



STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

HOMELESSNESS IN DOWNTOWN LITTLETON



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Executive Summary

Homelessness is a critical issue affecting communities nationwide, and Downtown Littleton is no exception. The complexity of this issue means that there is not one cure-all solution. Instead, this issue requires many tactics, frequent check-ins, and clear and constant communication with the community.

This report, prepared at the request of the City of Littleton, presents the essential findings and stakeholder feedback on the issue of homelessness in Downtown Littleton, Colorado. The information and anecdotes were gathered through a community forum, one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders, and an online survey over two months. Key stakeholders included residents, business owners, local agencies, South Suburban Parks & Recreation, and non-profit representatives.

The ultimate goal of the engagement with key stakeholders was to acquire qualitative data that can be paired with currently collected data to help influence and prioritize programs and services for this part of the community. As we strive for meaningful change, this collaborative effort between stakeholders and the community is vital in shaping effective strategies to address homelessness in Downtown Littleton, Colorado. Together; we can continue to build a more inclusive and supportive environment for all Littleton community members, businesses, and visitors.



Our purpose is to acquire qualitative data by surveying stakeholders, convening a community forum, and relaying feedback from community members.

Executive Summary

What We Heard:

When asked to identify the top three issues in Littleton, survey respondents cited a lack of affordable housing, the struggle to maintain clean public spaces, and concern for business and personal property downtown. Homelessness was named as a significant problem, while respondents appreciated collaborative responses from community partners. Stakeholders shared personal stories during the community forum, highlighting the complexity of homelessness and the need for empathy and understanding in approaching the issue. The meeting facilitated open discussions, provided education on current initiatives, and allowed multiple stakeholders to articulate their perspectives.

Recommendations from the Community:

As expected, stakeholders shared diverse and, at times, conflicting recommendations. Some would like the city to enhance homeless outreach services, implement a co-responder street outreach model, and create day-use areas for severe weather to ensure safety and provide assistance. Others would like to see an increased police presence, implementation of non-uniformed response teams, and a focus on cleaning up downtown public spaces. Shared recommendations included prioritizing affordable housing initiatives, expanding funding for homeless services, and conducting public awareness campaigns to promote empathy and understanding within the community. Several stakeholders requested that the city hold additional community forums to engage additional stakeholders.

Conclusions:

Stakeholder feedback, survey results, and community forum input offer valuable insights for the City of Littleton to develop effective and compassionate strategies to address pressing community needs. Addressing multiple needs around increased homelessness in Downtown Littleton requires nuanced reflection and opportunities to share concerns. Together, diverse stakeholders can address complex obstacles and support collaborative efforts to ensure Littleton is a vibrant and welcoming community for all.



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Methodology

Information gathered was primarily qualitative, with a small number of Key Stakeholders with connection to Downtown Littleton. The data for this report was collected through three primary channels:

- **One-on-One Meetings:** Individual meetings and phone calls were arranged with people the city of Littleton identified as key stakeholders in Downtown Littleton. Meetings were structured around getting to know the individual and receiving feedback on questions on the Google Forms Survey relating to concerns about a rise in homelessness, awareness of current support programs, and hopes for a community meeting. Individual meetings and phone calls allowed face-to-face interactions, fostering open dialogue and discussions. Participants shared personal experiences, anecdotes, and emotions related to the issue, providing rich and qualitative insights that may not be captured in surveys. Individual meetings also helped build relationships and trust between stakeholders and data collectors. This trust can encourage participants to be more open and honest in their responses.
- **Google Forms Survey:** A structured questionnaire was distributed to a broader segment of the community, including residents, business owners, non-profit representatives, and government representatives. The survey sought to gauge perceptions, experiences, and suggestions about homelessness in Downtown Littleton. Survey responses provided more quantitative-focused answers and offered anonymity, encouraging participants to be more candid, particularly when addressing sensitive topics. Additionally, the survey helped standardize questions and response options, facilitating comparisons and data analysis.
- **Community Forum:** A community meeting was organized to bring together stakeholders for education and discussion on the issue of homelessness. Over 50 people attended the meeting, including local business owners, non-profit service providers, city representatives, and people who are formerly homeless. Attendees provided valuable insights and personal anecdotes. A community forum offered multiple benefits, including increased community engagement, two-way communication, increased trust, sharing concerns, and fostering collaborative problem-solving. It also provided a platform for stakeholders to express their opinions and share feedback resulting in a stronger sense of community ownership and empowerment.

