**Bloomberg Associates**

# Phoenix Homeless Encampment Strategy

In the crisis of a court order to clear a large encampment, the City devised and implemented a client-centered and service-oriented strategy to permanently end camping around a social services hub.

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March 2025

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# Executive Summary

In 2022, homelessness in Phoenix was in the national spotlight. Like many cities across the country, homelessness had grown, and street homelessness drove the increase. More and more cities were seeing the growth of encampments, and public concern was escalating. In Phoenix, the largest encampment included about 800 clients on more than 15 blocks of sidewalks and streets around a downtown social services campus. Conditions were dire, and local businesses were increasingly dissatisfied with the city's response.

This case shares the city of Phoenix's successful approach to eliminating this encampment that provided for the safe transfer of clients from street corners to temporary housing. They did this under the intense scrutiny of the local and national press, a federal Justice Department investigation into police practices in dealing with the street homeless population, and the pressure of two court cases and multiple findings against the city that could have led to contempt findings against leading officials. This approach is outlined below.

**1. The imperative for action demanded by the Court:** The remaining factors on this list determined the quality of the city's strategy. The speed of action and generation of resources necessary to achieve the results were very much driven by the imperative of a court injunction to close the encampment and the risk of contempt findings against leadership for failure to do so.

**2. Leadership Commitment:** Prior to the lawsuits and court deadlines, the city of Phoenix created an environment for action with leadership proactively setting homelessness as a priority, creating a new agency devoted to this work, bringing on respected hires devoted to humane action, and a comprehensive citywide plan signaling ambitious goals, which enabled the city to respond coherently to seemingly inconsistent court orders.

**3. Coordinated management:** The City Manager's office created a cross-agency team to coordinate an approach to addressing the encampment, with clear direction, tasks, and responsibilities under the Office of Homeless Solutions (OHS) leadership.

**4. Outreach protocol led with services:** The strategy was client-centered and service-oriented, identifying each person's unique needs.

    a. **Utilize a by-name list:** Employ a by-name list with each client's needs to be aware of their specific needs, potential housing placement, and other service considerations.

    b. **Clearly communicate what will happen:** Develop a two-week notice for each effort and engage with clients regularly, preferably daily, in advance of any action.

    c. **Chunking the work:** A block-by-block approach was taken to make the large challenge more manageable.

**5. Enhanced high-quality shelter capacity and shelter choices:** More than 1,000 beds were added from 2022 to 2024. More beds and different types of shelters (e.g., low threshold, safe outdoor sleeping, private rooms, etc.) gave more reasons for individuals to say yes to the offer to come inside.

**6. Coordinated services and placement:** OHS worked with community partners related to transport and made immediate shelter transfers and referrals of clients to other crucial services (like detox, medical, etc.), and/or connected to permanency (private housing or family reunification).

**7. Personal Property Storage and Garbage Disposal Protocol:** OHS and partner sanitation agencies ensured clear, standardized, and respectful practices for protecting people's belongings and property and disposing of garbage.

**8. Coordinated clean-up:** Strong partnerships were built with Phoenix Street Transportation and Public Works Departments to store property and then dispose of identified garbage.
**9. Leveraged external funding:** ARPA funding, private funding, and other grant funding was essential to the time-limited temporary housing options implemented.
**10. Barrier Leveraging:** The city responded to barriers (e.g. lawsuits) to increase urgency, cut through administrative burdens or rules and enhance resources.
**11. Assessed Progress:** Progress is assessed over time to see what practices work and what needs improvement, ensuring services are meeting client needs.
**12. Aftercare:** For those who did not engage in services and accommodation, OHS continued to make contact and offer housing and support.
**13. Vigilant Post Clearance:** Frequent monitoring and enforcement to deter encampment recreation. Maintaining the space with the relevant enforcement measures for your affected area: no-camping signs, notice of enforcement, fencing, competing public use, park enforcement tools, signage, etc.

The city reported that 585 of the 718 people engaged in this process (the remainder of 100 to 200 people moved on prior to engagement), or around 80%, ended up accepting assistance in finding shelter. **(1)** Since that time the area has remained free of encampments.

The impact of these combined efforts was made clear in the city's next point-in-time (PIT) count. The 2024 PIT Count showed a 600-person drop in unsheltered homelessness, from 3,333 down to 2,701 - a 19% decrease **(2)**, making Phoenix the only local city in which homelessness went down. This data also reported a 13% increase in sheltered status for individuals compared to 2023 **(3)**.

These PIT numbers underscore the challenge that remains for Phoenix – moving people from shelter to permanency. Much of the shelter capacity brought on board is temporary and clients are not moving on to permanency in large numbers. City leaders acknowledge they require more aggressive housing strategies, and resources required to meet that need. Without that, shelter vacancies will not accommodate the continued flow of newly homeless individuals to the streets. Prevention efforts also need to be bolstered to best avoid homelessness for those precariously housed in the first place.

With the success of the effort to address encampments, the city is well positioned to tackle these more fundamental challenges and continue the story that it is possible for a committed team, with supportive leadership willing to invest the right resources, to overcome homelessness, save lives and allow all individuals to live with dignity.

