

## HOMELESS IN LANE COUNTY, 2019 to 2023

### HOUSING FIRST

In Eugene and in every large West Coast city today, the primary cause for the growing number of homeless people is lack of affordable housing.<sup>i</sup> Recently, **housing first** has been the priority, meaning that before other interventions could help, people first need housing, not just shelter. They need a place to come home to where they are safe to sleep, to be with their partners and kids, and to keep their pets and possessions. From a secure homebase they can work with other services toward a better life. But the housing first concept is little more than a wish. We do not have enough housing available to make it work.

Today, affordable housing means that the cost of rent or mortgage plus utilities is no more than 30% of a household's gross income. Eugene/Springfield, with a population of about 240,000, has 10,000 households with incomes of less than 30% of the average median income (AMI) but only about 3000 rental units available that they could afford. Households with incomes of 30 to 50% of the AMI number 7750, but there are only about 4000 additional rental units available that they could afford; and these are often occupied by people with higher incomes, further limiting choices for low-income populations. According to the Eugene Tenant Alliance, more than 300 evictions in Eugene since 9/2022 resulted from rents raised to unaffordable levels. When the tenant can find another home, moving costs can become an insurmountable barrier involving first, last, deposit, and move-in costs.

### WHY DON'T WE HAVE SUFFICIENT HOUSING?

Researchers have added an overarching reason to explain why homelessness has grown steadily to become an intractable national crisis: Homelessness is not an individual's failure; it is a national economic and policy failure.<sup>ii</sup> We've been here for a while: LWVLC Everymember material from April 2018 asserts "...market failure contributes to homelessness...the market hasn't responded (to the lack of affordable housing) with enough new units to bring supply and demand into equilibrium."

- Construction has not kept up with demand since the 1980s. Land prices increase as supply tightens. Building costs are inflated across all construction. Housing costs and rents have skyrocketed. Low wage earners cannot qualify for mortgages, and the inability to buy a home has left many at the mercy of rents rising beyond their budgets.
- Affordable projects are less profitable for developers. Since more homes are needed at all levels, developers prioritize construction for populations with higher incomes.
- Since the 1980s, federal budget cuts have reduced funds for low-income housing. Tax reforms have encouraged high-end single-family housing but not affordable housing. Government subsidies tilt toward benefits to homeowners, not renters.
- Nationally, 515,000 multi-family homes were built in 1985. Then a downward trend began, resulting by 1991 in only 140,000 multi-family units built.
- In the nation and in Eugene, large investment firms buy housing stock, raise rents, and price out low- and middle-income buyers.<sup>iii</sup> Landlords are often reluctant to rent to homeless people even when they have federal vouchers to help pay the rent.
- Codes, zoning restrictions, home owner associations and neighborhood resistance create barriers. Subsidies, system development waivers, and construction excise taxes are often not implemented.
- Historically, affordable homes have been eliminated during gentrification or in building new expressways. Homestead opportunities were not distributed equitably, nor were GI Bill mortgages.<sup>iv</sup> Housing stock has for some been inaccessible due to red-lining.

Lane County is poor, old, and under-employed, according to US Census data, 2020, [data.census.gov](https://data.census.gov)

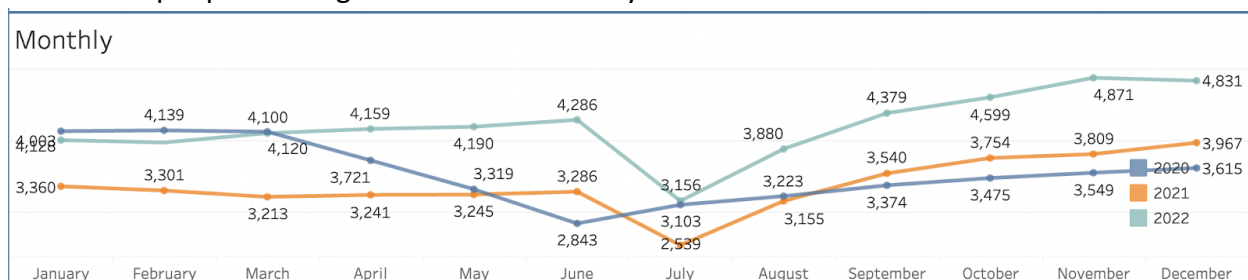
Measure	Lane County	State of Oregon	United States
Estimated poverty rate	14.4	12.2	12.8
Percentage of population over 65	20.5	18.6	16.8
Percentage of population over 16 in the civilian labor force	60.3	62.5	63.4

### TODAY'S NUMBER OF HOMELESS? ABOUT 4800

Homeless means that the primary nighttime residence might be a public or private place not used as regular sleeping accommodation for human beings: cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, or substandard housing. The current Lane County number of homeless people is about 4800, which includes those in emergency and alternative shelters as well as those having no place to sleep. For perspective, consider that in 2021 Eugene had a larger number of homeless people per capita than Los Angeles.