Survey Feedback

Question: "Tell me about your history with Littleton."

Feedback: From this group, two people lived in Littleton for over five years, one for over ten years, three people for over 20 years, and three people had multiple (more than one) roles in Littleton, including growing up in Littleton, owning businesses, and serving on boards. This diverse stakeholder group has a history and deep connections to the town of Littleton, which was important to establish before embarking on tougher questions.

*"I'm excited about the city's capacity to work collaboratively with multiple sectors and jurisdictions to craft and implement solutions to social changes."
-Local Non-Profit Leader*

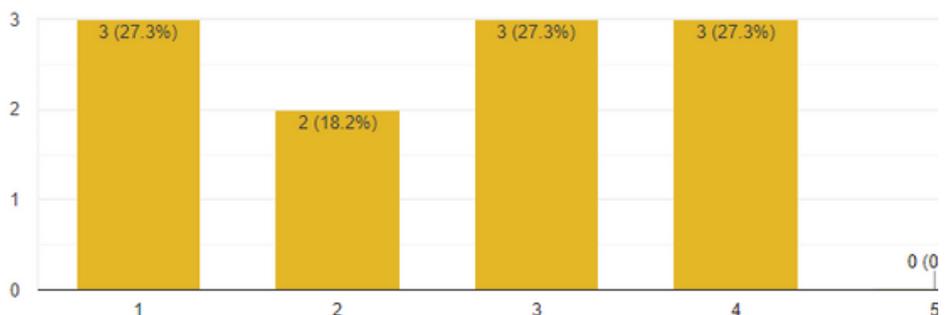
Question: "What are you most proud and excited about in Littleton?"

Feedback: Respondents had a variety of answers to this question. Their responses included being proud of how Littleton has changed and grown. Another common response was phrased well by a respondent who stated that they *"we're proud of the way that Littleton has continued to thrive as a downtown despite economic concerns and a pandemic."* Several respondents were proud of and excited about how the town collaborated with the business community.

Question: "Have you had any safety concerns for yourself or your business?" (1 being little to no concern and 5 being a major concern)

Feedback: When asked to place their concerns regarding safety for themselves or their businesses on a scale of 1 to 5, respondents had an average response rate of approximately 2.5. The answers can be seen in the bar graph below.

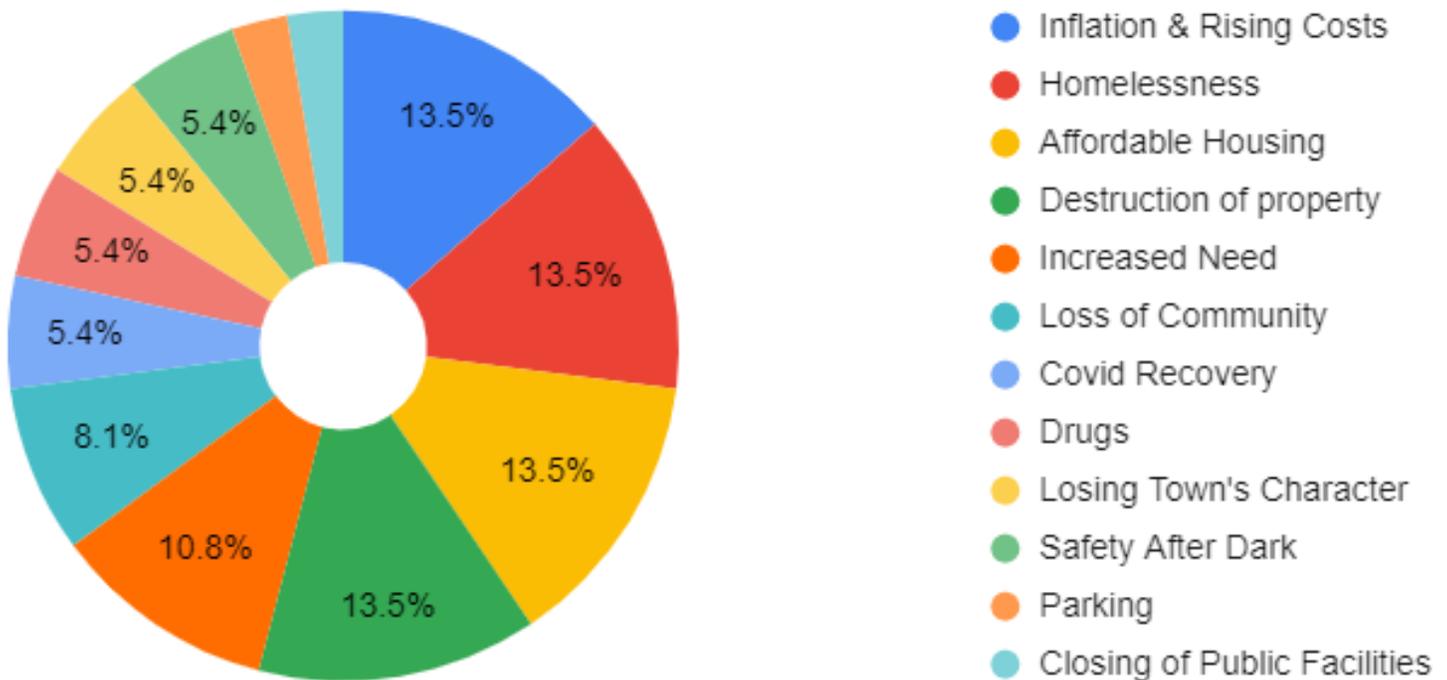
These findings suggest that concerns related to safety in the community vary widely. Some feel a sense of threat, and others do not. Further questions need to be asked to understand better what makes some feel safe and others unsafe.



