

2020-2025

THE WAY HOME



Chatham County's
Homeless Continuum of Care
Five-Year Plan to Address Homelessness

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Continuum of Care Definition **1**
- Executive Summary **4**
- Homelessness in Chatham County **8**
- Vision & Plan Development Efforts **10**
- The 5 Year Plan
 - Goal 1: The Crisis Response **12**
 - Goal 2: Housing Development **14**
 - Goal 3: Youth Homelessness **16**
 - Goal 4: Chatham County Homeless Camp System ... **17**
 - Goal 5: Cross-System Integration & Redesign **18**

CONTINUUM OF CARE DEFINITION

What is a Continuum of Care?

A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals.

CoCs represent communities of all kinds, including major cities, suburbs, and rural areas. In 2018, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded over \$2.2 billion in federal homeless assistance funds to 390 CoCs in all 50 states, plus DC, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

In 1995, HUD began to require communities to submit a single application for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants to streamline the funding application process, encourage coordination of housing and service providers on a local level, and promote the development of Continuums of Care. By requiring communities to submit a single application, HUD hoped to encourage a more structural and strategic approach to both housing and providing services to homeless people. A CoC would provide this more strategic system by providing homeless people with housing and services appropriate to their range of needs.

Source: National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2010). What is a continuum of care?

The Four Parts of a Continuum

According to HUD, a CoC is “a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness.”

HUD identifies four necessary parts of a continuum:



Outreach, intake, and assessment in order to identify service and housing needs and provide a link to the appropriate level of both.



Emergency shelter to provide an immediate and safe alternative to sleeping on the streets, especially for homeless families with children.



Transitional housing with supportive services to allow for the development of skills that will be needed once permanently housed.



Permanent and permanent supportive housing to provide individuals and families with an affordable place to live, with services if needed.

CoCs are tasked to track and manage the homeless community in their area. One of the most important activities entrusted to CoCs is the biannual count of the homeless population and an annual enumeration of emergency systems, transitional housing units, and beds that make up the homeless assistance systems. These counts provide an overview of the state of homelessness in a CoC, and offer the information necessary to redirect services, funding, and resources as necessary. The CoC also manages these services, offering both prevention strategies and homeless assistance programs to assist those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

How HUD Influences our Local Continuum of Care

HUD expectations and requirements drive many of the decisions made by the Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless in its role to coordinate community efforts to eliminate homelessness.

As a small nonprofit organization, CSAH can lead with information about homelessness and how to solve it, secure annual funds from HUD dollars, and sound the affordable housing alarm.

CSAH on its own does not have the capacity to significantly reduce the homeless situation. *It must be a community priority.* Without making homelessness a priority, our community will continue to talk about the issue but not make adequate progress on this shared community concern.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Geographic Boundaries

The Chatham Homeless Continuum of Care geographic boundaries encompass unincorporated Chatham County and all Chatham County municipalities: Bloomingdale, Garden City, Pooler, Port Wentworth, Savannah, Thunderbolt, Tybee Island, and Vernonburg. The Continuum of Care's contained geographic region allows for local control of critical decisions related to ending homelessness. *Loss of our local CoC would mean merging with the large Georgia multi-county CoC and substantial loss of federal funds.*

Funding

For the 2019/2020 HUD funding year, HUD awarded our CoC \$3,357,485. These funds are distributed to four nonprofit agencies, the Housing Authority of Savannah, and the City of Savannah. Most funds are used for housing subsidies for formerly homeless persons living with a disability. Today, federal expectations of the operation of Continuums of Care include:

- Designation of a *Lead Agency* (or in HUD terms, the Designated Applicant). This entity is the Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless (CSAH), founded by the Georgia Legislature in 1989 as an Authority and since 1993, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Specifically, the CSAH board is the Continuum of Care board and its board members reflect those outlined in its Authority founding legislation.
- A requirement to collect data in a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), that is used by HUD in various ways, including to score CoCs with respect to outcomes and ultimately funding awards.