# Message from Bloomberg Associates

Bloomberg Associates (BA) - a philanthropic municipal consulting firm that forms part of Bloomberg Philanthropies - has the unique privilege of working with cities around the globe. We on the social services team often find ourselves delving deep into varied strategies to reduce homelessness and address the devastating consequences being unhoused has for people who are living on city streets. We have seen cities struggle with the challenge of successfully bringing people inside and addressing the particularly harmful dynamics that occur when large congregations of people on the street organize into encampments. Encampments exacerbate unsafe conditions for the unhoused and generate a sense of chaos in the community's mind of what their city is doing to address the challenge of homelessness. Solutions have not been easy to come by, which makes the Phoenix case quite remarkable.

We have been working closely with the city of Phoenix's City Manager's Office and the Office of Homeless Solutions (OHS) since March 2024 to scan, research, capture best practices, and document the success of decommissioning a significant encampment while under the intense pressure of community exasperation, state and federal court litigation, court orders and Federal Justice Department scrutiny. The encampment of about 800 people covered 15 blocks around the Key Campus - a series of co-located human services in a two-block area adjacent to the Phoenix downtown. Over five months, representatives from the Office of Homeless Solutions and the community were interviewed, and the city was invited to review the written product of this case study and offer suggested revisions. The final document is a Bloomberg Associates product.

This case highlights the methodical approach to getting the job done the right way – for those who were unhoused and for the city. As the country sees attitudes towards encampment enforcement change in the shadow of the Supreme Court's *Grant's Pass* decision, the message here is clear – enforcement or aggressive cleaning without meaningful service offers will produce short lived results at best which will neither overcome street homelessness nor help vulnerable people in need.

This study documents the rigorous strategy that was put in place in Phoenix that included the city's own coordinated management, investment in services, attention to community need and expectations of clients for acceptable behaviors, which uplift how a common goal to meet need and ensure the safety and orderliness of the city can be achieved. We hope this case can be used by others when developing plans with the community to address encampments and best serve those in need.

Developing this case was inspiring, and we are grateful to all the individuals we met along the way for their knowledge on the remarkable journey they shared.

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# Introduction

In recent years, Phoenix has claimed its position as the fifth-largest city in the United States and one of the fastest-growing cities in the country. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Phoenix experienced the third-largest population growth in the country, while many cities experienced significant declines. This growth, fueled by growth in jobs and residents, added pressure on housing costs and strained many city services.

Prior to the pandemic, the Phoenix area's handling of homeless solutions was largely decentralized. Neighborhood Services, Public Works, Police, and Human Services Departments all maintained some responsibility for managing clients' needs and addressing community concerns. Maricopa County played a much larger role in coordinating actions locally. There was no stand-alone city department directly accountable for the management of homelessness in the city.

There was growing concern across the community about the conditions the city faced. The City Council, under the leadership of Mayor Kate Gallego, recommended the creation of a task force to develop recommendations for a citywide approach to address homelessness. The task force was seated and engaged with the responsible city agencies, who drafted the plan for task force consideration. The task force reviewed and offered modifications to the plan, called Strategies to Address Homelessness, and it was adopted by the Council in June 2020, with a final prioritized plan submitted in April 2022.

During this period, new leadership in the City Manager's Office came in, including a new deputy brought in for her knowledge and commitment to this issue. The Mayor and City Council created the Office of Homeless Solutions (OHS) and staffed it with a skilled management team, centralizing the city's efforts and making tackling homelessness a top city priority.

At the time, homelessness in Phoenix was in the national spotlight. Like many cities across the country, homelessness had grown, and street homelessness drove the increase. More and more cities were seeing the growth of encampments, and public concern was escalating. In Phoenix, the largest encampment eventually grew to include about 800 clients on over 15 blocks of sidewalks and streets around a downtown social services campus. Conditions were dire, and local businesses and residents were increasingly dissatisfied with the city's response.

**Key Campus**

The Key Campus was established in 2005 as a collaborative effort to address homelessness. Operated by Keys to Change, this campus benefits from the institutional knowledge of 15 partner organizations that have histories serving clients in Phoenix and across Maricopa County. Given its proximity to homeless services and temporary shelter, the area was viewed as a safe place for clients to drop in for services, congregate, and routinely camp.

The area around Key Campus was a mix of mostly warehousing and light manufacturing businesses, parking lots and empty parcels of land and some limited residential presence. The blocks around the campus were long a location of overnight bedding down and small encampments.

As the numbers grew, the area expanded and what was an overnight presence became a permanent fixture. The pandemic exacerbated the situation until it grew to the 800-person encampment the city faced in 2022.

**Case Purpose**

Managing homeless encampments on city streets is a global challenge cities often confront in their strategies to address homelessness. Bloomberg Associates developed this case study in partnership with the city of Phoenix to share the valuable lessons learned with other cities that can benefit from this knowledge. Over the last five months, we interviewed OHS team members, city department leaders, and community members, read through scores of articles, and toured the affected areas in and around Key Campus. The case aims to answer the following questions:

- What was the history and context leading into the cleaning up of the encampment?
- What were the key elements of the strategy and how well did they work?
- What are the lessons learned and the longer-term implications for the city in its strategy to address homelessness?