Survey Feedback

Several respondents shared a lack of adequate available support services. Some shared concern for a sense of a loss of community in Downtown Littleton. Various responses indicate that top concerns are spread across multiple issue areas. However, many of the reactions displayed in the pie chart below, such as a lack of affordable housing, increased need for support, and delayed recovery from COVID-19 contributed to an increased number of people experiencing homelessness in Littleton and surrounding communities.

Top Concerns in Downtown Littleton



Question: "What are the top three issues you or your business face?"

Feedback: Among the top three issues identified by participants, the majority highlighted the following concerns:

- Lack of affordable housing and rentals
- Homelessness
- Property damage and hygiene concerns due to litter and debris in public spaces

The data indicates that concerns in Downtown are nuanced and influenced by various factors. While some safety concerns may be associated with homelessness, the overall sentiment is not dominated by a lack of safety. Residents, business owners, and community partners share a desire for communities that are affordable, safe, and provide needed support services. Additionally, public facilities and community character are important.

Survey Feedback

Question: "Has the issue of homelessness impacted your or your business."

Feedback: In the survey, nine out of eleven respondents indicated that the issue of homelessness had impacted them or their business, while three respondents reported no direct impact. One respondent who answered "yes" shared a notable insight: *"Not that I can directly state. The employee and tenant mentioned above didn't leave my business due to their experience, but that doesn't negate the impact of the effect of the unhoused population in Downtown Littleton on a daily basis."* This response underscores that homelessness has indirect effects. These effects may not always be immediately apparent but can still influence business operations and the overall environment in the community.

Question: "What actions have you taken in response to this issue, if any?"

Feedback: Based on the provided responses, different individuals and organizations have taken various actions and initiatives in response to the issue of homelessness. Some of the notable actions include:

- **Community Outreach and Forums:** One business owner held a community forum on homelessness. This person also leads quarterly community outreach initiatives targeting community business leaders to engage them in addressing the issue.
- **Partnerships with All Health Network:** Collaboration with the All Health Network indicates efforts to provide behavioral health services to individuals experiencing homelessness, recognizing the increased need for such services in this population.
- **Training Initiatives:** A few business owners mentioned they held staff trainings covering de-escalation techniques and crisis evaluation. Business owners who did this received positive feedback from their employees.
- **Engagement with Loitering Individuals:** Direct interactions with individuals who are loitering were carried out, with allied police support when necessary.
- **Physical Security Measures:** Various physical security measures were taken by business owners. One respondent described "locking buildings, disconnecting electrical outlets, installing more lighting, and boarding up areas and windows" to deter homelessness-related issues.
- **Financial Investments:** In one case, significant financial investments involved "spending \$30,000 on a locking system" to prevent trespassing.
- **Reporting and Communication:** Instances of reporting concerns to the police and sharing concerns with the council were mentioned.