- A 2018 requirement for a Coordinated Entry System (CES) that prioritizes chronic homeless persons as priority for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH).
- A *Housing First* expectation and utilization where a primary emphasis is to move homeless persons into housing and adjust service approaches to keep them in housing.
- Ongoing engagement activities within the CoC to ensure a common understanding that solutions must be community-wide and cannot be relegated to one agency or one municipality.

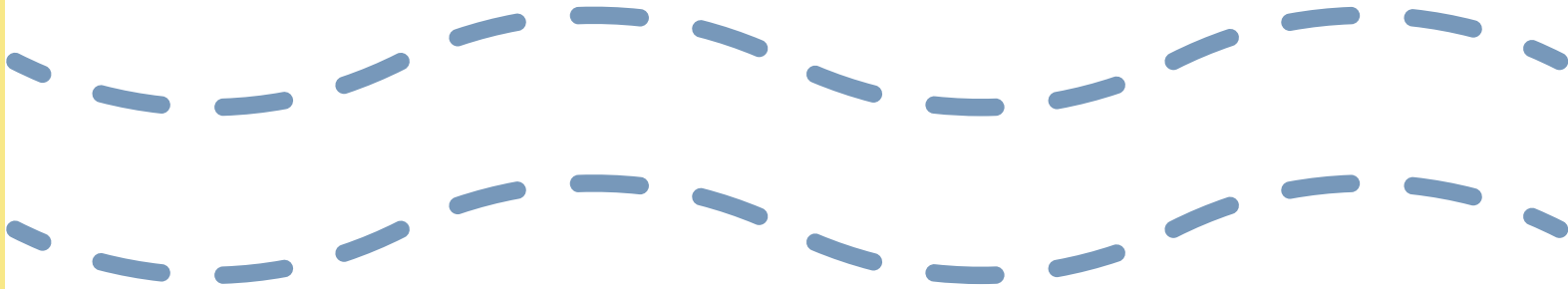
Our Continuum of Care is at risk for continued reductions of essential federal funds due to many years of disagreement among stakeholders about responsibility for solving the homeless issue, lack of investment by those entities critically needed to participate, and low HUD scores.

Local Approaches to Solve Homelessness

Over the past five years, with the support of HUD planning dollars, the Chatham Homeless CoC has implemented numerous approaches to strengthen our community through collaboration, education, and activities to prepare Chatham County for investment in best practice approaches to solve homelessness. Some of these strategies include:

- Early creation of a CoC Advisory Board to work with the CSAH board to increase participation by key decision makers in solving homelessness.
- Securing a national homelessness expert to work with our community for over 18 months to improve CoC outcomes.
- Securing a local consultant to work with nonprofit homeless Service Providers around issues of collaboration, best practice implementation, and discussion of CoC redesign options.
- Extensive sharing of data around how we count our homeless population and what HUD requires our CoC to capture.

- Bringing together elected officials from the City of Savannah, unincorporated Chatham County, and other municipalities to build connections and discuss solutions.
- Holding two educational conferences; one on housing and one on evictions.
- Holding two task force meetings and one community forum to address solving the homeless camp system.
- Creating a Housing Coalition with the primary purpose of increasing the supply of affordable housing for our CoC.
- Creation of the Tiny House Project, a permanent supportive housing community that will serve 71 homeless veterans; the first of its kind in Georgia.



This work has resulted in much stronger community awareness of the local homeless situation and has resulted in some growing agreement on key resolution strategies.

The broader community generally understands that we have a critical shortage of affordable housing for our homeless population. Those who work with the homeless and many of our elected officials and government staff understand that the number of annual evictions contribute to our homelessness challenge.

It is now better understood among decision-making stakeholders that while we can make local decisions to solve homelessness, federal and state funding does, to a strong degree, drive acceptable approaches. For example, the Housing First approach now expected by federal and state funders, is a significant practice change for our CoC service providers long engaged in a Service First approach.