# Case History

The past decade has seen a significant rise in the population of unhoused individuals in Phoenix, approximately half of whom are unsheltered. **(4)** According to the Maricopa Association of Governments 2022 Point-in-Time homeless count, there was a 73% increase in the number of chronically homeless individuals from 2016 to 2022. Key Campus (formerly known as the Human Services Campus), located near downtown Phoenix, is home to the city's largest shelter, with 600 beds, a smaller 95-bed facility, and an overflow capacity of 280 beds. In addition to beds, the campus is home to 15 partner nonprofits that provide food, legal assistance, medical care, and other services. **(5)**

The area surrounding Key Campus became the site of the largest homeless encampment in Phoenix due to proximity to services and limited municipal intervention. Additionally, police aiming to reduce the number of smaller concentrations of homeless individuals sleeping throughout the city routinely directed people to this area to encourage clients to seek services and shelter. At its peak in 2022, the Key Campus encampment had up to 800 people and stretched over 15 blocks. **(6)**

**2017-2021: Early City Efforts & Pandemic Effects**

Faced with a growing homeless population and mounting public and governmental pressure, the city of Phoenix began a series of initiatives to create a coordinated response to address homelessness. In 2017, the Mayor and City Council started the PHX CARES (Community, Action, Response, Engagement, Services) program. **(7)** PHX CARES is a complaint driven community response system created to address encampments. The system assigned response tasks to the appropriate city department, depending on ownership of the impacted land.

Despite increased municipal attention, the encampment continued to grow. The COVID-19 pandemic also presented challenges to unsheltered individuals and service providers. In February 2020, the city received a petition from the Madison Pioneers Coalition——a group of exasperated residents and business owners near the encampment——alleging unsanitary conditions and requesting private ownership and management over public sidewalks adjacent to their property. **(8)**

That same month, the city's Department of Public Works began placing numerous large trash bins around the campus, which were serviced five days a week. In April, the Streets Department began cleaning roadways surrounding the encampment three times a week. In May, the city contracted with a provider to deep clean the area by spraying the streets with disinfectant once a month (partly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic).

The Center for Disease Control also released guidance urging governments to avoid disrupting anyone on the streets who was not being offered a bed for health and safety reasons. **(9)** This guidance, along with the extraordinary disruptions caused during the early pandemic, also led to a halt in many ongoing initiatives to address street conditions.

As this was happening, in March 2020 under the leadership of voting-member Mayor Kate Gallego, the City Council directed staff to develop a plan to address homelessness in the city. In June, the Strategies to Address Homelessness Plan (STAHP) was presented to the Mayor, City Council, and public. **(10)** The STAHP was comprised of nine broad categories of action: outreach and resources, mental health, workforce development, housing strategies, encampment cleanups, communications strategies, policy strategies, neighborhood strategies, and the Housing Phoenix Plan.

The city turned down the Madison Pioneers Coalition request at a hearing in September 2020, stating that private ownership in the area would lead to the criminalization of homelessness and would be contrary to the principles of the STAHP. In October, the City Council unanimously approved the STAHP and included recommendations collected during public meetings, directing the creation of an 18-member STAHP Task Force. **(11)** The task force was made up of neighborhood leaders, service providers, and homeless advocates. By early 2021, the Task Force was meeting to develop recommendations for the deployment of the STAHP.

**2021-2022: City Action, Establishment of Office of Homeless Solutions**

Across 2021 and 2022, the city worked to implement the STAHP and direct funding for programs and services to address homelessness across the city, including the Key Campus encampment. A new Phoenix Deputy City Manager, Gina Montes, was hired in 2021 to revamp the city's work on homelessness and facilitate the existing STAHP Task Force, among other priorities. **(12)**

The Phoenix City Council created the Office of Homeless Solutions (OHS) in May 2022 and in July it became the designated department to lead in addressing homelessness for the city. **(13)**To initiate the OHS, Montes brought in Scott Hall– who had lived experience facing homelessness–– and later, Rachel Milne (who aided the city with strategic planning work in 2021) was brought in as OHS Director, with Hall eventually serving as Deputy Director.

Also in May, the Private Property Clean-up Pilot Program was initiated. **(14)** The program provides property owners whose property is affected by the nearby Key Campus encampment with free biohazard and waste management services. This service was expanded to other parts of the city under certain conditions.

**2021-2022: Encampment Area Policy Implementation – Early Stages**

Addressing the growing encampments was a pillar of the city's STAHP plan. The early stages of this work involved a good deal of iteration around cleaning and engagement. While this addressed the unsanitary conditions to some degree, the numbers continue to grow, as did public discontent.

In July 2021, the city increased refuse collection from the area from five to six days per week. In December, the city implemented the Safe Storage program. **(15)** The Safe Storage program emerged in response to high incidences of individuals' belongings being disposed of during cleanings and frequent theft among encampment residents. The program allowed unsheltered individuals a place to store their belongings in bins repurposed for this use, secured with zip ties while they accessed shelter services, reducing concerns regarding theft of personal items.

In January 2022, the city modified cleaning policies so that contractors and city staff cleaned around people's tents and belongings. **(16)** This meant that residents no longer had to move their property to accommodate cleaning and that cleaning occurred only on the streets.

In March 2022, the Council approved the city of Phoenix 2022 Heat Response Plan. The plan included $2.6 million in ARPA funding to support a shelter four miles away from the Key Campus encampment, known as the Washington Shelter. The shelter––funded jointly by the city and Maricopa County, located in a city-owned building and operated by the St. Vincent de Paul nonprofit––was opened in May, providing 200 additional beds for placement.

