder to overcome being homeless. She would like to see a system that provides mental and emotional support for people in her situation.

Key Denver Road Home Documents Demonstrate Importance of Service Provider Data

DRH has documented that establishing program evaluation and data gathering and analysis practices are crucial in measuring progress of the program. Other entities, including Rebound Solutions and MDHI, have also encouraged DRH and others in the Denver area Continuum of Care (COC), to prioritize data collection and analysis. DRH contracts with providers who offer a variety of services, such as providing shelter space, increasing access to healthcare services, and building community awareness of the issue. These providers track information about their operations, some of which they are contractually obligated to submit to DRH. For example, a service provider operating a center serving homeless women and families tracks the percentage of individuals or families who obtain stable housing after ninety days of participating in the center's program. The service provider submits this and other outcome information to DRH. This type of data can be used by DRH to assess whether the service provider is operating effectively and contributing to the overall goal of reducing homelessness in Denver.

Denver's Road Home's Documented Commitment to Data Collection and Analysis— While drafting the Plan, the Commission recognized that gathering and analyzing data would be critical to gauging program effectiveness and included it in the City's Plan. In fact, the Plan emphasizes that "every year of the Plan will require that new data be collected and analyzed" to gauge program effectiveness and further understanding of the homeless situation in Denver. Further, Action 3.5 of the Plan specifically calls for establishing evaluation systems to identify effective programs.¹⁸ In addition, the DRH website states that "the success of Denver's Road Home hinges on accountability."¹⁹

Paid Consultant Advised Denver's Road Home to Prioritize Data Collection and Analysis— In 2012, Rebound Solutions was hired to conduct a program evaluation of DRH for \$60,000 to determine the effectiveness of DRH in meeting its mission of eliminating chronic homelessness.²⁰ However, Rebound Solutions reported that they could not perform the planned evaluation because there were significant strategic and operational issues that needed to be addressed. In addition to DRH's own apparent commitment to data collection and analysis, a consultant has emphasized the importance of doing so. Specifically, Rebound Solutions reported that the program had not been measuring annual or long-term progress, which prohibited Rebound Solutions from assessing progress over time. Further, there had been no clearly defined agreement on metrics for success, which would have been necessary to perform the planned evaluation. Overall, Rebound Solutions found that DRH lacked the framework that would enable the program to demonstrate true progress on ending homelessness. The resulting

¹⁸ The City's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness incorporates eight goals with actions tied to each goal. Goal 3 focuses on homeless prevention and providing Denver residents facing homelessness with more tools to keep them from ending up on the streets or in emergency shelters. Action 3.5 discusses the creation of evaluation systems to identify effective prevention programs.

¹⁹ More information about Denver's Road Home can be accessed here: <http://www.denversroadhome.org/plan.php>.

²⁰ Rebound Solutions is a Denver-based consulting firm that provides services to clients in the areas of change management, project and program management, organizational alignment, strategic planning and execution, and leadership development. The firm provided some of the work to DRH on a pro-bono basis.

report delivered a framework upon which DRH could build and included recommendations to implement strategic objectives to move the program forward and meet its mission, one of which relates directly to data collection and analysis.²¹ These six strategic objectives were:

- Effectively listen to the voice of the homeless
- Design and coordinate high-impact convening
- Identify and fund innovative programs
- Align City resources and capabilities
- Improve public support and awareness
- Establish evaluation processes and metrics

MDHI Encouraged Denver’s Road Home to Contribute to Stronger Regional Data—The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI) has also made suggestions for how Denver might use data. In 2013, MDHI identified priorities to help prevent and end homelessness, including addressing the need for stronger regional data. MDHI identified actions that the City might undertake to accomplish these priorities, such as implementing data-driven decision making and standardizing across program types on how data is collected and entered.

Denver’s Road Home Has Not Prioritized Data Collection and Analysis

Despite the guidance and recommendations given from various entities including the City’s Plan, Rebound Solutions, and MDHI, DRH does not have a formal data tracking and analysis process. Although it is clear that the Plan and the website both identify data collection and analysis as important areas DRH would utilize to measure the performance and accountability of the program, a formalized process that incorporates these elements still does not exist. For example, according to the year-eight update issued in 2013, Action 3.5 still had not been completed due to insufficient funding.²² DRH has yet to analyze the performance data it receives from service providers to gauge and assess the state of homelessness in Denver.²³ Although contracted service providers are required to fulfill reporting requirements based on contract terms with DRH, most of which are submitted quarterly, DRH personnel who review these reports advised that no central logging of performance

DESPITE INJURY AND LOSS, HOMELESS MAN INSPIRES OTHERS

Steve has been homeless for five years but that hasn’t stopped him from encouraging others experiencing homelessness to not give up.

He was fired from his job at an auto repair shop after getting injured at work. To try to make ends meet, Steve sold his tools but that didn’t prevent him from losing his home, followed by his wife and kids. For a period of time, he slept in cars or on park benches.

Now 57 years old, his greatest desire is to be in contact with his children once again and to see his grandkids. Steve has received assistance from several different shelters in Denver, but thanks to one service provider, he will be having badly needed surgery to correct his workplace injury. He explained that currently there is not enough room at shelters in Denver and many homeless people do not know that there are places to go to for services and support.



²¹ A copy of the Rebound Solutions report can be accessed here: <http://www.denversroadhome.org/files/Bonfils%20DRH%20Strategic%20Report%20Findings%20.pdf>.

²² The action number is listed as 3.4 in the 2013 Plan Update, the fourth revision of the Plan.

²³ DRH plans to employ the Office of Drug Strategy’s data team to help analyze data already in the possession of DRH.

data is kept. Instead, service provider reports are reviewed on an individual basis when they are submitted each quarter. As a result, DRH is not assessing a provider's progress over time and, further, not assessing holistically the progress that all contracted service providers are making towards reducing homelessness in Denver.

Further, according to the Executive Director of DRH, the Rebound Solutions recommendations have only been used as guidelines. In fact, DRH was only able to provide documentation that fifteen out of the seventy-one action steps had been implemented as of December 2014. Although DRH may choose not to adopt some elements and action steps from the Rebound Solutions recommendations, auditors found no evidence that DRH exercised due diligence reviewing all recommendations to determine which actions are feasible to implement.

In our research, we found strong support for why data collection and analysis is important, as well as examples of ways other cities are using data to improve their homelessness initiatives.

- Without regular analysis of performance data, it is difficult to determine whether the methods that a program uses are effective. Data collected over time can be used to assess the effectiveness of and make improvements to programs.
- Public managers at all levels are able to make better decisions when the process they oversee is informed by appropriate data.
- The National Alliance for Ending Homelessness asserts that data is essential in illustrating progress towards program goals. Further, communicating and reporting results regularly, rather than once per year, provides additional opportunities to advocate for community support, including leveraging funding opportunities.²⁴
- A report issued at the National Symposium on Homelessness Research discussed the value of using data to identify effective program practices or low-performing programs that need assistance to improve their performance.²⁵
- Other communities have incorporated mechanisms into their homelessness initiatives to measure and analyze their impact over the life of the program.
 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has used data to understand client characteristics and patterns of shelter use. City staff use daily statistics to monitor and immediately fill shelter vacancies, manage caseloads, and redeploy case managers.
 - Columbus, Ohio has implemented a process for analyzing program effectiveness using data gathered from the Homeless Management

²⁴ "What Gets Measured, Gets Done: A Toolkit on Performance Measurement for Ending Homelessness," National Alliance to End Homelessness, accessed January 21, 2015, http://b.3cdn.net/naeh/a251dba5d56b8e3748_2qm6bi7cn.pdf.

²⁵ The National Symposium on Homelessness Research was conducted by Abt Associates Inc. and Policy Research Associates Inc. under contract for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and the Office of Policy, Development, and Research, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Changing Homeless and Mainstream Service Systems: Essential Approaches to Ending Homelessness," The 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/homelessness/symposium07/burt/>.

Information System (HMIS). The city uses the results of its analysis to inform program funding decisions. All funded service providers operate under data quality assurance standards to ensure that decision-making is based on reliable and complete data. Tracking performance this way has helped Columbus fuel program-level change to support the program's goals and future planning.

During the audit, DRH officials noted that the program plans to increase its emphasis on the importance of evaluation by utilizing data to measure program performance over time and report to stakeholders and the public regarding progress towards reducing homelessness. Specifically, DRH intends to track service provider objectives, such as the numbers of homeless served, and the outcomes of all provider actions and activities. DRH plans to provide training to service providers on the types of data it intends to collect. However, DRH did not begin to provide training for this process to service providers until December 2014, and only two trainings had been offered at the time audit work was completed. Further, this improvement has only occurred during the last six months of the ten-year Plan, which has effectively left no time for data analysis to have any impact on the outcome of a ten-year initiative.