The Five Goals

The Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless board of directors presents five goals to address homelessness over the next five years. While driven by the board, these recommendations need key stakeholder participation to ensure success. It is only by sharing the load of this immense challenge that we will build our success and a stronger, livable Chatham County community.



Goal 1: The Crisis Response

Enhance the current crisis response system that prevents homelessness whenever possible.



Goal 2: Housing Development

Create, grow, and maintain affordable housing for households who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness.



Goal 3: Youth Homelessness

Create a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate menu of services for youth who experience homelessness to prevent them from becoming the next generation of homeless adults.



Goal 4: Chatham County Homeless Camp System

Engage public and private systems to create one or more solutions to the public health issue of allowing 35+ camps without running water, sanitary sewer, or garbage pick-up to exist in our community.



Goal 5: Cross-System Integration & Redesign

Create a healthy, efficient and cost-effective nonprofit service system for the homeless population.

HOMELESSNESS IN CHATHAM COUNTY

How Data Are Collected

The Chatham Homeless Continuum of Care gathers annual data on homelessness through a comprehensive Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Data collected includes client demographic information, the number of homeless persons served annually by service providers, the number of available community shelter beds, and a one-night-per-year Point in Time (PIT) count of all homeless persons living in emergency shelters or unsheltered in locations such as parks and streets. The PIT also counts those living in our unregulated homeless camps, which have totaled between 17 and more than 35 (current count) over the past five years. Fewer camps today reflect the expansion of local development and do not indicate fewer homeless persons but rather, larger camps.

HMIS data capture is required by HUD and overseen by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. HUD-funded agencies are required to capture homeless data. Non-HUD funded agencies serving the homeless in our CoC are expected to capture these data but do not uniformly do so.

** Service includes (but is not limited to) emergency shelter, feeding sites, case management, mental health/substance abuse counseling, coordinated entry assessments, referrals, permanent supportive housing.*

How We Count Our Homeless Population

Service Count

One homeless person using one service* in one 12-month period, unduplicated.

