

# The Boston Globe

## **Brockton develops 10-year plan to end homelessness**

By Milton Valencia

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The man said he was fine living under the bush by the church parking lot in Brockton. Still, the Rev. Naomi Burton, pastor of the Keys of the Kingdom Tabernacle of Prayer, never liked seeing him huddled there, homeless. Each morning she would check to see if he was OK. One morning, she and others from her church found him dead.  
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"He died there, in those bushes," said Burton, who is still bothered by her church's inability to reach out to the man and other homeless people in the neighborhood.

"The problem seems to be getting worse, rather than getting better," she said.

City officials say it's time to do something about it. Last week, local officials joined social service workers and business executives to announce a 10-year plan to combat chronic homelessness.

The idea, they said, is to "find a solution, rather than manage a problem."

Toward that end, they will replace shelter beds with more stable transitional housing for people who are homeless, as well as offer support services. Shelters will be shut down or used only in emergency cases.

Twenty-two units of transitional housing have already been developed. An additional 32 units of affordable housing will be built on Spring Street and administered by Father Bills & MainSpring, a homeless support organization. Of those 32 units, 16 will be reserved for veterans, said John Yazwinski, the agency's executive director.

Beyond that, the goal is to develop 10 to 12 more units of transitional housing each year over the next 10 years.

Mayor James E. Harrington said the plan, in order to succeed, needs the support of the local, state, and federal governments, as well as help from the business and social service sectors.

In a January count, social service workers discovered 101 chronically homeless people living in Brockton and Plymouth County, with 67 living in shelters and 34 sleeping in public areas and parks.

Homelessness is both a moral and economic issue, officials said. They found that 1,000 of the 15,000 emergency medical responses in Brockton last year were related to the chronically homeless population.

The 10-year plan calls for local coordinators to conduct an annual census of people living on the streets, and refer individuals to the proper counseling or job training services, or both. The city would participate in a county-wide Homelessness Management Information System to analyze information on the area homeless, and determine which services are most needed.

Funding for homeless shelters will gradually shift to the creation of transitional housing, so that chronically homeless individuals are put into their own apartments rather than a homeless "warehouse."

Stephen Pike, chairman of the committee that developed the plan and senior vice president at North Easton Savings Bank, said the strategy has been branded Housing First, because committee members realized that the area homeless need a safe, secure place to live before underlying issues such as mental health and drug and alcohol addiction can be addressed.

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