Denver's Road Home Has Not Prioritized Assessing the Program's Impact on Reducing Homelessness—DRH has not prioritized evaluation of the program's progress, despite data analysis and evaluation having been consistently communicated as important, both through key DRH documents and by several credible stakeholders. In the absence of more definitive information about the impact of the program, it is unclear how homelessness is being prioritized by the City relative to other public policy issues. Without knowing how well the program overall is or is not working, DRH and the City cannot effectively evaluate whether current funding levels are adequate to achieve program goals. Further, as donation funding levels decline and more taxpayer funding is dedicated to this issue, it is even more critical that DRH monitors the extent to which it effectively utilizes current resources to support its goals and mission.

Denver's Road Home Is Unable To Demonstrate the Impact of its Efforts and Lacks the Ability To Strategize for Future Plans—DRH's historically limited data collection and analysis activities have prevented DRH from identifying which partnerships and solutions

TEEN NEARLY FALLS THROUGH THE CRACKS

Daniel is twenty years old. He moved to Denver six years ago when his mother followed a man to Denver. Unfortunately, his mother's new boyfriend was "not ready for kids," so 14-year-old Daniel was forced to leave and "house hop" between relatives' homes.

He began using drugs and stealing to make money to pay for housing. Teachers at his school had noticed he was homeless so a caseworker from Denver Human Services eventually put him in a group home. Over the next year he went through many foster home placements and eventually earned a criminal record for getting into fights.



At 16 years old, Daniel was out of the system and back in his old neighborhood. Before long, he was homeless again, often sleeping at a local park. After running into legal problems, he realized that the court might be lenient if he could stay out of trouble. This is when Daniel learned of a local service provider's youth program. Thanks to the career and housing assistance that comes with the program, Daniel said "you can see I have a life now."

are effective and providing the best return on investment. For example, one of the goals from the Plan focuses on education, training, and employment to help homeless individuals obtain the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in the workforce. Action 6.3 specifies that DRH, through the use of certain contracted service providers, will develop 580 employment opportunities annually for people who are homeless.²⁶ Although service providers who receive funds towards this goal are required to report to DRH on their progress, unless DRH uses that information to determine overall progress towards Action 6.3, DRH cannot fully convey the impact of efforts in this particular area.

Similarly, data presented in DRH's annual summary updates do not give a clear picture of the program's progress over time. For example, the Plan establishes a goal of creating 3,193 permanent and transitional housing opportunities throughout the life of the ten-year plan. Specifically, four actions will be used to achieve this goal: creating 2,080 permanent affordable housing opportunities, 842 permanent supportive housing opportunities, 100 transitional housing units, and 171 transitional housing units with intensive supportive services. Although updates to the Plan, which occur every two years, provide more detail regarding DRH's progress toward each of these four actions, annual summary updates only provide the aggregate number of housing opportunities added since the Plan's inception in 2005.²⁷ For example, in the seventh year summary update, DRH reported that the program and its partners added 2,653 housing opportunities since the Plan began. However, without reviewing a copy of the Plan in conjunction with this summary update, it is not possible to determine DRH's progress towards its overall housing opportunities goal of adding 3,193 housing opportunities. The limited reporting that the annual summary update provides is not user-friendly and inhibits transparency.

DRH's lack of data analysis and meaningful reporting affects DRH's ability to strategically allocate its resources. By June 2013, eight years into the Plan, DRH had expended more than \$63 million in public and private funding. As a program with such significant financial resources, for the purposes of accountability and transparency, it is important that DRH strategically plan for the continuation of meeting the goal to end homelessness through the implementation of The Way Home plan. Without analysis of the data that is available, DRH may be foregoing opportunities to understand whether its funding strategies are effective in achieving the goals set out in the Plan. Accordingly, the Executive Director of DRH should conduct and document an analysis to determine the level of private and public financial resources necessary to accomplish its goals and mission regarding The Way Home plan and develop and document a strategy to obtain the necessary financial resources.

To help drive decision making and strategies in the short and long term, DRH needs to create a governance framework that incorporates a robust data analysis process. Because DRH is not a service provider, this will allow it to demonstrate the value of

²⁶ This Action was increased to 750 employment opportunities annually in the 2009 Plan Revision. In the 2013 Plan Update, DRH reported that 6,702 job training and employment opportunities had been generated since the beginning of the plan. It is unclear if the goal number had been met in 2013 or previous years.

²⁷ DRH's Year 7 Annual Summary can be accessed here: http://www.denversroadhome.org/files/DRH_AnnualCard2013_v1.pdf. The most recent update to the Plan, the 2013 Update Year 8 Fourth Revision can be accessed here: http://www.denversroadhome.org/files/DRH_Report_FinalFINAL.pdf. DRH's Year 9 Annual Summary had not been published to the website at the time of the report, March 13, 2015.

programs that it funds to stakeholders, funders, and the citizens in an effort to build trust, maintain accountability, and engage the community. Due to the gaps in DRH's current practices, the Executive Director of DRH should document a framework regarding data collection and analysis which includes, at minimum, the following elements: documenting guidelines for standardized reporting from service providers, developing a plan for how outcome metrics are used to inform funding decisions, as well as standards for clear and transparent public reporting of DRH's progress towards meeting program goals. This framework should be incorporated into The Way Home plan and codified in DRH's policy and procedures.

The Commission to End Homelessness Is Not Structured or Managed to Effectively Support the Efforts of Denver's Road Home to Reduce Homelessness in Denver

Established by Mayor Hickenlooper in the fall of 2003, members of the Commission are appointed by the Mayor as required by City Charter. Initially, the Commission was given the responsibility to harness all of the necessary resources to accomplish the ultimate goal of eliminating homelessness over a ten-year period. However, DRH has not structured or managed the Commission in a way that enables this advisory group to fulfill this responsibility and effectively implement the Plan.²⁸ As a body representing various stakeholders working to reduce homelessness in Denver, the Commission provides a broad-based and knowledgeable perspective on the homelessness issue.²⁹ Not only does the Commission operate without a clear, updated mission or purpose, the format of Commission meetings prevents needed discussions, which is frustrating, according to several current Commission members interviewed by auditors. In addition, the current Commission roster lacks members from several key stakeholder groups that hold unique and valuable perspectives on addressing homelessness in Denver. As a result, the Commission has been unable to effectively function in its advisory capacity to help DRH develop and implement strategies to reduce the homeless population in Denver.

The Commission Lacks a Clear and Updated Mission—During their assessment of DRH, Rebound Solutions found that many Commission members were unclear about their role and responsibilities as well as the overall purpose of the Commission, since its original mission—to create and implement Denver's 2005 Plan—was no longer applicable. Possible roles of the Commission, as reported by Rebound Solutions, were activities such as developing and reviewing financial strategies and operational or performance metrics for DRH. As of early 2014, this uncertainty regarding the Commission's role had not been addressed, as shown in records from a Commission meeting that documented the need for a new vision or direction and a plan for implementation. Commission members continue to report that the Commission does not have a targeted vision, two

²⁸ According to the Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC), commissions, boards, and committees are all considered advisory groups; in fact, the designations are frequently used interchangeably. Merriam-Webster defines a commission as "a group of people who have been given the official job of finding information about something or controlling something."

²⁹ In general, the Commission includes representatives from non-profit and faith-based organizations that provide services to the homeless, individuals from various local government agencies and businesses, as well as homeless persons. See Tables 5 and 6 for more details.

years after this problem was first pointed out to DRH. In addition, they are unsure about what the Commission should be accomplishing and what type of authority the Commission has over homelessness programs in Denver.

To ensure that any advisory group, such as the Commission, functions within its designated authority and works effectively, certain governance elements are required. Several professional organizations including the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the Municipal Research and Service Center (MRSC) advise that any commission should have by-laws that designate the purpose and goals of the group. Without these basic guidelines, the advisory group may be ineffective, thereby wasting the time of its members. Additionally, if members perceive that they are not serving a clear purpose, they are more likely to lose interest and stop participating. To create an effective advisory body, these organizations recommend that jurisdictions adopt policies and procedures, such as by-laws, that address the group's purpose and goals. By-laws should also be used to stipulate more specific activities of the group such as its procedures and format.

The Format and Frequency of Commission Meetings Fail to Capitalize on Member Expertise—Commission members expressed concern that meetings are conducted in a way that prevents group discussion, resulting in a top-down delivery of information from DRH representatives. The 2013 Rebound Solutions assessment reported a similar finding that Commissioners felt as if meetings were not conducted effectively and their input was not valued. For example, opportunities for group discussion occur at the end of each meeting, which greatly limits the depth and quality of any deliberation. This was confirmed by the audit team, which attended a Commission meeting in November 2014. During the meeting, Commission members listened to updates from DRH management for the majority of the meeting, and group discussion on the important topic of the Commission's role in 2015 was delayed until the last fifteen minutes of the two-hour meeting. Other comments by Commission members on the format of Committee meetings include the following:

- Meetings are used as information-sharing sessions instead of opportunities to generate solution-oriented discussion
- Members would like a stronger voice to be able to produce worthwhile solutions during meetings
- Members feel they are not being heard

In addition, members who serve on Commission subcommittees, which are designed to focus on sub-areas of the homelessness issue—such as homelessness among children and families—explained that DRH personnel do not listen to them or act upon the reports created as a result of their work.³⁰ This reduces member interest in and commitment to serving on these subcommittees.