In April 2022, the recommendations of the STAHP Task Force were released and presented to the city Manager. The recommendations called for increased collaboration with neighborhoods during the shelter capacity expansion process and a greater emphasis on data collection, tracking, transparency, and outcome evaluation. **(17)**

**2021-2023: Legal Backdrop: Investigation, Lawsuits, Injunctions**

In August 2021, the Department of Justice began an investigation into the Phoenix Police Department and the city of Phoenix. The investigation began due to alleged civil rights violations and police abuses of power––including those against homeless people.

In addition to the pending DOJ investigation commenced in 2021, by 2022 Phoenix faced the beginnings of two major legal cases concerning the city's efforts to address homelessness.

Property and business owners within and surrounding the encampment had been dissatisfied with the impact caused by the encampment for years. On August 10th of 2022, Freddy *Brown, et al. v. City of Phoenix* was filed in state court. The plaintiffs claimed the encampment became a public nuisance and the city failed to address the problem. The *Brown* lawsuit did not seek compensation or damages. Rather, it asked for the city to "refrain from expanding, maintaining, and/or operating" the encampment surrounding the Key Campus and "immediately abate the nuisance."

Three months later, in October 2022, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit in federal court alleging that the city's cleaning practices failed to give inhabitants proper notice and often destroyed individuals' personal belongings. Moreover, citations were issued to unsheltered people for sleeping in public, despite the unavailability of shelter beds (this being prior to the Supreme Court's *Grants Pass* decision). The lawsuit sought for the city to halt the resumption of cleanups requiring people to collect belongings and relocate (the so-called 'enhanced' cleanups that were paused in January 2022). It also called for halting police enforcement of city ordinances on camping, basing the claim on the 2018 Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling on *Martin v. Boise,* which at that point was the prevailing legal standard in the Ninth District barring governments from enforcing no camping laws on public property if there is no meaningful service offer available as an alternative (i.e., more unhoused people than shelter beds in the locality).

In December, the judge in the ACLU case issued an emergency preliminary injunction prohibiting the city from enforcing camping and sleeping bans on public property against people who "practically cannot obtain shelter" unless shelter beds could be offered.

The injunction also outlined orders for notice to be provided in advance of cleanups, prohibited seizure of property without reasonable belief of abandonment, and required the city to provide property storage for 30 days before disposal.

**2022-2023 Fully Matured Encampment Policy**

Meanwhile, the city was devising a more ambitious approach to expand services and aggressively address the encampment. From the start, the homeless service team at OHS was put in charge of the citywide coordination of this effort, with all other agencies acting in support of their collaborative leadership. The city adopted a client-centered approach led by service practitioners who could build rapport with occupants in the encampment and make offers to them that would be accepted.

This client-centered and service-driven value was core to the new OHS vision and mission and drives all their work. The leadership at City Hall embraced this first when building the new team, being intentional in recruiting individuals with lived experience for the agency. They also listened to the client's perspectives on why they were rejecting shelter offers and what they wanted from support and services.

The city evolved a more fully fleshed-out encampment strategy that was premised on acceptable offers of shelter in several new locations around the city. Federal pandemic relief funds that were made available to the city were crucial in supporting the creation of this new capacity.

In addition to the shelter offers, clients were also met with a range of services, including dental care, physical health care, behavioral health care, pet care, transportation assistance, mailroom services, personal identification services, and workforce training and employment services. OHS insisted on moving beyond the minimum requirements and set a plan to provide services attending to the needs of the whole person.

Key to the strategy was communication and transparency with clients, the community, and other stakeholders, including the State of Arizona. Frequent updates on the implementation plan were provided, advising in advance when and what steps would be taken to ensure awareness and readiness for action. Routine open communication with neighboring businesses, residents, and stakeholders helped build clarity and trust in the city's efforts.

Within OHS, the city also created a new Homeless Liaison Team—seven of the 11 with lived experience—to complement the existing non-profit outreach efforts. This team was the agency's community-facing operation, working with clients and neighborhoods to address needs, concerns, and challenges. They were to be the first to step forward during the encampment clean-up efforts, bringing information about schedules and resources.

The city began implementing this approach on a block-by-block basis in May 2023, premised on reserving the needed number of shelter beds to accommodate the block's occupants.

Part of the city's strategy was the mandate to clients to prepare to move on. The successful delivery of this message relied heavily on each outreach worker's ability to know clients by name.

OHS Outreach kept a by-name list of clients and their various conditions to better understand which move-on options might serve them best as they were being asked to clear the encampment.  Each client received a formal notice to vacate. The Enhanced Engagement Day Schedule in the appendix outlines the three-week communication strategy for clients, providers, and staff to prepare for the upcoming shifts of block clearing and cleaning.

The city also lined up sanitation services – two separate units within two departments, one for public trash pickup and one for alley-way pickup of household garbage. The city updated policies on cleaning practices, provided individuals with advanced notice of when the enhanced cleanups would occur, and offered unhoused individuals the opportunity to have their items stored that could not be brought to the shelter according to the new protocol. This included a secure location for the property for at least 30 days.

These policies included wrapping, tagging, and logging the location of the items. These items were available to pick up seven days a week during business hours. If the items remained unclaimed for an additional 30 days after the original retention period of 30 days, Key Campus staff documented and disposed of them. According to city officials, retrieval rates for stored items were very low—almost never claimed.

Protocols also updated an abandoned property procedure to clarify that it includes any unattended property that remained unclaimed for at least one hour after the street's closure. Sanitation services would then clean the street after all clients departed, and the street would be declared a no-camping zone subject to enforcement, posted to that effect.