The counting method preferred since 2022 is the Homeless By Name List (HBNL)<sup>v</sup> which records each person seeking services by actual individual names along with an assessment of specific needs. It allows social workers to know what kind of help each person needs and to keep track of their progress in finding housing. The HBNL as part of the county Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) provides information that is both more accurate and more useful than the Point in Time (PIT) survey that has traditionally been done each year one evening in January.

### Increase in people seeking services from January 2021 to December 2022



Most county services for the homeless are based in Eugene. The HBNL showed that 75% of the Lane County homeless live in Eugene, and the remainder are in rural areas or small cities, with 11% in Springfield. Less than 0.1% reported being from other parts of Oregon or from out of state. Services are funded by Lane County, the Cities of Eugene and Springfield, various federal and state sources, and private charitable organizations.

### WHO IS AT RISK?

When low wages (that don't increase as rents increase) are coupled with another vulnerability, the risk of becoming homeless multiplies. Vulnerabilities that can create a need for housing or other assistance become an endless list: abuse, trafficking, mental illness, loss of employment, addiction, medical crisis, divorce, loss of a partner, natural disaster, return from prison, aging, inequitable policies, climate effects, a death in the family, disability, mistakes...

## HOW DOES ONE FIND SHELTER?

- Lane County has an established **coordinated entry** process for helping people find shelter. It begins when they meet with a **front door assessor** who identifies their specific needs and the services they may require. The paths to that front door are varied: It may be word of mouth, postings where one might go to buy food or other supplies, direction from staff at a shelter, or more often, from contact initiated by an **outreach worker**. Outreach workers themselves may provide a front door **assessment** or can tell someone how and where to get an assessment through a community provider.
- A **community services hotline** is available as a 211 phone call. Callers first explain their general location, then select from options that include information about shelter and housing. A series of questions leads to an actual person who can advise next steps. Information is also accessible online at 211info.org.
- Outreach workers may find people needing help at venues where free meals are served, in warming centers, at White Bird Clinic, at a propane pickup point, on the street, at the St Vincent de Paul (SVdP) Service Center, or wherever. The HBNL allows information about veterans to be collected so that services can be particularly targeted for veterans, who are a US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) priority.
- In addition to outreach workers, there are three front door access points where coordinated entry and assessment can begin: Catholic Community Services, SVdP, and Looking Glass. In the initial assessment, the person's name and an evaluation of their needs is placed on the HBNL. If they literally have no place to sleep and if assessment scores them as highly vulnerable, their name is added to the **coordinated wait list** (CWL) with priority for placement. Placement options from the CWL include **emergency/alternative shelter, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing**.
- Because the need for housing is much greater than the current capacity, people on the CWL may still spend months waiting for housing. However, the majority of people in shelters might not have gone through coordinated entry since some shelters do accept drop-ins. Thus, one may be able to get into shelter more quickly than into housing, which can take months or years. The county is preparing a **real-time shelter inventory** so that access to shelter does not require a person to contact every shelter to find out if there is space for them. The number of street tents and car-campers shows that there is not shelter space for everyone.
- If they are newly homeless but have options elsewhere, like couch surfing, or just needing rental move-in assistance, for example, outreach or assessment can help them determine possibilities for a **diversion**<sup>vi</sup> from homelessness. Diversion may mean helping the client identify immediate alternative arrangements or connecting them with services or financial assistance to help them get back to permanent housing. **Prevention**: A slide into homelessness is less expensive for the system and far less traumatic for the individual.