³⁰ Initially, four subcommittees—Implementation, Evaluation, Fundraising, and Oversight—were established to help the Commission expedite and monitor the implementation of the Plan. The Oversight committee was responsible for preparing progress reports for the Commission and semi-annual reports to the public and elected officials. However, over the previous ten years the subcommittees changed and took on more narrow topics. For example, the current subcommittees focus on the following subjects: youth and families, shelter, and employment.

The frequency of Commission meetings is another area in need of improvement. For example, two meetings were canceled in 2014. In light of the fact that the Commission meets every other month—or six times a year—canceling any of the six meetings creates a large gap in the communication and coordination of homeless services in Denver, according to one Commission member.

To ensure that Commission meetings are effectively managed to generate valuable discussion and that members understand the expectations for Commission participation, professional organizations and other governmental entities, such as the MRSC and the Washington State Office of the Governor, recommend that advisory groups have policies and procedures in place that specify how meetings should be conducted and scheduled. Finally, guidance from Colorado State University regarding the use of advisory committees states that a group must meet formally on a periodic basis and have operating guidelines to be considered a formally organized advisory body.

Key Stakeholders Are Not Represented on the Commission—The 2003 Blueprint for Addressing Homelessness in Denver (Blueprint) demonstrates that the Commission was intended to integrate community entities and represent the perspectives of many organizations and governmental bodies involved with homelessness programs. Table 5 lists the entities that the Blueprint specified should be represented on the Commission.

Table 5: Community Entities to be Represented on Commission
Businesses
Community Planning and Development (i.e., planning, zoning)
Denver CARES*
Denver Health Authority**
Denver Housing Authority
Denver Human Services
Denver Police Department
Department of Labor
Homeless Advocates
Homeless Persons
Homeless Services Providers
Local Foundations
Mental Health Corporation of Denver**
Neighborhood groups
Source: Denver Homeless Planning Group's "A Blueprint for Addressing Homelessness in Denver."
*Part of Denver Health, Denver CARES provides nursing, behavioral health, and counseling services to those suffering from addiction.
**At no time did the Commission include representatives from the Mental Health Corporation of Denver or the Denver Health Authority.

Although the majority of these groups were represented on the Commission when it was first established, current Commission membership does not reflect this diversity, which is necessary to ensure that all organizations with a stake in the homelessness issue are included. In addition, frustration with the current direction of the Commission has impacted attendance at Commission meetings, further reducing the diversity of

perspectives represented. A comparison of Commission membership between 2005 when Denver’s Plan was issued and 2015 demonstrates the reduction in the diversity of the Commission; the change over time is represented in Table 6.

Table 6: Comparison of Commission Membership between 2005 and 2015			
	2005	2015	No Longer on the Commission
City Council	7	4	
Office of Economic Development/Workforce Development	2	0	x
City Attorney’s Office	1	0	x
Zoning	1	0	x
Denver Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau	3	1	
Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce	1	0	x
Business Improvement District	1	0	x
Banking	1	0	x
Homeless Representative/Advocate	6	4	

Source: Audit team analysis.

Note: Certain organizations have relatively consistent representation on the Commission including the Denver Police Department, Denver Housing Authority, Mayor’s Office, Downtown Denver Partnership, neighborhood and faith-based groups and foundations; groups that have increased their presence on the Commission are service providers and local businesses.

In addition to demonstrating a reduction in the diversity of Commission members, Table 6 also shows a decrease in the quantity of members representing certain stakeholders, including City Council and those representing the homeless community. This lack of key Commission members was pointed out in Rebound Solutions’ 2013 assessment of DRH. Specifically, the Rebound Solutions consultant reported that Commission members discussed the need for more representation from the homeless community, the healthcare community (e.g., mental health, substance abuse), faith-based organizations, other City agencies, and housing developers, among others. We found this to be a continuing issue two years later. Current Commission members and the Rebound Solutions report indicated the need for more representatives from the following groups:

- Neighborhood associations
- Homeless community
- Private sector Chief Executive Officers or top executives
- Faith community
- Denver Public Schools
- Mental and behavioral health organizations
- Public safety

- First responders
- Public health

More diverse membership on the Commission will ensure that the Commission serves as a neutral advisory group. In other words, service providers should not make up the majority of Commission members, as they have a specific perspective on the homelessness issue directly connected to their work and needs. As recommended by MRSC, DRH should develop by-laws or internal policies regarding the make-up of the Commission, including qualification requirements for members and the optimum number of Commission members. Although the Mayor and DRH leadership have discretion regarding the optimum number of Commission members and what groups to include on the Commission, a varied group of members would bring more expertise and knowledge to any planning efforts or recommended actions for homelessness programs in Denver.

Denver’s Road Home Has Not Fully Utilized the Commission as a Resource for Improving the Homelessness Situation in Denver—DRH’s continued failure to formalize the Commission has prevented it from functioning as a valuable resource and partner in addressing homelessness in Denver.

Although the Commission currently needs an updated mission and improved meeting management, the Commission started out with a clear purpose—the creation and implementation of the City’s Plan. Despite this, no by-laws or procedures around how the Commission should function were established by DRH leadership or the Denver Human Services (DHS) manager who chaired the Commission when it was created in 2003. Moreover, the Plan references the Commission’s responsibility to “marshal the people, systems, and resources necessary to eliminate homelessness over the course of the next decade.” In fact, the Commission was the governance body over the City’s efforts to reduce homelessness, as it was established prior to DRH within DHS. To accomplish such aggressive goals, including the implementation of the City’s Plan and the elimination of homelessness, the Commission should have been provided with guidelines regarding the purpose and format of meetings and the authority of the Commission. This lack of established by-laws and structure has left the Commission unable to make a substantive impact on homelessness in Denver.

Not only have service providers observed an increase in the overall number of homeless

TEEN MOTHER HAPPY TO HAVE OVERCOME ADVERSITY AND HOMELESSNESS

Jane knows that she’s lucky to be doing as well as she is, considering what she’s been through. She was adopted before the age of 10. While living with her adoptive family, Jane began using marijuana. After her adoptive parents divorced, Jane spent time in treatment facilities during her teen years. While going through the emancipation process at age 16, Jane was required to kick her roommate and her roommate’s baby out of her apartment. Jane refused to do so, so she found herself homeless. Jane’s first night on the street, she slept on the sidewalk only to be awakened by a kick from a policeman who forced her to move.

Jane moved in with a male childhood friend and later found herself pregnant. After giving birth, she reconnected with her adoptive father and lived with him for several months until she obtained a housing voucher. In addition to her housing voucher, one local program helped Jane tremendously, connecting her with an internship through a nonprofit organization. Although she lives paycheck to paycheck, she is happy and constantly aware of how far she has come and how lucky she is.



people in need of assistance, but leadership from DRH expressed the same view. Homeless service providers report recent increases in the number of homeless families, women, and seniors. Also, managers of the City's homeless shelters describe an "overwhelming increase" in the number of shelter residents.

This inability to function as an effective advisory body able to inform DRH policy-makers and help drive solutions for the homelessness issue in Denver has led to fatigue and frustration among Commission members, which in turn has resulted in low attendance at Commission meetings. Without formalizing the role and procedures for the Commission and ensuring the participation and attendance of all key stakeholders, this important advisory group with diverse expertise will be unable to provide DRH with the broad-based perspective and buy-in necessary to improve the homelessness situation in Denver.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We offer the following recommendations to assist Denver’s Road Home with the development of the next strategic plan and to improve the role of the Commission to End Homelessness.

- 1.1 **Financial Resources**—The Executive Director of Denver’s Road Home should conduct and document an analysis to determine the level of private and public financial resources necessary to accomplish its goals and mission regarding The Way Home plan and develop and document a strategy to obtain the necessary financial resources.

- 1.2 **Data Analysis**—The Executive Director of Denver’s Road Home should document a framework regarding data collection and analysis which includes, at minimum, the following elements: documenting guidelines for standardized reporting from service providers, developing a plan for how outcome metrics are used to inform funding decisions, as well as standards for clear and transparent public reporting of Denver’s Road Home progress towards meeting program goals. This framework should be incorporated into The Way Home plan and codified in Denver’s Road Home’s policy and procedures.