The Police Department was asked to be present but on standby in case any issues arose requiring enforcement. This marked a difference in approach for the precinct covering the Key Campus area. That precinct had a long involvement in working with the unhoused population and addressing safety issues in and around the encampment. For much of their history, there were no partners across the city services to engage, and the work of addressing street homelessness was left in the Police's hands. With the advent of OHS, the Police were able to step back, allowing service-oriented teams to take the lead on engagement.

All this was done under intense press attention in both local and national news. As the city began implementation the number of on-site press outlets covering the events became so numerous as to require a designated press holding area where they could set up and receive briefings while staying a respectful distance from the area of activation. The events were also monitored by First Amendment auditors of the city's efforts.

In March 2023, the County judge presiding over the *Freddy Brown v. City of Phoenix* case issued a preliminary injunction against the city requiring abatement of the "nuisance" of the encampment and removal of tents and offenses from the area around the Key Campus "as soon as is practicable." The judge also suggested the city create structured campgrounds as an intermediate means of shelter for unhoused people. In response, Phoenix appealed the ruling and filed a motion to stay the ruling, claiming that it was an overreaching of judicial power. The motion to stay was denied. **(18)**

Per the injunction in response to the *Freddy Brown v. City of Phoenix* in March 2023, the city restarted enhanced cleanups, and unhoused residents were given a two-week notification before the city began removing tents. **(19)** The city would not allow continued camping in the area surrounding Key Campus following the cleaning. **(20)** Fliers delivered to the unhoused population stated that "Refusal to permanently relocate may result in citation or arrest." **(21)**

Although cleared blocks became permanently closed to camping, some unsheltered individuals who refused services relocated to yet-to-be-cleared blocks. On the first block cleared 29 of the 35 people accepted shelter. **(22)** The weekly census of the area dropped from 900 to around 760 people by May. **(23)** In anticipation of being moved, some unhoused individuals decided to preemptively re-locate themselves. Some of these people moved to encampments in other neighborhoods and parks across the city. **(24) (25)** The city cleared 50% of the 15-block encampment from May to September 2023. As of September 20, six blocks remained to be cleared and some of the most challenging clients remained to be sheltered. **(26)**

Following trial of *Freddy Brown v. City of Phoenix* in July, the county judge issued a permanent injunction in September requiring that the city clear the encampment around the Key Campus by November 4. This required a more rapid expansion of citywide shelter capacity than had been planned, which extended several months longer than the judge's ordered deadline. The Mayor, city council members, and city officials responsible for homeless services faced the threat of contempt findings against them for failure to meet this deadline, escalating the intensity of pressure around the pace and success of the clearing.

The city allocated funds to allow for new capacity to come online. Part of this new capacity - Phoenix's Safe Outdoor Space (SOS) - offered clients a sanctioned outdoor camping area under an open-air covered warehousing field roughly the size of a football field. The STAHP Task Force recommended the creation of a safe outdoor space to the City Manager and presented the idea to the Phoenix City Council in April 2022. The city reluctantly moved forward with this plan, concerned that it did not represent a humane alternative for people living on the street. It was intended to serve as a temporary landing pad for individuals to prepare to move to a more permanent indoor setting. In June 2023, the Phoenix City Council approved the purchase of the property. Through $5.4 million in grant funding from the Arizona Department of Housing, the city purchased the property in October 2023. **(27)** The SOS gave the city a place to direct unhoused individuals who did not feel ready to accept the indoor shelter space offered during the city's engagements. **(28)** The SOS is located a few blocks away from the Key Campus at Madison and 12th Avenues and has offered an effective alternative for individuals not otherwise willing to accept a sheltered bed.

In addition to expanding capacity through SOS, the city partnered with four organizations in October 2023 to create new transitional housing for the unhoused population. These partnerships included 140 units of lodging with Community Bridges INC, 60 with Central Arizona Shelter Services, 102 with A New Leaf, and 60 additional beds with St. Vincent de Paul and Maricopa County. **(29)** In October, the city was able to add a total of 362 temporary shelter beds. In total during 2023, the city of Phoenix added an additional 482 beds for the unhoused population. **(30)**

This space, along with others secured through partnerships, increased Phoenix's shelter capacity by over 1,000 beds, providing viable shelter alternatives for those who were a part of the Key Campus encampments.

Within the community, at least one business also stepped up to contribute to the solution. The Rio Fresco Shelter is a 117-room hotel that has been converted into a temporary shelter. The adjoining restaurant offers clients a workforce culinary apprenticeship program that provides meals for the neighboring shelter.

With this last-minute infusion of funds, the city cleared all remaining blocks in the Key Campus encampment within the time ordered by the Court. The last block was cleared on November 1st, 2023. **(31)** Only four enforcements involving police occurred during this time. Three were clients involving violent behavior that required intervention. The fourth involved two separate arrests of a local protestor who was advocating that clients not cooperate with the offers of shelter and housing. The city reported that 585 of the 718 people engaged (the remainder moved on prior to engagement), or around 80%, ended up accepting assistance in finding shelter. **(32)** Since that time the area has remained free of encampments, with continued maintenance, outreach, and, if required, enforcement. to ensure no return to street sleeping in this area.