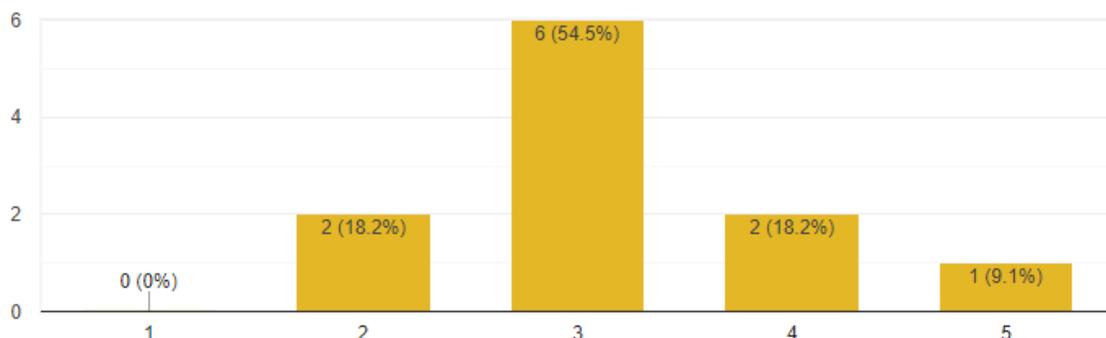
Survey Feedback

Question: "Please identify your needs being met successfully by the city."

Feedback: Based on responses, the following needs of the respondents are being successfully met by the city:

- **Feeling Supported:** The city's co-responder program and efforts to educate the community and engage with stakeholders have contributed to support and collaboration among respondents.
- **Responsive City Services:** The city is recognized for its responsiveness when called about incidents, issues, or tenant improvements, engaging in dialogues promptly.
- **Winter Assistance:** The city has been proactive during winter by assisting those impacted by snow and ice and helping people find alternative places.
- **Increased Police Presence:** Respondents have observed an increased police presence, contributing to a sense of safety and security in public spaces.
- **Collaborative Efforts:** The city has facilitated direct collaboration with businesses and stakeholders, allowing for the implementation of the Tri-Cities Homelessness Action Plan.
- **Responsiveness of Police Department:** Respondents appreciate the responsiveness and efforts of the police department, which contributes to their feeling of safety.
- **Communication and Information:** The city is commended for being easy to talk to and providing accessible information to residents and businesses.

Littleton appears to be successfully meeting many community needs. Simultaneously, knowledge of the scope of available services is incomplete. Proactive, collaborative efforts across city departments in partnership with non-profit services are seen as most helpful. When asked to rank how responsive the city is to their concerns (1 being "city is not responsive" and 5 being "city is responsive"), most respondents selected 3. This suggests there is room to strengthen the administration and communication of available services to a wider public.



Survey Feedback

Question: "What local assets, if any, do you hope to see leveraged in response to the issue of homelessness?"

Feedback: In response to the issue of homelessness, stakeholders made the following suggestions based on their own knowledge of community assets:

- **Co-responder Program:** "Utilize the co-responder program to support individuals experiencing homelessness."
- **Increased Education from the City:** "More education about causes and preventative measures for homelessness can create awareness and understanding within the community, fostering a more empathetic and informed approach."
- **AllHealth Mobile Response Unit:** "Leverage the resources of AllHealth's mobile response team can enhance their ability to respond to homelessness-related issues and provide timely assistance."
- **Mental Health Professionals:** "Involving more mental health professionals is crucial in providing appropriate support and services to individuals experiencing homelessness, particularly those with mental health challenges."
- **Increased Police Presence and Foot Patrols:** "Implement more police presence and officers on foot in the area. Address safety concerns and create a sense of security for residents, businesses, and families."
- **Effective Relocation Strategies:** "Conduct assessments to determine effective strategies for moving unhoused individuals to places where their needs can be better addressed while focusing on the experiences of businesses and employees in Downtown Littleton."
- **Continued Tri-Cities Homelessness Action Plan Collaboration:** "Ensure effective collaboration among different entities can provide valuable support and improve referrals for unhoused individuals to locations with family and support systems."
- **Block Grants or ARPA Funding:** "Increase city support for individuals experiencing homelessness through block grants or funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to enhance resources for shelters, food pantries, and public restrooms."