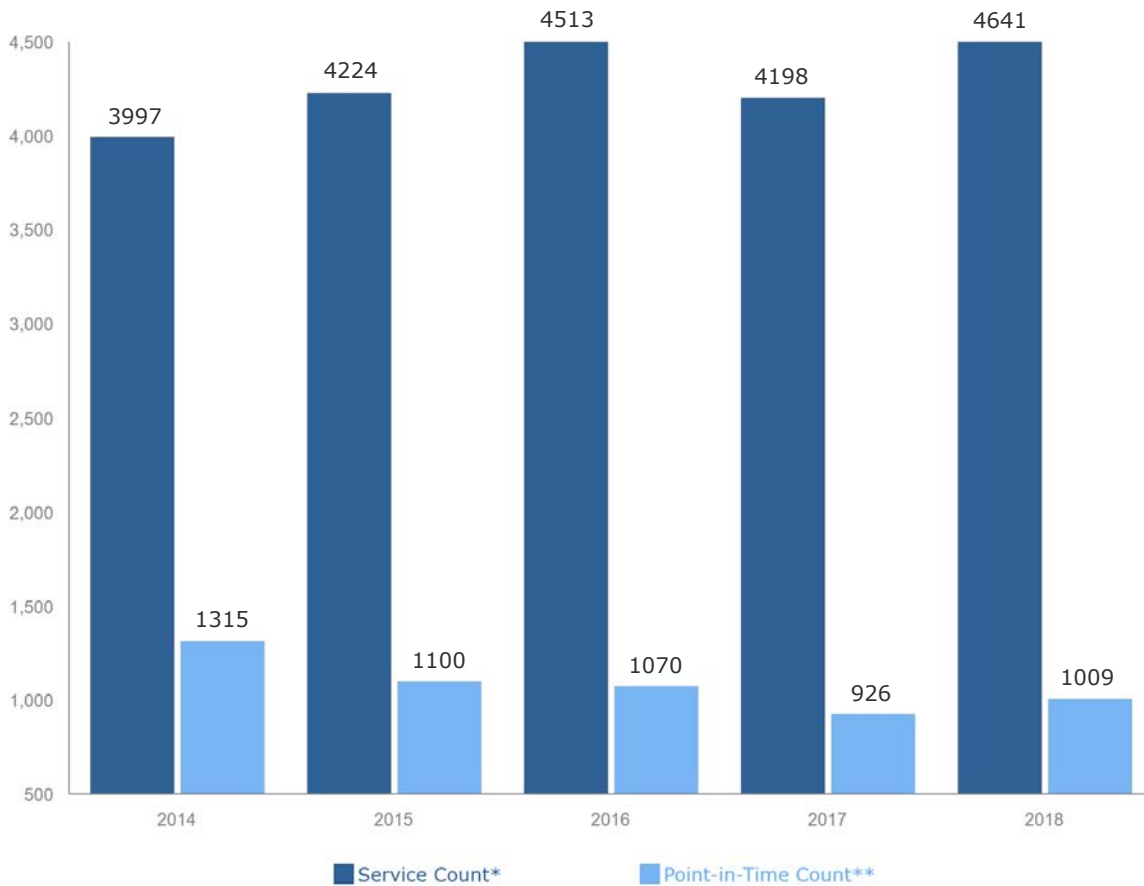
Point in Time Count

(via a one-night count)

This count primarily captures those individuals living in homeless camps, on the streets, and in and out of emergency shelters.

The Data

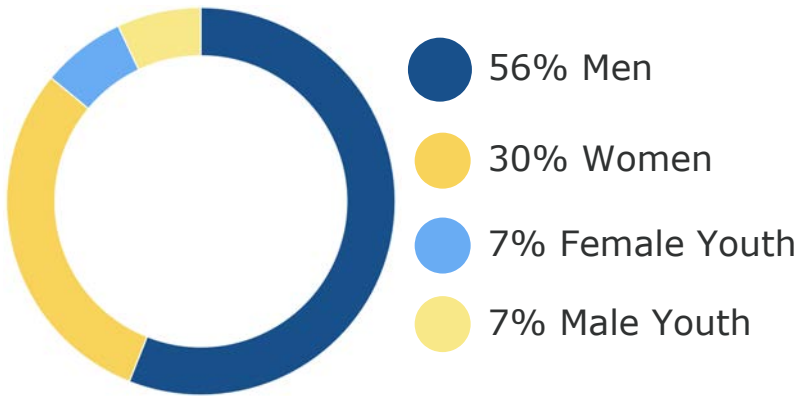
Homeless Numbers: Service Count & Point-in-Time Count, 2014 - 2018



* Includes 289 households in permanent supportive housing. These individuals are formerly homeless persons living with a disability and are provided a subsidy to remain in housing.

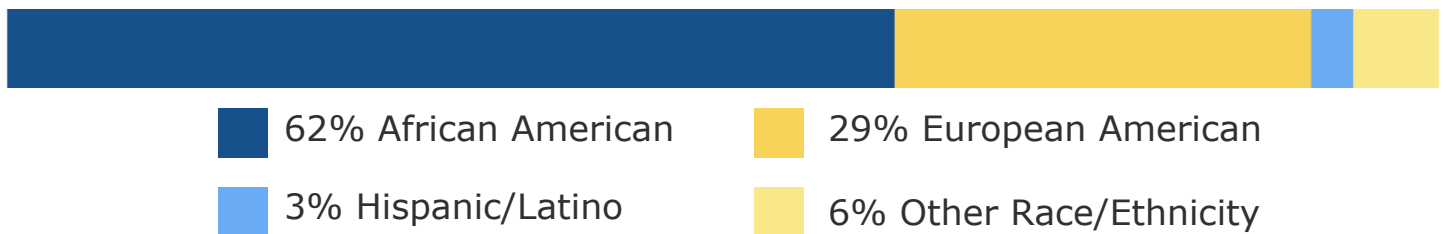
** Does not include students enrolled in the Savannah-Chatham Public School System and counted as homeless under a separate HUD definition of homelessness.