- 1.3 **Commission Mission**—The Executive Director of Denver’s Road Home should work with the Mayor and current members of the Commission to End Homelessness to develop an updated mission and focus for the Commission, which could include involvement in developing and reviewing financial strategies as well as operational and performance metrics for Denver’s Road Home.

- 1.4 **Commission By-laws**—The Executive Director of Denver’s Road Home should work with the Mayor to develop and approve by-laws for the Commission to End Homelessness that specify the format and frequency of meetings, attendance expectations, and the appropriate mix of members to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are represented.

Other Pertinent Information

Denver's Unauthorized Camping Ordinance May Expose the City and its Homeless Population to Risks

An Other Pertinent Information section is intended to provide the reader with additional content on a subject that was not the primary focus of the audit. This section does not require any official response from the auditee; however, it adheres to the Auditor's Office's citizen-centric philosophy of using audit reports to inform the citizenry of potential risks to their community.

Denver's City Council passed the Unauthorized Camping Ordinance (Ordinance) in May 2012. Although the Ordinance was outside the scope of this audit of the Denver's Road Home (DRH) program, auditors identified research and case law demonstrating the potential for unintended consequences associated with this type of legislation. Due to the risk associated with this Ordinance—namely the criminalization of the homeless—relevant research, local statistics, and nationwide challenges to similar bans on specific homeless-related behaviors are discussed in this Other Pertinent Information section.

Denver's Camping Ordinance

Municipalities have adopted policies that prohibit unauthorized camping under the basis of protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the public. Denver's Ordinance was a response to the rise in urban camping populations related to the Occupy Wall Street movement. District 8 Councilman Albus Brooks presented the proposed bill on April 3, 2012, to allow the City to exercise its responsibility to protect commercial areas and private property as well as public infrastructure. Although there were already a number of state and City laws in place regulating the unauthorized use of public and private property, such as the "Sit and Lie" Ordinance adopted in 2005 and overnight curfews established for Denver parks, Denver had no existing law that specifically prohibited urban camping.³¹ The bill was filed during the Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting on April 24, 2012. Individuals supporting the proposed bill included various business owners and neighborhood and civic organizations; however, many were opposed to the bill including homeless service providers, shelter providers, and individuals currently experiencing homelessness.

Proponents of the bill argued that the Ordinance would increase safety and sanitation and be accompanied by increased efforts to connect homeless individuals with services and refer them to shelters. Conversely, opponents cited the lack of existing shelter beds and services, and concerns that the law would criminalize homeless individuals due to the lack of shelter resources. DRH, the City's homeless program, was neither for nor against the Ordinance but proposed solutions and planning that would be necessary to

³¹ The "Sit-and-Lie" Ordinance prohibits the act of sitting or lying on the surface of any public right-of-way or upon any bedding, chair, stool, or any other object placed upon the surface of the public right-of-way in the Downtown Denver Business Improvement District between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m.

keep up with shelter demand and curb the potential effects of the pending legislation. Ultimately, City Council passed the Ordinance on May 14, 2012, with nine members in favor of the bill and four opposed.³²

Specifically, the Ordinance prohibits any person from camping upon any private property without written consent or upon public property except in locations where camping is allowed.³³ A violation of the Ordinance can result in a maximum fine of \$999 and one year in jail, which is consistent with other municipal violations. However, police officers cannot issue a citation or make an arrest unless the officer first verbally requests the person to move and determines whether the person is in need of medical or human services assistance.³⁴ If the person is found to be in need of assistance, the officer must contact and obtain the assistance of a designated human services outreach worker who will refer the person to appropriate services if warranted.

Denver Lacks Adequate Shelter Space Necessary to Mitigate Harm from the Ordinance

The U.S. Conference of Mayors conducts annual surveys of hunger and homelessness in twenty-five cities, the mayors of which serve on the Mayors' Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. The most recent report, which includes data from September 2013 through August 2014, found that Denver was among the 73 percent of surveyed cities that were forced to turn away homeless families and homeless individuals due to the lack of shelter beds. Specifically, the report indicated that 13 percent of those in need of shelter in Denver were unable to find it. As a result, Denver-area shelters have been forced to increase the number of people sleeping in the same room, distribute vouchers for hotels or motels, and provide overflow cots or chairs for people to sleep in due to this shortage of shelter space. To make matters worse, Denver officials reported late last year that the number of homeless families in Denver increased by nine percent while the count of homeless individuals increased by five percent. In addition, Denver's 2013 update to its Ten

COST OF LIVING FORCES COUPLE INTO HOMELESSNESS

Cathy was a working single mother until she married in 2004 and moved to Colorado Springs with her husband. However, they struggled to find work in Colorado Springs, so they moved to Denver to live with Cathy's cousin.

Eventually Cathy found a job at an area hospital which allowed them to live on their own. Unfortunately, Cathy and her husband were forced out of their home after the landlord increased the rent beyond what they could afford. Now, four months later, they are still homeless.



Cathy has battled recurring health issues recently, but assistance provided by several service providers has helped her overcome the problem. Prior to receiving medical care, Cathy was unaware that services were even available to people in her situation. She is making progress, attending classes available through local organizations and filling out housing applications, but she has been on various housing wait lists for nearly two years.

³² The Ordinance is codified in Chapter 38, Offenses, Miscellaneous Provisions, Section 38-86.2 of the Denver Revised Municipal Code.

³³ The Ordinance defines "camping" as conducting activities such as eating, sleeping, or storing personal possessions temporarily in a place, with shelter. Shelter can be considered a tent, lean-to, sleeping bag, bedroll, blanket, or any other cover or protection from the elements other than clothing.

³⁴ According to the Ordinance, medical or human services assistance includes mental health treatment, drug or alcohol rehabilitation, or homeless services assistance.

Year Plan to End Homelessness (Plan) referenced the continually growing need to create additional shelter capacity. Specifically, it was estimated by DRH that an additional 350 shelter beds were needed at that time.

Before the Ordinance was passed, multiple organizations weighed-in on the issue. The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) issued a press release communicating the organization's disagreement with the proposed Ordinance due to the potential negative impacts of its passage. CCH asserted that the Ordinance would criminalize survival activities for those experiencing homelessness since Denver lacks the needed supply of emergency shelter, mental health and substance treatment services, as well as supportive and affordable housing for those in need. Furthermore, the Ordinance could create a situation in which homeless individuals would be likely to develop a criminal record due to the illegal status of their public activities, which would make it even more difficult for them to find housing and employment. A letter written by the Public Policy Director of Colorado's American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) expressed the organization's strong opposition to the proposed Ordinance and expanded on the concerns raised by CCH. ACLU asserted that the Ordinance would do nothing to resolve the homelessness problem; instead it would only force the homeless to move elsewhere—into Denver's neighborhood alleys, dumpsters, or abandoned buildings—which would make it even more difficult for area service providers to reach them. The statement also called into question City leaders' rhetoric suggesting that additional shelter capacity would be added once the Ordinance was passed.

Documentation associated with City Council deliberations on the proposed Ordinance indicates implied commitments on the part of the City to increase shelter space. In response to a question about the City's plan to address the need for shelter when no beds are available, representatives from Denver Human Services (DHS) and DRH replied that the Administration is committed to finding shelter for those who want it. However, one City Council member cautioned that Denver residents may not be fully informed of the effect of the Ordinance since there were no dedicated funds in the budget for additional shelter resources or mental health services. As Denver's recently updated Plan explained, the concerns raised by CCH and ACLU and others were legitimate because the City reported that it continues to have a lack of shelter beds to accommodate Denver's homeless population.

This lack of shelter space intensified the concern among homeless advocates that passing an Ordinance against camping in public places would effectively leave Denver's homeless population with nowhere to go. Instituting legislation that criminalizes unavoidable life-sustaining behaviors, such as sleeping when there are no alternatives and inadequate shelter space, exposes the government to legal challenges related to the fundamental constitutional rights of homeless individuals.

Laws Similar to Denver's Ordinance Are Receiving Increased Scrutiny

Many advocacy groups have opined on the constitutionality of certain laws directed at the presence and behavior of homeless individuals. Activities such as sleeping in public places, loitering, begging, and food-sharing have been the targets of city governments across the country. In the State of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado Springs, and Lakewood

have also instituted ordinances to curb camping—whether in the open, in tents, or in a vehicle—obstructing streets and passageways, and begging. The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty’s (National Law Center’s) report “No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities,” notes that the number of bans on camping and begging in particular public places increased between 2011 and 2014 among the 187 cities surveyed.³⁵ Bans on city-wide camping, loitering, and begging during the same period increased as well. However, bans on sleeping in particular public places decreased by 34 percent, which may indicate that municipalities are increasingly reconsidering this type of legislation. Table 7 provides details on how the nature of these types of bans has changed in recent years.