Stakeholders have a variety of ideas on leveraging assets. Additionally, the responses showed that stakeholders may not be fully informed on what assets are and are not available. Community feedback on possible solutions can provide generative opportunities for creative solutions to pressing problems. Also, responses indicate that further communication about possible services and partnerships would expand access and support for those in need.

Survey Feedback

Question: "Are you aware of the current steps/actions being implemented from the Tri-Cities Homelessness Action Plan? If yes, please elaborate below. If so, what is working well? What is missing?"

Feedback: Based on responses, some know about the actions and steps implemented by the Tri-Cities Homelessness Action Plan. At the same time, knowledge of the plan, actions taken, and future plans are not complete. Here are the key points:

- **Tri-Cities Homelessness Action Plan Implemented Actions:**

- The "Ready to Work" program has locations in Aurora and Boulder. A third location is being launched in Littleton.
- The resource navigation center, centralized and local, has progressed, with the Request for Proposal (RFP) recently closed.
- Discussions around safe parking and tiny home options have occurred.
- A lived experience advisory board has been formed.
- All Health Network has established a street outreach team and peer recovery coach.

- **Perceptions of What is Missing or Ineffective:**

- Some respondents express concerns about the slow rollout of services and plan implementation.
- Emergency shelter capacity and affordable housing increases are areas that some believe need more attention.
- There are differing views on whether the plan addresses the root cause of homelessness, with some associating drug addiction and homelessness.

- **Perceptions of What is Working Well:**

- Respondents are excited that the plan is moving forward, with progress being made on different initiatives.
- The mobile unit is seen as inspiring and likely beneficial.

"My role is to implement the Tri-Cities Homelessness Action Plan. I believe it holds significant potential to increase ground-level services. Two areas that are not addressed in the plan are 1) emergency shelter capacity and 2) affordable housing increases."
-Mike Sandgren, Tri-Cities Homelessness Services Coordinator

Overall, it is evident that the Tri-Cities Homelessness Action Plan has promising initiatives underway that are already having an impact. Collaborative efforts are seen as effective in addressing this regional issue. A primary opportunity for improvement is in improving broad communication about the initiative and available resources.

Survey Feedback

"I do not think you are going to get honest feedback from many businesses or community members because it is a partisan issue, and anyone voicing anything that one side does not like can/will likely get thrown under the bus and dragged. Complicated issue, and there are many versions of the unhoused community. I have two family members that are homeless, so I feel I can speak to it from multiple perspectives."

-Community Member

"I would like to see the city increase its supports for individuals who are homeless through the use of block grants or ARPA funding. Lack of shelters, limited food pantries and public restrooms leave individuals stuck on the streets and creating camps."

-AllHealth Network Employee

"Camping and loitering ban. Make it a nonfriendly environment for troublemakers. This is different from people down on their luck. I should be able to safely walk my kids down main street and not worry about used needles on the ground."

-Owner of Commercial Building on Main Street

"We need to listen to concerns but be able to take the concerns and formulate a plan. The merchants are only one component of the people that need to be heard. Neighbors and consumers are another component. Baby steps with a long-range plan can make things better for all of our residents and businesses."

-Member of the Littleton Downtown Development Authority

"It's a difficult situation and needs thoughtful and careful planning ASAP. But I hope to see more police presence and officers on foot in the area. Some assessment of what is effective in moving these people out of this area and into places where their needs are better addressed should focus on the businesses and employees' experience in downtown Littleton. We are the contributors and taxpayers that keep this area vibrant."

-Community Member

"I believe the Tri-Cities Homeless Action Plan is a robust initial effort to increase the community's capacity to manage the issue at the ground level. While I believe in the potential of the plan, I do think that further work will need to be completed to more fully address challenges related to homelessness."

-Mike Sandgren, Tri-Cities Homelessness Services Coordinator

Community Forum

On the morning of July 11, the Illiff Institute for Religion, Politics, and Culture, in collaboration with the City of Littleton, conducted a community forum centered around the pressing issue of homelessness. The primary objectives of the forum were to provide attendees with an understanding of the city's homeless action plan, engage in open dialogue with key stakeholders, and gather feedback from community members. It is estimated that more than 50 participants were present, including several employees of Littleton. This forum served as a significant platform to gather valuable insights and perspectives from key stakeholders, shedding light on the complex issue of homelessness in Downtown Littleton and paving the way for informed decision-making and potential solutions.