Homeless Numbers: Demographic Information from Service Count, 2018



678
Number of chronically homeless persons

280
Number of homeless veterans



VISION AND PLAN DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

The Vision

The Chatham Homeless Continuum of Care Five-Year Plan to Address Homelessness articulates a vision for Chatham County, Georgia that everyone in the county can share. In this historic region that gave us pioneering Juliette Gordon Low and the visionary city planner James Oglethorpe, we believe obstacles can be overcome. We believe that ending homelessness is possible and that everyone residing in Chatham County should have a decent place to live.



Plan Development

The last 10-year plan to end homelessness, which began in 2003, was a collaborative effort of the Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless (CSAH) and the City of Savannah. Today, a new 5-year plan incorporates a broader geographic area, substantially more stakeholders, new best practices, new HUD expectations of Continuums of Care, and a shorter timeline.

With the support of HUD planning dollars, CSAH has spent the last five years preparing for this new stage of the Chatham Homeless Continuum of Care. This work has included emphasizing local government engagement, improving service providers' work with clients, encouraging systems collaboration efforts, and engaging the business community and local congregations.

CSAH has driven significant local media coverage, which has helped elevate the dialogue on homelessness. Importantly, substantial advocacy work focused on efforts to change the community dialogue from *'the problem of the homeless'* to one that focuses on *'our affordable housing challenge'* has been pushed forward. Additional work by CSAH includes best practice efforts to shift community practice from Service First to Housing First and utilizing a Harm Reduction approach. A key impediment to a shared vision to resolve homelessness is limited engagement and investment by all municipalities in the Chatham Homeless Continuum of Care.

While not an exhaustive list, this effort includes feedback from the United Way of the Coastal Empire and from the business community, including the Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Business Association, the Downtown Neighborhood Association, and the Tourism Leadership Council. Other key participants in efforts over the past five years include unincorporated Chatham County, nonprofit homeless service providers, CSAH board members, and local and external experts who have addressed this issue beyond the Chatham County geographic area. It is this cumulative effort that has driven the goals of our new 5-year plan.

Note that we have honored stakeholder feedback about not developing *'another long plan that sits on a shelf'* and we hope you will agree that this plan is clear, concise and intended for the reader to quickly grasp the magnitude of our challenge and support the recommendations herein.



THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN: 2020-2025



GOAL 1: THE CRISIS RESPONSE

Enhance the current crisis system that prevents homelessness whenever possible.

Goal 1 Overview

A HUD-mandated Coordinated Entry System (CES) was put in place in January 2018 and is operated as a single point of entry by CSAH at 761 Wheaton Street, Savannah, GA. CES assessments of homeless persons prioritize chronic homeless individuals for permanent supportive housing (PSH) openings. There is a substantial shortage of PSH options.

Other affordable housing options for homeless persons not designated as chronically homeless are urgently needed and must be developed. Additionally, we must substantially strengthen efforts to reduce high levels of evictions, as these create a false sense of housing availability for this population. High eviction rates dramatically increase costs to serve this population as a result of the revolving door of providing services to many of the same persons/families repeatedly.

A focus on prevention and diversion throughout our system is important. A Prevention Fund is essential to support households and landlords in avoiding eviction and keeping individuals and families housed.

Goal 1 Objectives & Recommended Responsible Parties

Objective 1.1

Strengthen knowledge and cross-train referral staff at 311 and 211 with the CoC Coordinated Entry System to ensure no wrong door for consumers of homeless service. Determine if all three systems are necessary.