Table 7: Percent Change in Bans on Specific Public Behaviors between 2011 and 2014

	City-wide Bans	Bans Applicable to Particular Public Places
Camping	60%	16 %
Loitering, Loafing, Vagrancy	35%	-3%
Begging	25%	20%
Sleeping	No change	-34%

Source: National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty.

Note: Loitering, loafing, and vagrancy describe individuals who are idle, moving from place to place, or occupying an area where they have no reason to be.

Not only has the American Bar Association (ABA) recognized the risk of criminalizing homelessness through these types of ordinances but the federal government directed the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to develop and communicate viable alternatives to utilizing bans on certain activities in public spaces.³⁶ The ABA’s policy-making House of Delegates issued a new policy opposing any laws that punish the homeless for life-sustaining behaviors including eating, sleeping, and camping, as well as laws that attempt to punish those who provide food or shelter to the homeless. Further, ABA urges cooperation between bar associations, lawmakers, and advocates toward the goal of revising laws and policies when the demand for shelter and services exceeds supply. Furthermore, the federal Helping Families Save Their Homes Act of 2009 required USICH to “develop constructive alternatives to criminalizing homelessness through laws and policies that prohibit sleeping, feeding, sitting, resting, or lying in public spaces when there are no suitable alternatives, result in the destruction of a homeless person’s property without due process, or are selectively enforced against homeless persons.” In its 2012 report, USICH states that imposing law enforcement and the criminal justice system into the homelessness equation does not address the factors that contribute to the underlying causes of homelessness but instead punish those living on the street. In

³⁵ The National Law Center tracks municipal ordinances regarding homelessness for these 187 U.S. cities because of their geographic and demographic diversity. “No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities,” National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, accessed January 16, 2015, http://nlchp.org/documents/No_Safe_Place.

³⁶ With the passage of the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009, the President and Congress required the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to develop a national strategic plan to end homelessness. This national plan is updated annually and can be accessed at the following site: http://usich.gov/opening_doors/annual-update-2013/.

turn, this punishment often translates into a criminal record, which only compounds the difficulty of finding employment and housing. In fact, during discussions on the proposed Ordinance in 2012, Denver's Assistant City Attorney stated that the City would have to be very careful to avoid criminalizing people who are "truly down and out and have no alternatives."

These ordinances are coming under increased scrutiny, specifically with regard to possible violations of the First, Fourth, Fifth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.³⁷ The Eighth and Fourteenth amendments are recognized as the most compelling challenges to unauthorized camping ordinances similar to Denver's. The Eighth Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment has been the basis for several challenges to laws banning sleeping in public spaces. Those challenging this type of law argue that it effectively punishes individuals for a status, rather than an act. This assertion was affirmed by a Texas case, *Powell v. Texas*, which found that the state cannot criminalize status, or the act of "being."³⁸ Moreover, in the case *Pottinger v. Miami*, the district court found that ordinances banning sitting, sleeping, eating, or congregating in public and laws allowing the confiscation or destruction of homeless individuals' property violated the right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment.³⁹ The central fact in this case was that carrying out survival activities in public is unavoidable for homeless individuals when there is no shelter space available.

Fourteenth Amendment challenges assert that laws banning sleeping in public violate the individual's right to travel. The right to move freely from state to state, as well as between cities within the same state, is provided by the Privileges and Immunities Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibits state interference. Essentially, challengers to camping or sleeping bans have argued that prohibiting sleeping, lying down, eating, or other life-sustaining activities in public impacts their right to travel. *Dunn v. Blumstein*, and other cases, recognized that the right to travel includes the "right to remain" as well as the right to "enter or depart."⁴⁰ In *Dunn v. Blumstein* the court added that any efforts to penalize the right to travel must be shown to promote a "compelling governmental interest."

A recent Oregon circuit court case illustrates the type of legal challenges brought against unauthorized camping ordinances.⁴¹ The case includes the following challenges to Portland's camping ordinance:

- The Eighth Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment
- The Fourteenth Amendment's Right to Travel

³⁷ The First Amendment right of free speech has been used to challenge laws that restrict begging. Protection from unreasonable search and seizures of individuals, and their property, spelled out in the Fourth Amendment is often used to argue against state and local governments' damage or confiscation of personal property as a result of "sweeps," or the process of removing homeless individuals and their property from areas where a number of homeless people have congregated or camped. The Fifth Amendment contains a provision restraining the government from undue interference with the individual's life, property, and liberty; as such, it has been used to argue against sweeps.

³⁸ *Powell v. Texas*, 392 U.S. 514, 516 (1968) (Marshall, J., plurality opinion).

³⁹ *Pottinger v. Miami*, 810 F. Supp. 1551, 1554 & 1584 (S.D. Fla. 1996).

⁴⁰ *Dunn v. Blumstein*, 405 U.S. 338 (1972).

⁴¹ *Oregon v. Barrett*, Case No. 14CR10631, Multnomah County Circuit Court (2015).

- The Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause

Although the circuit court judge found that Portland’s ordinance did not violate any of the defendant’s constitutional rights, the judge weighed in on the issue by stating that Portland’s anti-camping ordinance is not the solution to the complex problem of homelessness. He added that “arresting people who are struggling to survive in the streets just because they have no place else to go is not the answer. We must do better than that. But determining the best ways to address this difficult problem is the job of public policymakers, not the courts.” Despite the outcome in the Portland case, the National Law Center reported in 2014 that many recent cases have either upheld the legal rights of homeless individuals to carry out life-sustaining behaviors in public spaces or resulted in positive court decisions that facilitated further legal challenges. Specifically, since 2011, courts have acted in ways that support homeless individuals in 100 percent of the cases challenging food-sharing laws, 71 percent of the cases opposing camping and sleeping bans, and 66 percent of the cases challenging begging and soliciting behaviors. Results included injunctions to stop enforcement of opposed laws, awards of financial damages, and settlements that modify the laws or enforcement.

Potential Effect of the Urban Camping Ordinance in Denver

A recent *Denver Post* article referenced data collected by the Denver Crime Prevention and Control Commission and other City agencies regarding the heaviest users of City and County services such as jails, courts, medical centers, and detox since 2010.⁴² The data show that nearly all of the 300 “high-frequency users” of these services were homeless at some point in time. In addition, individuals in this group, on average, spent forty-seven days in jail and visited detox centers and emergency rooms several times each year. In addition, each person was arrested an average of eight times each year. The annual cost of these services for the City is estimated to be approximately \$38,000 per person, or \$11.4 million. Since this data covers the time period before and after the passage of Denver’s Ordinance, auditors analyzed citation and arrest data for Denver’s homeless population between 2012 and 2014 from the Denver Police Department’s (DPD’s) Versadex System to determine whether a link may exist between Denver’s Ordinance and the number of homeless individuals cited for camping or arrested. Table 8 demonstrates that no citations or arrests occurred in 2012 and 2013 regarding violations of the Ordinance but that changed in 2014. Additionally, the overall number of arrests increased by 24 percent between 2012—the year the Ordinance was passed—and 2013. The number arrested increased again in 2014.

⁴² “Denver Homeless Initiative Would Be Latest to Tap Social Impact Bonds,” *The Denver Post*, accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.denverpost.com/News/Local/ci_27388251/Denver-homeless-initiative-would-be-latest-to-tap-social-impact-bonds.

Table 8: Number of “Transients” Warned, Cited, or Arrested Between 2012 and 2014

	Written Warnings for Illegal Camping	Citation or Arrest for Illegal Camping	All Arrests
2012	1	0	8,805
2013	1	0	11,272
2014	1	15	11,555

Source: Denver Police Department data from Versadex.
Note: This “transient” category likely includes homeless individuals in addition to others who are not homeless but simply passing through the Denver area.

According to the DPD data, the most common reasons for arrest over this three-year period were:

- Warrants/Holds
- Liquor Laws
- Trespass
- Drug Violations

Of these, arrests related to trespassing and liquor laws increased significantly between 2012 and 2013. Specifically, arrests for trespassing increased by 52 percent while liquor-related arrests increased by 43 percent. Other reasons for arrest, though less common, included violations related to urinating in public, larceny, disorderly conduct, among others.⁴³ The number of arrests related to two of these activities increased as well between 2012 and 2013. Arrests for urinating in public went up by 38 percent while arrests for larceny increased by 34 percent. Although this data shows that relatively few camping-related citations, or arrests, of homeless individuals have occurred since the Ordinance’s passage, the homeless are being arrested—albeit for other reasons—and in increasing numbers.

This data cannot be viewed as irrefutable evidence that the Ordinance has resulted in an increase in the number of homeless individuals passing through Denver’s jails. However, it certainly shows a notable increase in the number of homeless people being arrested since the Ordinance was passed. Overall, this demonstrates the need for the City—specifically DRH and the Commission—to be vigilant in monitoring these trends and to take action if this monitoring shows a direct link between the Ordinance and increased criminalization of Denver’s homeless population.