**2023-2024 Repeating the Successful Strategy**

Following up on this overall success, the city employed a similar but modified approach in the city's second-largest encampment. Also a longstanding issue with the community, it was comprised of over 200 individuals camping outside in a small corridor in Sunnyslope adjacent to a nonprofit that provided meals but few other resources. There was a predominant drug problem with this population.

The city relocated the OHS Homeless Liaison Team to this area, which took the lead in engaging the nonprofit and community while they planned their strategy. The team worked closely with the neighborhood to ensure they were informed and found opportunities for them to participate in the effort. They worked hand in hand with the nonprofit to provide outreach to get everyone sheltered or housed. The organization subsequently phased out the dining hall. As a result, over 240 people were placed in shelters, housing, and treatment. The area also remains free of encampments to this day.

The impact of these combined efforts was made clear in the city's next point-in-time (PIT) count. The 2024 PIT Count showed a 600-person drop in unsheltered homelessness, from 3,333 down to 2,701 - a 19% decrease. **(33)** This data also reported a 13% increase in sheltered status for individuals compared to 2023. **(34)**

# Final Thoughts

All too often, managing the issue of homelessness is the hot potato no one wants to catch. The Phoenix case makes clear that committed leadership from the city was required to create collective accountability for the issue—from the government, non-profit, client, and community levels. The lawsuits played a large role in defining elements of the strategy and significantly accelerated the timeline. However, it was the city's ownership and vision that drove the approach and ensured a cohesive and balanced implementation.
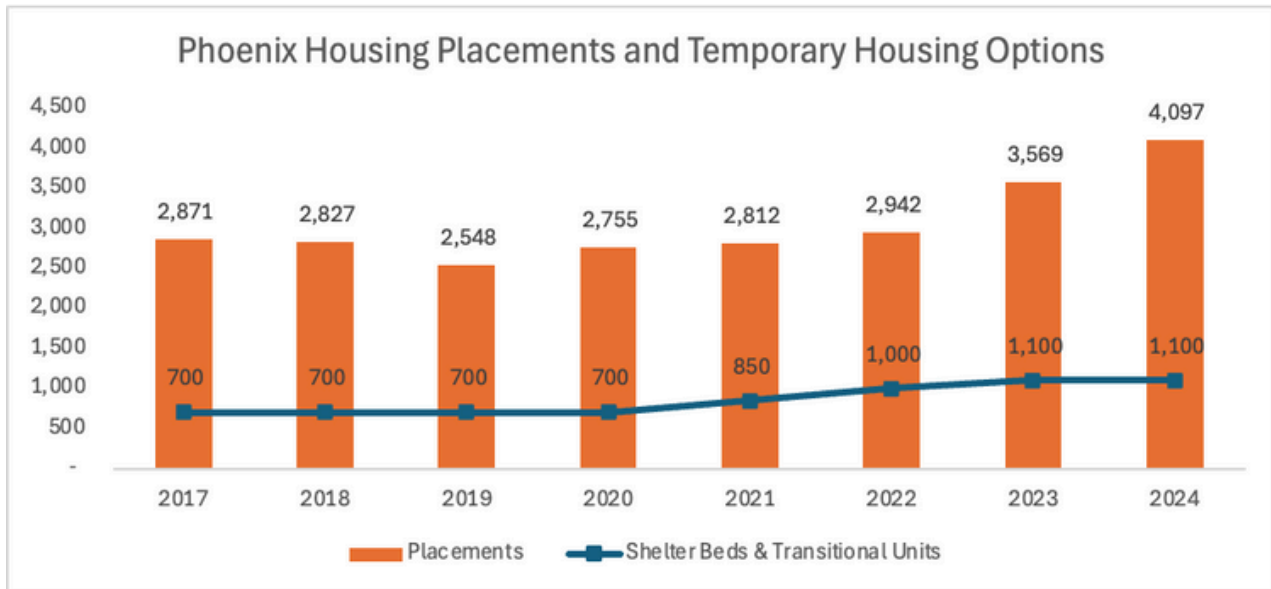
Clients in Phoenix had expressed a desire for alternative models of temporary shelter options, and when those options opened, they accepted at high rates. When areas of the encampment were cleared and cleaned, clients infrequently returned to those areas due to clear policy against it and the notice of intention for enforcement. Actual enforcement through arrest or citation was overwhelmingly not required. On-site at partner locations, clients engaged, allowing service models to operate with minimal disruption.

This demonstrates that when clients are provided with supportive, practical solutions that meet their needs and are given clear explanations of how a no-sleeping ordinance will be enforced, they actively participate in and sustain these improvements, showcasing a successful collaborative effort in addressing homelessness.

The Office of Homeless Solutions is the anchor of this collective problem-solving schema. The City Manager's Office recruited a team of dedicated leaders who had a vision and built a plan to see it through. At the executive level, the city made homelessness a priority. Within the operational team, leaders developed credibility and trust, leveraging partnerships with service partners and clients alike, and added credibility to the community approach.

The success of the strategy was clearly influenced by the community's frustration with the prior city response, and by findings against the city in the litigations brought against it. What is impressive is that, under this scrutiny, a clear and comprehensive client-centered plan of action, committed leadership, and strategically deployed resources were structured to enable a lasting solution.