Objective 1.1 Responsible Parties

United Way of the Coastal Empire, City of Savannah, CSAH

.....



Objective 1.2

Triple the United Way Community Fund that is used for prevention and diversion resources for individuals and families in Chatham County. Create an oversight team of municipalities for fund allocation and best practices and to further municipality engagement in prevention.

Objective 1.2 Responsible Parties

All municipalities in Chatham County and unincorporated Chatham County (determine allocation to fund based on population formula)

.....



GOAL 2: HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Create, grow, and maintain affordable housing for households that are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness.

Goal 2 Overview

A stable and affordable home for everyone in Chatham County is the vision of this Plan. To realize this vision, a range of permanent housing options must be developed for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

For some, a short-term housing subsidy and stabilizing case management is all that is needed to regain stable housing. For those living with a disability, permanent supportive housing has proven to be a cost-efficient and effective intervention. For the rest, who are struggling with high rents and low-paying jobs, subsidized, affordable housing will prevent and end homelessness.



Investment in a range of permanent, affordable housing options creates strong families and neighborhoods. Having in place a specific organization whose mission is to develop housing for the homeless throughout Chatham County is necessary to maintain Housing First as a key priority.

Goal 2 Objectives & Recommended Responsible Parties

Objective 2.1

Create a Community Development Corporation (CDC) specifically to develop housing for the homeless population. Ensure the CDC works closely with the newly formed Housing Coalition for a strong combined effort to increase the affordable housing supply.

Objective 2.1 Responsible Parties

Housing Coalition, municipality and unincorporated Chatham County leadership, CSAH

Objective 2.2

Determine and agree upon number of housing units needed. Create a countywide, permanent housing fund to support and incentivize development of permanent affordable rental housing.

Objective 2.2 Responsible Parties

Housing Coalition, Chamber of Commerce, municipality and unincorporated Chatham County leadership, CSAH

Objective 2.3

Explore and implement innovative solutions for increasing permanent housing options including home sharing, roommate matching, landlord incentives, master leasing, and options for ex-offenders, youth, and female-headed households.

Objective 2.3 Responsible Parties

CoC service providers (Union Mission, Economic Opportunity Authority, Inner City Night Shelter, Salvation Army, Housing Authority of Savannah)



GOAL 3: YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Create a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate menu of services for youth who experience homelessness to prevent them from becoming the next generation of homeless adults.

Goal 3 Overview

Unaccompanied youth, disconnected from a trusted adult, face unique developmental challenges and dangers on the street. In 2017, the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System (SCCPSS) documented 1001 homeless youth in their system. Note that these data are over and above that referenced in Section IV of this Plan.

Youth need a full complement of accessible services to become stably housed and successful in adulthood. We must do a better job of providing resources for youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who currently access our CoC.

Goal 3 Objectives & Recommended Responsible Parties

Objective 3.1

Increase available unaccompanied youth beds to 50.

Objective 3.1 Responsible Parties

Leadership in all Chatham County municipalities, Park Place Outreach, SCCPSS

Objective 3.2

Increase the capacity of one additional Service Provider to serve youth.