Alternatives to Ordinances that Ban Certain Behaviors

To respond to federal legislation requiring the identification of alternative options to address homelessness, USICH and the Access to Justice Initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice held a summit in 2010 to develop alternatives to the criminalization of homelessness. Many stakeholders participated in the summit, including officials from city and county governments, criminal justice representatives, health providers, business representatives, homeless advocacy organizations, and previously homeless individuals.

⁴³ Larceny refers to the taking of personal property from the rightful owner.

Their efforts resulted in three high-level solutions for addressing homelessness beyond utilizing the traditional legal remedies: Comprehensive and Seamless Systems of Care, Collaboration between Law Enforcement and Behavioral Health and Social Service Providers, and Alternative Justice System Strategies.

Comprehensive and Seamless Systems of Care—The first solution recommended creating comprehensive systems of care that combine housing with behavioral health and social services. Specific strategies for accomplishing this include the development and implementation of community-wide plans to end homelessness, developing permanent supportive housing solutions such as “Housing First,” and providing twenty-four-hour access to emergency shelter.⁴⁴

Denver was one of eleven cities chosen to participate in a Housing First project through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2004. The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless leads the project which is called the Denver Housing First Collaborative. City leaders are also pursuing a twenty-four-hour rest and resource center in Denver that will provide limited emergency shelter space, transitional housing, and basic services.

Collaboration between Law Enforcement and Behavioral Health and Social Service Providers—Collaboration between law enforcement and certain service providers can lead to intervention programs that steer homeless individuals toward support services and away from the criminal justice system. To accomplish this, key steps include an increased use of outreach and engagement along with cross-training of police officers and service providers, as well as the use of crisis intervention teams for those homeless individuals with mental illness.

Denver has established a Police Homeless Outreach Unit that works with area service providers to serve the homeless community with a goal of diverting them away from jails and to those organizations that can assist them. The officers within this unit work exclusively on homeless issues in Denver.

Alternative Justice System Strategies—Alternative strategies developed during the summit include citation dismissal programs, the use of “specialty courts,” reentry housing, and reentry employment, among others.⁴⁵ The ultimate goal of these methods is to design justice system procedures and structure, which more effectively address the needs of the homeless population who often bring a unique set of needs and circumstances.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The Housing First system focuses on the immediate placement of homeless individuals into permanent housing with the notion that stable housing will allow homeless individuals to focus on and overcome the core mental and physical issues that led to their homeless situation.

⁴⁵ Problem-solving, or specialty courts, are an alternative to the traditional court process as they add a therapeutic approach. People who meet certain criteria, including having a mental illness, being a veteran, or being a homeless person, are provided with a treatment plan and supervision instead of a jail sentence.

⁴⁶ For more information on these and other strategies for addressing homelessness, see the following report: “Searching Out Solutions: Constructive Alternatives to the Criminalization of Homelessness,” United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, accessed November 25, 2014, http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/RPT_SoS_March2012.pdf.

Consistent Monitoring of the Effects of Denver’s Unauthorized Camping Ordinance on the Homeless Population Could Mitigate Risks to the City

Although Denver has implemented certain strategies to improve services available to the homeless, including a Housing First model and a Police Outreach Homeless Unit, the Ordinance may be worsening the City’s homeless situation by increasing the number of homeless people moving through the jail system. The City’s lack of shelter space means that homeless individuals may have no alternative but to carry out life-sustaining behaviors in public spaces. In fact, this conflict has resulted in multiple legal challenges to the constitutionality of unauthorized camping ordinances throughout the country. In light of the risk associated with this type of legislation, national organizations including the ABA and USICH have opposed criminalizing homelessness with laws that prohibit certain behaviors in public, particularly when the demand for shelter and services exceeds the available supply, as is the case in Denver. The recent increase in the number of arrests of homeless people demonstrates the need for the City to be vigilant in monitoring the citation and arrest data to enable City leaders to identify and act quickly to mitigate any negative impacts on the City and its homeless citizens.

APPENDIX A

The Reality of Homelessness in Denver

The following stories are the result of interviews with individuals who have experienced homelessness. Actual names have been changed to protect the identity of those we interviewed.

Nineteen and on the Street

At the age of 14, Chris was sent to jail. Afterwards he was in and out of different group homes. Five years later, he was off parole but found himself homeless so he found places to stay as often as he could, or slept in parks. During the time that he was homeless, he was regularly told that he had to be in a shelter for 60 to 90 days in order to receive services. From Chris' point of view, requiring young people or even families to stay in shelters with adults, some of which may be on drugs, is unreasonable.

Because he's been on his own so long, Chris essentially raised himself. He is one of six children; three still live with his mother while Chris and two others are grown. Chris' father is serving time in the penitentiary so he does not play a significant role in Chris' life. Although he was estranged from his mother over the last few years, they recently got back in touch. Chris initially got involved with a local homeless youth program and really enjoyed the experience. However, after his program term expired, he was homeless again and without any income for months. Luckily, he was able to join the program again and get a housing voucher. Also, with the help of this program, Chris' New Year's resolution is to get his GED in 2015 like his cousin. Chris has used the program to help him follow the advice of his parole officer who told Chris that he had three choices—to get a job, go to school, or go back to jail. Recently he's worked in construction and customer service but he hopes to get a position working for a non-profit. Chris would like to eventually find a job that allows him to travel, especially throughout Europe.

Homeowner to Homeless and on the Housing Waitlist

Beth has lived in Denver since she was 12 years old; in fact, she remembers when the City was a "cow town." Now 68 years old, Beth is disabled and relies on an oxygen tank to breathe and an electric wheelchair for mobility. Even though several family members live in Denver, Beth is on her own. In her prior life, she was a building manager and owner of two homes. However, her husband's heart attack sixteen years ago changed her life forever. Although he survived the episode, he required hospice care afterwards. At the urging of her children, Beth sold everything and moved away from Colorado. After her husband passed away seven years ago, her children "turned on her" and she found herself homeless with no money, a situation that continues to this day. A constant struggle for her as a disabled person is finding suitable housing; she also has bad credit which further complicates her ability to find a place to live on the mere \$1100 she gets in disability payments. In fact, she is currently on several wait lists for housing, including the Denver Housing Authority wait list which she has been on for seven years. If she is able to

find housing, Beth looks forward to making crafts like baby comforters to sell to local boutiques. She tries to stay positive but she admits she feels traumatized by her situation.

Homeless with Nowhere to Turn

Before becoming homeless, Sally earned a Bachelor's degree and worked as a director of human resources. She lived in an upscale neighborhood in the Denver area until she lost her home to foreclosure. Although Sally has an ex-husband and mother who also live in Colorado and children in California, this family network has not prevented her from becoming homeless. Last fall, Sally was attacked by a person who wandered into the home of a friend that had taken in Sally and others with nowhere to go. Using an oxygen canister and a lighter, the attacker severely burned Sally's head which required her to undergo six hours of surgery. Within a few weeks, Sally was placed with a service provider in Denver. Despite her hardships, she hopes to own her own business some day. She described the common (and false) perception that homelessness is "ugly and dirty" and that those experiencing homelessness are either criminals or "boozers." Sally explained that many people who become homeless don't know what to do about their situation; often times their backgrounds or other circumstances make it even harder to overcome being homeless. In fact, she urges anyone passing judgment on those who are homeless to imagine themselves in the following situation—give away all of your possessions (e.g., car, house, money), have someone drop you off downtown, and see how easy it is to get a job and survive. In her view, most people don't understand what it's like to be homeless. She would like to see a system that provides mental and emotional support for people in her situation.

Despite Injury and Loss, Homeless Man Inspires Others

Steve has been homeless for five years but that hasn't stopped him from encouraging and supporting others experiencing homeless, teaching them to not give up, no matter how bad their situation is. He was fired from his job at an auto repair shop after getting injured at work. To try to make ends meet, Steve sold his tools but that didn't prevent him from losing his home, followed by his wife and kids. For a brief period he lived with his sister but she eventually kicked him out because he could not pay her rent. In addition, she sold a storage unit that held his remaining possessions. Afterwards, he slept in cars or on park benches. Now 57 years old, his greatest desire is to be in contact with his children once again and to see his grandkids. He is from a neighboring county but he was brought to Denver and dropped off at an area service provider immediately after being released from the hospital because he was homeless. He has stayed in several different shelters in Denver but thanks to services received with one service provider, he will be having badly needed surgery to correct the workplace injury he suffered five years ago that led to the loss of his job and his homeless situation. He explained that currently there is not enough room at shelters in Denver and many homeless people don't know that there are places to go for help.