# Appendix



Phoenix Housing Placements and Temporary Housing Options

Legend: Placements | Shelter Beds & Transitional Units

| Year | Placements | Shelter Beds & Transitional Units |
|------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| 2017 | 2,871 | 700 |
| 2018 | 2,827 | 700 |
| 2019 | 2,548 | 700 |
| 2020 | 2,755 | 700 |
| 2021 | 2,812 | 850 |
| 2022 | 2,942 | 1,000 |
| 2023 | 3,569 | 1,100 |
| 2024 | 4,097 | 1,100 |

# Enhanced Engagement Day Schedule

**Week 1:**
- Create the flyer for the next scheduled day. Staff will need Adobe PRO to edit the PDF or request a document from the PIO.
- 14 days PRIOR to the scheduled event, post notices in the targeted area.
  - Hand directly to the person occupying a tent/structure.
  - If an unoccupied tent/structure, tape notice to the tent/structure and take a picture
- Send an email to the "Engagement Day-City Staff" group to notify them of the next scheduled event. In the email, include the targeted area, start time, estimated number of people, and any nuances that may be problematic.
  - OHS, PWD, Streets, NSD, PD, Community Prosecutor, Heat Mitigation (when operating), CAP
- Send an email to the "Engagement Day-Providers" group to notify them of the next scheduled event. In the email, include the targeted area, start time, estimated number of people, and any nuances that may be problematic.
  - HSC, CBI, NAC, US Vets, UMOM, CASS, A New Leaf, SVdP
- Create a calendar reminder to send emails to partner providers the day prior to the event to inform providers of day-of logistics (parking, staging, media, etc.) and receive projected shelter bed availability from providers. This could also be a 30-minute virtual meeting if needed.
- Create an internal calendar invite for OHS staff for the day of the event.
- Send the calendar invite to the "Engagement Day-CityStaff" group
- Start staging the map so there is time for feedback and edits.
- The client list will be started after notices are posted. Transfer this information into the Engagement Days workbook and complete HMIS data entry.

**Week 2:**
- Work to finalize staging map—receive approval from PIO and outreach team.
- Complete HMIS data entry when outreach is conducted by OHS.

**Week 3:**
- Update the date and print client forms (half sheets).
- Gather supplies and equipment.
  - Pop-up tents, folding tables, and folding chairs
  - Signs and zip ties
  - Ziploc bag with office supplies, clipboards, folder
  - Disinfecting wipes, gloves
  - Observation Area signs in plastic protectors (print new as needed)
  - Cooler, case of water
- 1-2 days prior to Engagement Day, send an email to providers for 1) projected shelter bed availability and 2) the agency's staff roster.
- Once you receive the projected bed availability from shelter providers, email it to OHS leads.
- Once the agency's staff roster is received, update the Enhanced Clean-up Staff Attendance workbook by creating a new tab for it and including staff names and the agency. Since the same staff is usually used each time, this is an easy task.
- Print 5 copies each of the client list and staff roster.

## Unattended Property Notice

**UNATTENDED PROPERTY NOTICE**

LOCATION: _____

DATE & TIME POSTED:_____

The property at this site has been identified as unattended.

The City will remove the property at this location if it remains unclaimed for more than 48 hours from the time of this notice. **Property that is not claimed will be removed.**

**If you need housing, shelter or other services, please call 211.**

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**AVISO DE PERTENENCIAS ABANDONADAS**

UBICACIÓN: _____

FECHA Y HORA DE PUBLICACIÓN:_____

Las pertenencias en este lugar han sido identificadas como abandonadas.

La Ciudad retirará las pertenencias de este lugar si no son reclamadas por más de 48 horas desde el momento de este aviso. **Las pertenencias que no sean reclamadas serán removidas.**

**Si necesita vivienda, refugio u otros servicios, llame al 211.**

## Property Storage Notice

# PROPERTY STORAGE NOTICE

LOCATION: _____

ID # _____ (needed to claim property)

DATE & TIME POSTED:_____

To claim this property you must call **(602) 262-4051** between 8 am and 5 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding City holidays, within 45 days.

**If you call within 45 days, the City will return your property to you.** If you do not call within 45 days, the City of Phoenix will dispose of the property.

**If you need housing, shelter, or other services, please call 211.**

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# AVISO DE ALMACENAMIENTO DE PERTENENCIAS

UBICACIÓN: _____

ID # _____ (necesario para reclamar pertenencias)