## WHAT KINDS OF HOUSING ARE AVAILABLE?





Housing falls into two time-related categories. **Shorter-term options** are emergency or alternative shelters and transitional housing. **Longer-term options** are rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing. All of these services can be accessed through a referral from the front door assessor, but the emergency/alternative shelters also allow drop-ins if space is available. Although HUD funding may be available for construction of emergency shelters, HUD requires those shelters to have Americans with Disability Act (ADA) access and electricity, increasing the time and money required for construction. Because of the overwhelming and immediate need in Eugene, the city has encouraged temporary



shelters that can be provided more quickly without HUD approval—Conestoga huts, pallet shelters, sheds, tents, and car camping.

The table below shows an increase in housing availability from January 2019 to December 2022.

Type	Description	Jan 2019 capacity	Dec 2022 capacity
Emergency Shelter	Permanent building with ADA accessibility, electricity	597 (referral) 22 (drop-in)	484 (referral) 53 (drop-in)
Alternative Shelter	Conestoga huts, tiny houses, tents, pallet shelters	121 (referral) 106 (drop-in)	239 (referral) 273 (drop-in)
Transitional Housing	Voucher or apartment, limited to 24-month occupancy	99 (referral)	119(referral)
Rapid Rehousing	Voucher based, priority to formerly homeless people/long-term disabilities. Doesn't include wildfire victims.	125 (referral)	161 (referral)
Permanent Supportive Housing	low-barrier shelter, with substance-abuse/mental health challenges. Priority for chronically homeless. Caseworkers and other services as well as shelter.	596 (referral)	804 (referral)
<b>Total</b>	<b>A 28% increase in capacity from 2019-2022 while the increase in the number of homeless was 13%</b>	<b>1666</b>	<b>2133</b>

### EXAMPLES OF RECENT ALTERNATIVE SHELTERS

EveryOne Village, 40 sites current, 100 planned	common areas: kitchen/ common living room		Westmoreland Safe Spot, 20 sites	restrooms, water, trash	 <small>Community Supported Shelters opened the Westmoreland Safe Spot, a rest stop of 18 C experiencing homelessness in March. The communities and services provided at the rest tents to rebuild their lives and move on to more permanent housing. Dana Sparks/The R</small>
310 Garfield 55 cars and RVs	common areas: kitchen/ common living room		410 Garfield, 88 tents, in a large warehouse	common areas: kitchen/ common living room	

EXAMPLES OF RECENT PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING					
Nel, 11 <sup>th</sup> and Charnelton	45 studio apts.		Commons on MLK 2315 MLK,	51 studio apts.	

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

- **Traditional apartments** classified as affordable have been built by a number of agencies, including St. Vincent de Paul, Homes for Good (Lane County's Housing Authority), and by private developers.
- **Square One Villages** is a co-op development in which the land is owned by Square One Land Trust and features tiny homes with long-term lease or lease to own agreements. Residents pay a monthly fee for utilities and maintenance. The **Square One Land Trust** co-op housing includes Emerald Village in Eugene (2019) and Peace Village Co-op under construction in 2023.
- **Accessory dwelling units (ADU)** can become affordable housing, especially with the option of using pre-approved ADU plans that expedite the permit process and reduce other pre-construction costs.<sup>vii</sup> Other types of missing middle housing may also be built to be affordable.

**CHART 1: EXAMPLES OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEW SINCE 2020**

Name	Location	Size	Developer	
Iris Place	1531-1563 River Road	53 units	St Vincent de Paul, 2021	
Hayden Bridge Landing	1975 5th St	69 units	Homes For Good, 2022	
Ketanji Court	11 <sup>th</sup> and Lincoln	59 units	Craig Weicker (Civic Winery), 2022	



Market District Commons	560 Oak	15 veteran units 35 workforce units	Homes For Good, 2020	
Emerald Village	25 N. Polk St	41 units of co-op housing*	Square One Village	
Peace Village Co-op	3060 River Rd	70 units of co-op housing*	Square One Village, by 2023	

\*Co-op housing consists of tiny homes on land trust housing, owned by Square One Village; tenants can rent to own housing, pay a monthly fee for utilities and maintenance