Objective 3.1 Responsible Parties

Unincorporated Chatham County leadership, SCCPSS





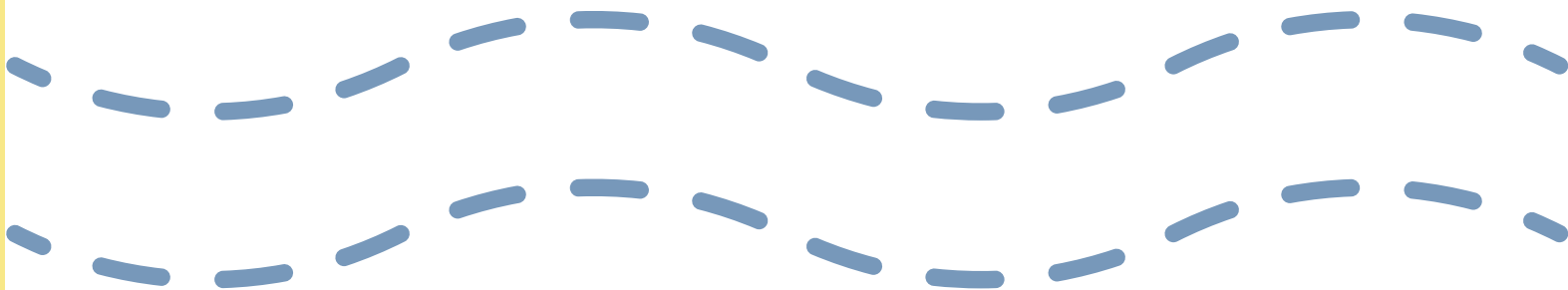
GOAL 4: CHATHAM COUNTY HOMELESS CAMP SYSTEM

Engage public and private systems to create one or more solutions to the public health issue of allowing 35 camps without running water, sanitary sewer, or garbage pick-up to exist in our community.

Goal 4 Overview

Despite much conversation, paid consultants and multiple previous community stakeholder recommendations, a few systemic elements within our CoC remain stubbornly entrenched. This includes our 35 permanent homeless camps, many located near business/tourist areas.

Conversations with community leaders about solutions reflect concerns in the areas of legality, cost, and long-term responsibility. We remain hopeful that previous stakeholder recommendations will be considered soon.



Goal 4 Objectives & Recommended Responsible Parties

Objective 4.1

Form a short-term homeless camp task force made up of one influential elected official and one top staff person from all eight governmental bodies and unincorporated Chatham County. Use an external consultant to facilitate creation of a plan and resources to eliminate or redesign the homeless camp system in Chatham County.

Objective 4.1 Responsible Parties

CSAH hired consultant, CSAH/CoC board



GOAL 5: CROSS-SYSTEM INTEGRATION & REDESIGN

Create a healthy, efficient, and cost-effective nonprofit service system for the homeless population.

Goal 5 Overview

Healthy and efficient nonprofit sectors contribute greatly to the strength of any community. Some elements of these strengths are reflected in the financial health of nonprofits, the number of nonprofits, and how well they collaborate with each other, local government, and the business community to address needed social change to make the community healthy for all members.

We believe the United Way of the Coastal Empire must strengthen their leadership of the Chatham County nonprofit sector. An agency one step removed from the daily work of the Homeless Continuum of Care can insist on needed change for the good of the community.

HUD planning dollars over the past five years have been used to address strengthening the homeless-serving nonprofit sector with limited success. Leadership from the United Way is needed to make a difference in supporting redesign over the next five years.



Goal 5 Objectives & Recommended Responsible Parties

Objective 5.1

Create a Chatham County Homeless Service Provider Master plan that redesigns the homeless-serving system incorporating the optimal number and size of agencies, service types, locations, and best practice service priorities.

Objective 5.1 Responsible Parties

CSAH hired consultant, United Way of the Coastal Empire, City of Savannah, unincorporated Chatham County, CSAH/CoC board

Objective 5.2

Coordinate funding efforts of homeless-serving agencies among the United Way of the Coastal Empire, unincorporated Chatham County, and the City of Savannah to ensure funded agencies participate in HMIS and follow HUD best practice expectations.

Objective 5.2 Responsible Parties

CSAH hired consultant, United Way of the Coastal Empire, City of Savannah, unincorporated Chatham County, CSAH/CoC board





Chatham County Continuum of Care

Five-Year Plan to Address Homelessness

For questions about this plan or ways you can address homelessness in Chatham County, contact:

Cindy Kelley
Executive Director, CSAH
912.644.7945
ckelley@homelessauthority.org