Teen Nearly Falls Through the Cracks

Daniel is twenty years old and from Virginia but he moved to Denver six years ago when his mother followed a man to Colorado and brought Daniel and his two siblings with her. Unfortunately, his mother's new boyfriend was "not ready for kids" so 14 year-old Daniel was forced to leave the house and "house hop" between relatives' homes. Even though his neighborhood was filled with gangs, he avoided getting tangled up with them; however, he did begin using drugs and spending time with the wrong people. Since he had no money, he felt he had to rob or steal to make money to pay for housing. According to Daniel, things went downhill after he was called to a parent-teacher conference at his school. Teachers had noticed he was homeless so a caseworker from Denver Human Services met Daniel at the meeting and he was eventually put in a group home with others in his situation. Over the next year he went through many foster home placements and eventually earned a criminal record after getting in many fights with other kids where he lived. At 16 years old, Daniel was out of the system and back in his old neighborhood. Before long, he was homeless again, often sleeping at parks with other homeless people. After running into other legal problems, Daniel realized that the court might be lenient if he proved he was stable and could stay out of trouble. Thanks to the career and housing assistance that comes with a local service provider's program, Daniel said "you can see I have a life now." Right now, he lives in an apartment complex with another young man going through the same program. The housing voucher provided through the program allows him to pay only 30 percent of his income for rent but he will again face the challenges of finding a place to live when the voucher expires because having minimal credit history and a criminal record make it even more difficult to find housing in Denver. In the future, Daniel hopes to find a job that allows him to help young people get past the difficult things that have happened in their lives and set goals for themselves. From his time living on the streets, he learned that many homeless people do not have a bad background; instead they have just suffered some sort of tragedy. In his view, this is an area where Denver can help; people should stick together and provide help to one another.

Teen Mother Happy to have Overcome Adversity and Homelessness

Jane knows that she's lucky to be doing as well as she is, considering what she's been through. She was adopted before the age of 10 so she has an extended family of biological and adoptive siblings and parents. Her biological mother is a drug addict so Jane chooses to keep her distance; her biological father lives with one of her brothers but their affinity for alcohol means that Jane does not see or interact with them often. Of her adoptive parents, she is only in contact with her father. Her adoptive mother threw Jane and three other adopted children out of the house so she could focus on her three biological children. Although her adoptive mother prevented Jane from reconnecting with her adoptive father for several years, she was able to get in contact with him and he has stepped in to help Jane several times when she was badly in need of help.

While living with her adoptive family, Jane began using marijuana. After her adoptive parents divorced, Jane spent time in treatment facilities during her teen years. At the age of 16, while going through the emancipation process, Jane was allowing a girl and

her baby to live with her but she was informed that she would have to kick out the girl and her child or lose her apartment altogether. Jane refused to turn the girl out on the street so she found herself homeless. Jane's first night on the street, she slept on the sidewalk only to be awakened by a kick from a policeman who forced her to move. In her view, harassment from the police was not an uncommon event and it was clear that homeless people were perceived to be "vile" or troublemakers by many. In the days that followed, Jane received assistance through several youth-oriented homeless programs and she frequented the 16th Street Mall area where other homeless individuals congregated.

Next, Jane moved in with a guy friend from her childhood and later found herself pregnant at 23 years old. After her friend was sent to jail she went to her adoptive mother for help but she was refused. Although she eventually received a housing voucher that provided her shelter for one year, once it expired she was on the street again but this time with her baby. She reconnected with her adoptive father during this time and he allowed her to live with him for several months until she found another housing voucher, this time an 18-month voucher that provided an added benefit—it would be valid regardless of her job status. This additional protection proved critical for her during that period of time when she lost her job and was out of work for six months. Any other housing voucher would not have supported her during a time of unemployment. Jane also credits the one-on-one contact and personal attention that she received from a local nonprofit's homeless youth program with her current situation. In addition to the housing voucher, the program has connected her with an internship through an area nonprofit which has provided her with a variety of professional connections. Although she lives paycheck to paycheck, she is happy and constantly aware of how far she has come and how lucky she is.

Jane explained that as a homeless person, one of the most difficult things is to put yourself out there, to try to get help because you're made to feel different. In fact, many homeless people feel stuck or shut down, unable to "pull out of the pit." Being alone was particularly challenging for Jane; she had to figure things out on her own, where to go for help, who to trust, who not to trust. She wants to be an advocate for the homeless, to show them that being homeless doesn't mean you're any less of a person. She would like to participate in a mentoring program that matches formerly homeless people that are now successfully self-sufficient with those that are currently homeless. As someone who has walked in their shoes, Jane feels she would be able to connect with and help those receiving help through the program. Another helpful step would be for Denver to have more shelters available. From her experience, it's the lack of shelter that motivates people to commit crime.

Cost of Living Forces Couple into Homelessness

Originally from Texas, Cathy was a working single mother. Later, she moved to New Jersey to get married. For five years she worked at a hospital as a parking attendant and later as an operator. After losing her husband to a brain aneurism, Cathy remarried in 2004 and moved to Colorado Springs four years later with her second husband. However, they struggled to find work in Colorado Springs, so they moved to Denver to live with

Cathy's cousin. Although their stay was short-lived, Cathy found a job at a local hospital which allowed them to live on their own. However, Cathy and her husband were forced out of their home after the landlord increased the rent beyond what they could afford. Now, four months later, they are still homeless. Recently they were forced to sleep on the bus stop bench for two weeks. Unfortunately, Cathy's husband was forced to continue sleeping on the streets after Cathy was placed in housing through a lottery process. Her husband had to go through the lottery process on his own, which he eventually did, to join his wife. Cathy has battled recurring health issues recently, but assistance provided by several service providers has helped her overcome the problem. Prior to receiving medical care, Cathy was unaware that services were even available to people in her situation. She is making progress, attending classes available through local organizations, and filling out housing applications but she has been on various housing wait lists for one to two years. In her view, many of the services and programs offered do not last long enough to sustain people who must wait years for housing. She would like people to just "hear the homeless" and understand that people living in this situation are good people living through bad situations.

AGENCY RESPONSE



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April 3, 2015

Mr. Kip R. Memmott, MA, CGAP, CRMA
Director of Audit Services
Office of the Auditor
City and County of Denver
201 West Colfax Avenue, Dept. 705
Denver, Colorado 80202

Dear Mr. Memmott:

The Office of the Auditor has conducted a performance audit of Denver's Road Home (DRH).

This memorandum provides a written response for each reportable condition noted in the Auditor's Report final draft that was sent to us on March 13, 2015. This response complies with Section 20-276 (c) of the Denver Revised Municipal Code (D.R.M.C.).

The objective of the audit was to evaluate the effectiveness of the program toward meeting goals and outcomes in the effort to reduce homelessness in Denver. Denver's Road Home began in 2005. The program works with a network of partners to provide a wide variety of services to the homeless in Denver.

Since 2005, Denver's Road Home, its partners and other City agencies have:

- Added 2,941 housing opportunities for the homeless, increasing the opportunity to move those currently experiencing homelessness or who are at-risk of homelessness into temporary and supportive housing.
- Housed 2,549 individuals through the Denver Street Outreach Collaborative, effectively ending homelessness for those individuals.
- Prevented 6,445 families and individuals from becoming homeless with eviction assistance.
- Mentored 1,215 families and seniors out of homelessness, preventing many from becoming chronically homeless.
- Generated 7,984 employment and training opportunities for those experiencing homelessness, providing them with the skills needed to find work and move from homeless to housed.
- Connected thousands of homeless individuals to hundreds of services through the annual Project Homeless Connect event.
- Increased shelter capacity by adding hundreds of spaces and sheltered thousands of people nightly during the cold winter months through the city's cold weather emergency shelter program.



- Started construction of the Lawrence Street Community Center, a daytime center that will provide a drug- and alcohol-free safe place for the homeless to gather during the day with access to services, clean drinking water, restrooms, showers, a dining area and a dignified staging area for transport to other shelters.
- Acquired the location and issued the Request for Proposals to select a provider for a Solutions Center to assist those in crisis. The referral-only facility will provide short-term behavioral and mental health, substance abuse, housing and other services to help stabilize homeless and other individuals and connect them to longer-term resources and treatment programs.
- Launched a \$10 million Housing Trust Fund dedicated to improving affordable housing in Denver including \$3 million dedicated to providing 3,000 workforce and transitional housing units over the next five years.
- Joined the 25 Cities Initiative, a collaborative effort among the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Veterans Administration and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness that supports cities in building Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement systems to streamline access to housing and services, prioritizing those most in need, rather than the traditional first-come, first-served practice.
- Initiated the development of a Coordinated Entry System which will enable services for those experiencing homelessness to be delivered in a more effective and efficient manner and streamlining service delivery for the providers who serve them.
- Piloted a common assessment tool that matches chronically homeless individuals and Veterans with Permanent Supportive Housing and other resources.
- Initiated a Rapid Entry Pilot that utilizes card swipe technology to improve client access in a trauma informed care manner to provider services. Data collection is real time, results in less documentation/duplication errors and streamlines service delivery for providers.