The presence of various stakeholders, including business owners, direct service providers, and residents at the community forum indicates a diverse and engaged group of attendees. Here is a breakdown of city officials in attendance:

City Staff in Attendance:

1. Dennis Quinn - Library Director
2. Jeff Wren - Sergeant LPD (Littleton Police Department)
3. Luke Bishard - Corporal LPD (Littleton Police Department)
4. David Gilbert - Senior Media Strategist
5. Jamie Crout - Economic Development Specialist
6. JC Bonilla-Acosta - Code Compliance Manager
7. Mike Gent - Deputy City Manager
8. Jim Becklenberg - City Manager
9. Samma Fox - Assistant City Manager
10. Elizabeth Watts - Management Fellow



City Council Members in Attendance:

1. Gretchen Rydin - Mayor Pro Tem
2. Stephen Barr - District III
3. Pam Grove - At Large
4. Jerry Valdes - District II



Non-City Staff:

1. Dave - Park Ranger from South Suburban Parks and Recreation
2. Ben - Park Ranger from South Suburban Parks and Recreation

Community Forum

The presence of city staff and city council members at the forum indicates a commitment from local authorities to engage with the community and address the issue of homelessness. Additionally, the attendance of non-city staff, such as park rangers from South Suburban Parks and Recreation, shows collaboration and interest from other organizations in finding solutions. This diverse representation at the forum ensured a comprehensive perspective on the matter and underscored the importance placed on community engagement in addressing homelessness in Downtown Littleton.

During the initial part of the community forum, attendees heard informative presentations from key individuals. Sergeant Luke Bishard provided insights into the Littleton Police Department's approach when handling criminal and noncriminal calls, shedding light on their strategies in dealing with various situations. Melissa Bortnem, the All Health Network Co-Responder, and Andrea Martin, the MRU/CRT (Mobile Response Unit/Crisis Response Team) programs' supervisor, shared their expertise and experiences in addressing mental health and crisis-related issues within the community. Additionally, the forum heard a powerful success story from Josh, a formerly unhoused individual who shared his journey of overcoming homelessness. Following these presentations, the meeting transitioned to an interactive segment, where community members were encouraged to respond to five questions and record their responses:

- 1. Please share your name and briefly describe your relationship/history with the city of Littleton.**
- 2. What are you most proud of and excited about in Littleton?**
- 3. What are your top concerns in Littleton?**
- 4. Has the issue of homelessness impacted you or your business? What actions have you taken, if any?**
- 5. What resources, if any, do you want to see leveraged in response to the issue of homelessness?**

The interactive portion of the meeting facilitated active engagement and meaningful contributions from attendees, ensuring that a broad range of perspectives and ideas were heard and considered in shaping potential solutions for homelessness in Downtown Littleton.



Community Forum Feedback

Based on the stakeholder responses, here are the themes and key findings related to what stakeholders are most proud of and excited about in Littleton, their top concerns in the city, and the resources they want to see leveraged in response to homelessness:

****Statements reflect feedback from stakeholders, not recommendations****

Themes and Key Findings - What Stakeholders Are Proud of and Excited About in Littleton:

- **Sense of Community and Engagement:** Community members take pride in the strong sense of community and engagement within Littleton, including community events, programs, and the involvement of residents in local issues.
- **Arts, Culture, and Recreation:** Littleton's art and cultural scene, community programs, recreational options, and natural open spaces were highlighted as sources of pride.
- **Safety and Charm:** The charming main street, walkability, and efforts to make Littleton family-friendly create a safe and welcoming environment were noted by several attendees.
- **Community Reputation and Collaboration:** Stakeholders appreciate the city's reputation for effectively engaging with issues and the willingness of residents and businesses to work together.

Themes and Key Findings - Top Concerns in Littleton:

Affordability and Housing: Stakeholders are concerned about the cost of living, the lack of affordable housing options, and the need for smart growth planning.