### STRATEGIES, SERVICES, AND ATTITUDE SHIFTS SINCE 2019

- In 2019, the **Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC)** prepared an analysis of the local homeless situation for Lane County and the City of Eugene.<sup>viii</sup> The resulting recommendations have become foundational for a revision of goals and strategies. Among the TAC recommendations is the creation of low-barrier shelters that accept people no matter in what condition they present. These shelters meet people where they are, engaging them through a harm reduction approach to increase their quality of life. If they choose to continue substance abuse, it is to be done off the property. In 2022 the **Navigation Center** opened on River Road as a low-barrier shelter where people should be safe while they begin to navigate the complex system that may help them find stability. The initial months of operations have shown the difficulty of working with the most vulnerable people, especially when drug use is still part of their lives.
- Built for Zero<sup>ix</sup>** is a coalition of communities across the US (including Lane County since 2019) working together to share strategies and support one another in finding solutions. Built for Zero technical support has enabled Lane County staff to create the effective and efficient HBNL. The goal is that homelessness must become rare, brief, and measurable by HBNL data in order to arrive at **functional zero** homelessness. The number may not actually be zero, but must be a stable and very low number where the number of people seeking homes is equal to the number exiting homelessness.

- The **Behavioral Health Stabilization Center**<sup>x</sup> to be constructed on MLK Boulevard will become a significant piece of our healthcare system, giving immediate attention to mentally unstable people who are brought in from the street or voluntarily enter. Presently it is Cahoots or the police and the Lane County jail who provide whatever care they can. The center will divert people from overuse of a system such as the emergency department to a more appropriate and helpful choice.
- **Frequent User System Engagement (FUSE)**, is a program in partnership with Trillium and PacificSource Healthcare to divert chronically homeless who repeatedly and often end up in emergency departments, or arrests, or jail bookings. Guiding them to more appropriate behaviors and assistance has resulted in less stress on the system, and the individual is better served. Since its inception in 2017 FUSE has effectively reduced frequent use and cost.
- In 2021 the **Eugene Chamber of Commerce** produced its own study<sup>xi</sup> of our homeless situation to identify what expertise they might provide. One recommendation was the increased use of data, not only in tracking numbers but also in tracking strategies that were effective as well as those that were not. Currently, with a grant from Lane Community Health Council and working with Lane Workforce Partnership, they are piloting a program to develop 75 to 100 jobs for the homeless. They hope to engage other private sector help to create more transitional jobs. The Chamber is also researching funding sources and bringing in leaders from elsewhere to share strategies.
- In 2022, at the former Naval Reserve site on 13th Avenue, the **Jefferson-Westside Neighbors**, instead of protesting a low-income housing complex, worked to encourage citizens to meet with developers and city staff in coordinating plans and asking and answering questions. Neighbors often went door to door to keep everyone informed. The result will be the development of 80 apartments for those with incomes at or below 50% of the area median income and a Head Start learning center not solely restricted to apartment residents. The **South Hills Neighborhood** was similarly welcoming for the planning of the Girl's Youth House, which opened in 2018.
- In addition to supporting a number of community services for many years, **SVdP** opened the **Hub** on Hwy 99 N in 2020. In partnership between St Vincent and Willamette Family, the Hub provides access to routine and urgent healthcare including mental health services, addiction treatment, and support groups.
- The **Eugene Service Station (ESS)**, which has for years provided food, day shelter, clothing, laundry, showers, supplies, and stabilizing assistance during personal crises, is also the gateway to the SVdP drop-in shelters which include Dawn to Dawn, formerly known as Dawn to Dusk, the Safe Parking Program, and the Egan Warming Centers.
- **Food for Lane County** continues to add capacity for providing food pantries, meals, and produce. In 2019, the first phase of the expansion of the Bailey Hill Warehouse provided additional refrigeration and freezer space, making it easier to accept larger food donations. The second phase will add more refrigeration and a cool room for processing perishable foods.

- Legal decisions from 2018 and 2021 prevent city enforcement of anti-camping laws when the people have no alternative place to be. In response, Mayor Wheeler of Portland in 2022 suggested building huge capacity shelters that could hold many hundreds of people, while Eugene has developed additional smaller Safe Sleep Spots.
- Lane County, although with insufficient housing, currently has more than 30 well-established agencies and services working to assist those in need of housing and other support.
- Eugene's **2022 Five Year Plan**, the **Housing Implementation Pipeline**, includes further investments in preservation, new construction, contributing more land for housing, issuing 6000 construction permits, and increasing downtown housing by 50%.<sup>xii</sup>
- Illustrating how difficult it will be to build enough housing, a survey headlining the Oregonian of March 17, 2023, found that in spite of housing shortages at all levels and the resulting consequence that people are displaced into homelessness, 40% of Oregonians want to slow home construction in their own community.
- To encourage **voting**, agencies or volunteers may help homeless people gather required forms of ID and then direct them to Lane County Elections at 275 W 10th Ave in Eugene, Oregon, 97401-3008. There they can register to vote, using the Elections office address as the address to which their ballot will be sent and where they can later pick it up to vote.<sup>xiii</sup>