These accomplishments and initiatives are significant and many of them were achieved during the worst recession since the Great Depression. The economic downturn, which is not mentioned in your audit report, only served to increase the need for homeless services, increasing demand on providers as well as other assistance programs, all while the city was experiencing budget cuts, employee furloughs and holds on hiring. It wasn't until 2014 that economic indicators finally returned to pre-recession levels. However, the increased need for homeless services is still a direct result of this environment.

AUDIT FINDING

Denver's Road Home Has Failed to Utilize Key Resources to Reduce Homelessness in Denver

RECOMMENDATION 1		
Financial Resources —The Executive Director of Denver's Road Home should conduct and document an analysis to determine the level of private and public financial resources necessary to accomplish its goals and mission regarding The Way Home plan and develop and document a strategy to obtain the necessary financial resources.		
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	Target date to complete implementation activities (Generally expected within 60 to 90 days)	Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation
Agree	August 15, 2015	Bennie Milliner 720-944-2508

Narrative for Recommendation 1

Homeless services are provided through a network of private and public programs and providers. City funding is one piece of the network. Utilizing daily, weekly and monthly monitoring of shelter demand reporting and data from the Denver Street Outreach Collaborative, Denver’s Road Home recognized the rapidly changing landscape of homelessness in the fourth quarter of 2013 and began the shift in city funding sources and deeper analysis work with the support of Denver Human Services and the Budget Office to determine what budget adjustments were needed. That analysis continues in conjunction with the Budget Office and includes a review of all previous and current program funding as well as future budget development, criteria to support investment decisions and crisis response protocols.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Data Analysis—The Executive Director of Denver’s Road Home should document a framework regarding data collection and analysis which includes, at minimum, the following elements: documenting guidelines for standardized reporting from service providers, developing a plan for how outcome metrics are used to inform funding decisions, as well as standards for clear and transparent public reporting of Denver’s Road Home progress towards meeting program goals. This framework should be incorporated into The Way Home plan and codified in Denver’s Road Home’s policy and procedures.

Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	Target date to complete implementation activities (Generally expected within 60 to 90 days)	Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation
Agree in Part	August 31, 2015	Bennie Milliner 720-944-2508

Narrative for Recommendation 2

Denver’s Road Home agrees with the recommendation to document the framework regarding our data collection and analysis methods. The audit recommendation notes that data collection and analysis is occurring within Denver’s Road Home, but appears to take issue with the manner in which this collection and analysis is occurring. We disagree with the implication within the highlight and narrative body of the report that the program’s data gathering and analysis is unable to evaluate progress toward Ten Year Plan (TYP) goals and impacts our efforts or to effectively strategize for the future.

Denver, through the work of DRH, leads the region in data detail regarding the scale of homelessness in communities and in programming responses to homelessness, a tribute to our partners’ investment in data collection and analysis. Annual Point in Time (PIT) participation is more sharply focused in Denver than in other surrounding communities: We identify more people at the street level; we identify more people that are chronically homeless; and we engage a broad spectrum of agencies in the PIT count. Regardless of various opinions regarding the PIT data, it is *the* source of information used by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in determining the distribution of hundreds of millions of dollars annually. As a result, DRH uses this data as one source in the planning and scoping of service needs. Building equity for women’s emergency shelter service is one example demonstrated:

By identifying the need, we coordinated and funded an increase of available nightly emergency beds for women by 60% from a 2012 baseline and another 40% from the same baseline in 2014.

DRH obtains rich data beyond PIT figures, and the analysis of this data informs and expedites decision-making around service needs that, compared with ten years ago, generally change more frequently and more dramatically. The Denver Street Outreach Collaborative has provided monthly reports since its inception. An example of that robust data is attached. Outreach data on shelter referrals in particular has revealed dramatic increases in shelter demand and less consistent seasonal patterns since 2012. When coupled with daily counts from the shelter network, the Outreach data proved to be the lead barometer of the increase of approximately 18% above baseline numbers from November-December 2013 to the present.

The audit report fails to consider any external circumstances impacting the effort to end chronic homelessness. The leading causes of homelessness are the loss of a job, the break up of a family or the high cost or unavailability of housing. By failing to include the impact of the economic recession which began in 2007, the introduction and background section fails to accurately frame the conditions and causes of homelessness not only in Denver but throughout the nation. The “Great Recession” was the most severe economic contraction America has experienced since the 1930’s. Millions lost jobs and hundreds of thousands lost their homes due to foreclosure. Former home owners became homeless or moved into the rental market, which helped push rental costs higher, another contributor to homelessness. Many who became homeless during the recession also remained homeless for longer periods due to the aforementioned circumstances and not from a failure of DRH or its partners in the TYP. The DSOC data shows that even in this difficult, resource deficient time, people were and are being housed although admittedly not in the numbers needed. The National Alliance to End Homelessness has complimented the outstanding breadth of Denver’s outreach efforts compared with other major cities, where outreach is simply a van ride to shelter and does not provide case management focused outcomes.

Permanent Supportive Housing, Transitional housing and long term shelter resources continue at or near capacity levels, demonstrating the positive impact of these programs on those served. These are the homeless unseen by the public. An eventual increase in housing stock will allow movement throughout the housing continuum, showing the validity, need and impact of these services.

DRH has and does use existing data to track and demonstrate progress relative to the TYP and to address a dynamic and quickly changing environment. We acknowledge the need to package and present this data in a more formal way in order to document concisely the accomplishments and success of DRH and that of our service provider partners to the public. We initiated action in early 2014 to this end by engaging analytic staff from the Office of Drug Strategy to assist in this effort. In the future, DRH will continue to develop staff capability to solidify data gathering and in-depth analysis by adding personnel or contracting for professional services.

RECOMMENDATION 3		
Commission Mission—The Executive Director of Denver’s Road Home should work with the Mayor and current members of the Commission to End Homelessness to develop an updated mission and focus for the Commission, which could include involvement in developing and reviewing financial strategies as well as operational and performance metrics for Denver’s Road Home.		
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	Target date to complete implementation activities (Generally expected within 60 to 90 days)	Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation
Agree	August 31, 2015	Bennie Milliner 720-944-2508

Narrative for Recommendation 3

Denver’s Road Home acknowledges efforts regarding the development of the Commission to End Homelessness require more focus and attention to optimize the unique resource represented by the Commission members. Discussions around this need have been ongoing since early 2014 and have resulted in a strategy to accomplish more engagement with the Commission. A different structure for Commission meetings was discussed at the November 2014 meeting and introduced at the January 2015 meeting. Those discussions also addressed creating a Steering Committee for developing meeting agendas and topic discussions for future meetings. That Committee is composed of the two co-chairs and five Commission members, with the Executive Director staffing the group. The Steering Committee met on March 24, 2015, and has begun work on its action plan moving forward. Drafts of a Governance Charter and By-laws should be available for Commission review and discussion in late April 2015. Approval by the Commission should occur at the May or July 2015 Commission meeting.

RECOMMENDATION 4		
Commission By-laws—The Executive Director of Denver’s Road Home should work with the Mayor to develop and approve by-laws for the Commission to End Homelessness that specify the format and frequency of meetings, attendance expectations, and the appropriate mix of members to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are represented.		
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	Target date to complete implementation activities (Generally expected within 60 to 90 days)	Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation
Agree	August 31, 2015	Bennie Milliner 720-944-2508

Narrative for Recommendation 4

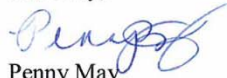
The Executive Steering Committee and the Executive Director will undertake this task with input from stakeholders and make recommendations for adoption of Commission By-laws and Governance Charter as noted in addressing Finding 3.

The Executive Director will work with the Mayor and the Director of Boards and Commissions to determine what the right size and composition of the Commission needs to be as we move forward with the development of The Way Home Plan. The landscape and environmental concerns associated with

homelessness have evolved since the inception of the original TYP. The chronic homeless population was the main focus of the TYP but increases in other segments of the homeless population have driven different programmatic and budgetary approaches since 2005. Families with children, youth, seniors, veterans and unaccompanied women are demanding more attention than the TYP provided. Denver's Road Home has made considerable progress in the past several years to address a difficult and complex problem in our City, including moving thousands of people from homelessness to housed and increasing shelter resources for the growing transient population. Clearly, the factors influencing homelessness are many and not easily addressed, but the commitment to continue the work to assist, convene and advocate for a vulnerable population has not changed.

Please contact Bennie Milliner at 720-944-2508 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Penny May
Executive Director
Denver Human Services

cc:
Janice Sinden, Chief of Staff
Bennie Milliner, Executive Director, Denver's Road Home
Barbara Shaklee, Director, Human Services Legal Section