Homelessness and Drug Issues: Respondents often tie "homelessness, drug-related problems, and safety" together. Research shows that this is not an accurate assessment, but it is important to know that this perception comes through in interviews.

Public Safety and Code Compliance: Concerns were raised about trash, litter, vandalism, public facilities, and a desire for enhanced security measures after dark.

Perceptions and Attitudes: Some attendees highlighted a need for greater empathy, understanding, and support for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Community Forum Feedback

Themes and Key Feedback - Impact of Homelessness on Stakeholders and Their Actions:

1. **Business and Safety Concerns:** Homelessness has impacted several businesses in Downton Littleton through disruptions, vandalism, and safety concerns for their employees and customers.
2. **Cleanliness and Security:** Several attendees described taking action by increasing security measures, cleaning up their properties, and promoting cleanliness while engaging with the unhoused community.
3. **Desire for Services and Solutions:** Several attendees expressed the need for increased police presence, services for the unhoused, and initiatives to prevent homelessness through eviction prevention and supportive programs.

Themes and Key Feedback - Resources Stakeholders Want to See Leveraged in Response to Homelessness:

1. **Housing and Shelters:** Stakeholders want to see increased availability of affordable housing and rental units, overnight shelters, and increased day-use areas for severe weather events.
2. **Mental Health and Co-Responders:** There is a desire for non-uniformed response teams (co-responders) to handle mental health crises and in-patient detox and recovery services.
3. **Education and Prevention:** Stakeholders emphasized the importance of education about homelessness, affordable housing, and successful reentry programs for those released from jail/prison.
4. **Support Services:** There is a call for caseworkers, social workers, counseling classes, wraparound services, and mental health support to aid individuals and families at risk of homelessness.

Recommendations Based on Stakeholder Feedback

01. Expand affordable housing and shelter options

Collaborate with local agencies and organizations to increase affordable housing opportunities, create overnight shelters, and establish day-use areas for severe weather to provide safe spaces for individuals in need.

02. Increase non-police response

Address safety concerns by increasing non-uniformed response teams (co-responders) to handle mental health crises and support those experiencing homelessness with dignity and respect.

03. Enhance homeless outreach services

Invest in and expand programs like the co-responder model and All Health Network's street outreach team to engage with individuals experiencing homelessness, provide mental health support, and offer resources for shelter and assistance.

04. Support eviction prevention strategies

Implement preventative measures, such as eviction prevention programs and wraparound services, to support families and individuals at risk of homelessness and provide a hand up to prevent the crisis from occurring.

05. Improve cleanliness and security

Implement measures to maintain cleanliness in public spaces, including the installation of more public waste cans and deepening trust and relationships with those with lived experiences of homelessness.

Consultant Recommendations

Homelessness is a complex and entrenched issue across the United States, Colorado, and the Denver Metro region. Littleton, specifically the Downtown Business District, is no exception. The City of Littleton has a strong foundation of collaboration to address the struggle to address homelessness through the Tri-Cities Homelessness Initiative. Additionally, partnerships between the Littleton Police Department, City Staff, AllHealth Network, City Council, South Suburban Parks and Recreation, Downtown Business District, local non-profits, and engaged community members have been key to efforts to date. They will continue to be vital to ensuring Littleton remains a welcoming community for all.

Littleton has a history of community engagement which is an asset in implementing effective, community-based local solutions to support those struggling. By focusing on these partnerships and leveraging state and federal resource support, Littleton can develop creative paths that align with the cherished culture of Littleton and the needs of vulnerable people.

We recommend building on the current foundation and collaborations to:

- 1) Continue direct support efforts**
- 2) Ensure downtown is clean and safe**
- 3) Support long-term efforts to increase affordable housing**
- 4) Continue and expand efforts to gain stakeholder input**

Additionally, the City of Littleton would benefit from:

1) Developing an intentional community communication strategy

Ensure available resources and current efforts to support those experiencing homelessness, and those vulnerable to falling into homelessness, are understood across Littleton. While those directly engaged are well-informed, knowledge of services decreases markedly outside of spaces of direct engagement.

2) Development of an evaluation plan

Measure program effectiveness and make adjustments to current efforts to address homelessness in Littleton. Coordination with the evaluation efforts of the Tri-Cities Initiative Dashboards to identify the particular impacts in Littleton may be a viable path for developing local evaluation tools.