#### NEW FUNDING SOURCES SINCE 2019

- Oregon legislators, recognizing that the supply and demand market has not kept up with human needs for housing, passed HB 2001 in 2019, which eliminates some restrictive codes and zoning, allowing more dense neighborhoods with duplex and townhouse configurations.
- Governor Kotek's executive order sets a goal of 36,000 new homes to be built this year, above 22,000 previously planned. Kotek's inaugural address requests \$130,000,000.
- President Biden's goal as of 2022: cut US homelessness by 25% by 2025.
- A coalition of Oregon mayors, including Eugene and Springfield mayors, requested \$123,000,000 per year to address homelessness.
- Portland Metro Area passed a measure allowing them to issue bonds for housing projects, opening a new funding path for Portland and possibly Eugene.
- The Federal CARES act of 2020 (Coronavirus Aid Relief & Economic Security) and the ARP (American Rescue Plans) of 2021 and 2022 sent significant millions of dollars for Oregon's housing plans and grants with more to come next year.
- In March 2023 Governor Tina Kotek signed a package, House Bills 5019 and 2001, which provided \$200,000,000 toward homelessness and housing projects.



- In April 2023, HUD awarded \$4.1M to Lane County's Continuum of Care for homeless service and housing projects.

## LWVUS POSITIONS

**Meeting Basic Human Needs:** Support programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families. (1971, 1989). **Housing supply:** Support policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family. (1990). **Income Assistance:** Support income assistance programs, based on need, that provide decent, adequate standards for food, clothing and shelter. (1970). **Support Services:** Provide essential support services. (1988).

## QUESTIONS

Conflicting ideologies may be roadblocks to solutions for homelessness.

1. Where is the best balance between the following extremes?
  - Low barrier acceptance of addiction OR Enforcing drug-free shelters
  - Camping on city streets OR Large capacity warehouse camping
  - Free services and assistance OR Work requirements for assistance
  - Local responsibility for local problems OR Federal responsibility for systemic problems
2. Have you been aware of these conflicting ideas in Eugene?
3. How has Eugene's homeless problem affected your own life or welfare or the way you feel about living here?
4. Does the LWVUS position give us sufficient basis for action?

This material was prepared by LWVLC members Nancy Mills and Lois Taylor and edited by Merle Bottge and Carol Hildebrand

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## REFERENCES

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- <sup>ii</sup> "The Obvious Solution to Homelessness", Jerusalem Demsas, The Atlantic, January/February 2023
- <sup>iii</sup> Discussion with Eugene City Council on increased rents at Eugene Hotel, Feb. 27, 2023
- <sup>iv</sup> "The undoing of affirmative action", Emily Bazelon, New York Times Magazine, Feb. 19, 2023
- <sup>v</sup> Data on homelessness, Lane County, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/lchsd#!/>
- <sup>vi</sup> <http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/creating-a-successful-diversion-program.pdf>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.eugene-or.gov/4708/Homeowner-ADU-Info>
- <sup>viii</sup> [https://www.eugene-or.gov/DocumentCenter/View/44184/Lane-County-Shelter-Feasibility-Study\\_TAC](https://www.eugene-or.gov/DocumentCenter/View/44184/Lane-County-Shelter-Feasibility-Study_TAC)
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://community.solutions/>
- <sup>x</sup> <https://www.lcstabilizationcenter.com/>
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://www.eugenechamber.com/state-of-homelessness-906350.html>
- <sup>xii</sup> <https://www.eugene-or.gov/4889/Housing-Implementation-Pipeline-HIP>
- <sup>xiii</sup> <https://sos.oregon.gov/voting/Pages/homeless-confidential.aspx>

Interviews with Kate Budd, Lane County Housing Program Manager; James Ewell, Street Outreach and Coordinated Entry Supervisor; Carly Walker, HMIS supervisor, Feb 7 and Feb. 20, 2023

Interviews with Brittany Quick-Warner and Sylvia Barry, Eugene Chamber of Commerce, Nov. 16, 2022