FECHA Y HORA DE PUBLICACIÓN:_____
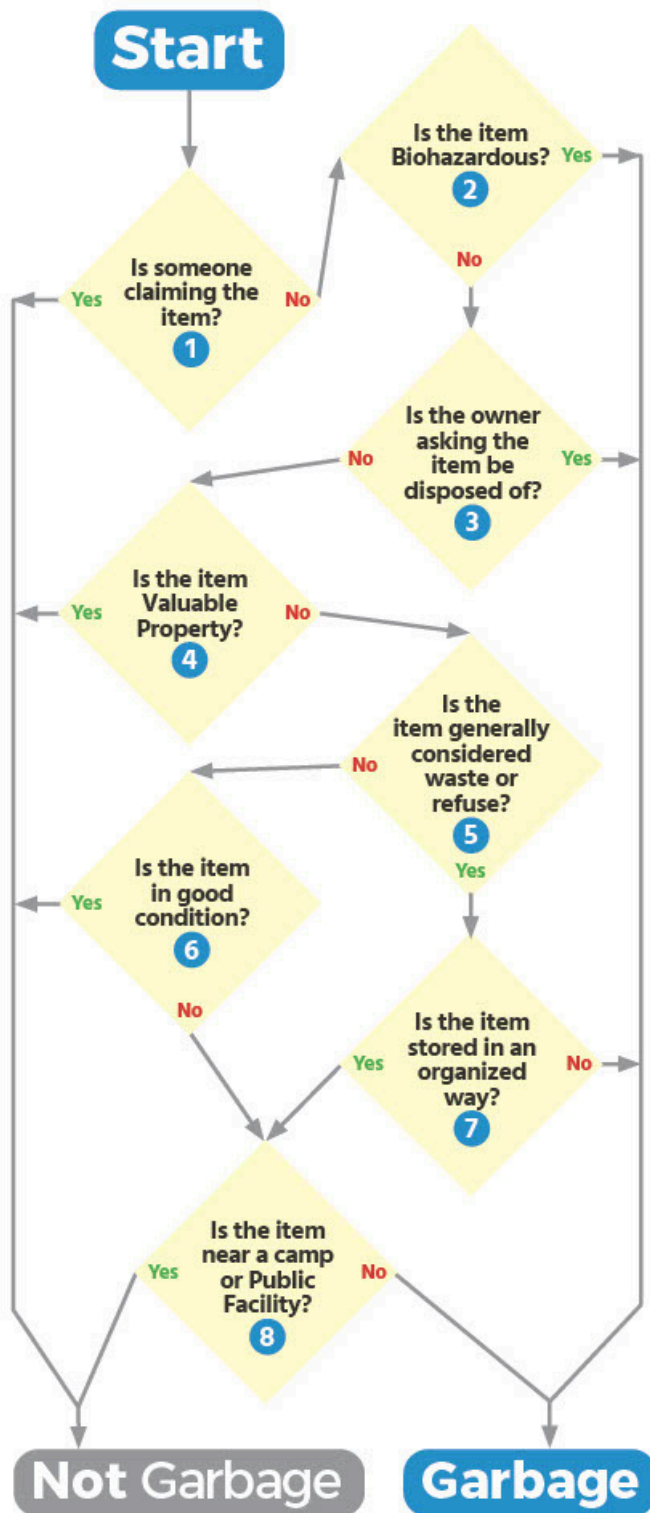
Para reclamar estas pertenencias, llame al **(602) 262-4051** entre las 8 am y las 5 pm, de lunes a viernes, excepto los días festivos municipales, dentro de los próximos 45 días.

**Si usted llama durante ese tiempo, la Ciudad le devolverá sus artículos.** Si no llama dentro de los 45 días, la Ciudad de Phoenix los desechará.

**Si necesita vivienda, refugio u otros servicios, llame al 211.**

# What is Garbage? Flowchart

## Flowchart

**Start**

**Is someone claiming the item? (1)**
- Yes → Not Garbage
- No → Is the item Biohazardous?

**Is the item Biohazardous? (2)**
- Yes → Garbage
- No → Is the owner asking the item be disposed of?

**Is the owner asking the item be disposed of? (3)**
- Yes → Garbage
- No → Is the item Valuable Property?

**Is the item Valuable Property? (4)**
- Yes → Not Garbage
- No → Is the item generally considered waste or refuse?

**Is the item generally considered waste or refuse? (5)**
- No → Is the item in good condition?
- Yes → Is the item stored in an organized way?

**Is the item in good condition? (6)**
- Yes → Not Garbage
- No → Is the item near a camp or Public Facility?

**Is the item stored in an organized way? (7)**
- Yes → Is the item near a camp or Public Facility?
- No → Garbage

**Is the item near a camp or Public Facility? (8)**
- Yes → Not Garbage
- No → Garbage

**Not Garbage**  |  **Garbage**

## Is it Garbage?

**(1)** An item is not garbage if a **person takes action consistent with ownership**, such as grabbing or holding the item, moving or hiding the item, stating the item is being held or watched for another, or requests to keep the item.

**(2)** **Biohazardous** items presents a risk of disease, injury, infection, or illness to those who come into contact with the item (or the public). Examples:
- Used hypodermic needles
- Used drug paraphernalia
- Items soiled with bodily fluids or waste, such as blood and feces
- Items contaminated with mold or bacteria
- Items infested with insects or other vermin
- Leaking or damaged propane tanks, fuel tanks, combustion engines, or other items containing toxic or flammable substances
- Corroded or leaking batteries
- Items unsafe to segregate from one or more of the above

**(3)** An item may be considered garbage if the **owner instructs or asks** that the item be thrown away. To establish a person is the owner of an item, ask the person. If a person identifies as the owner and grants permission for the item to be thrown away, document the date, time and location of the conversation, the ID of the owner, and note the owner granted permission to dispose of the item.

**(4)** **Valuable Property** means any item with apparent substantial monetary value, such as items with precious metals or gems, working electronic devices, functioning machinery, functioning tools, functioning bicycles, fine art, or currency in any amount. Valuable Property also includes IDs, legal and healthcare-related documents, purses, wallets, backpacks, file folders, functioning medical equipment, and medications.

**(5)** Items generally considered **waste or refuse** include wrappers and packaging, plant litter and debris, used paper and personal hygiene products, construction debris, and used consumable medical and other supplies.

**(6)** When evaluating an **item's condition**, consider whether the item is soiled, damaged, broken, missing components, or otherwise non-functional.

**(7)** Consider whether the item(s) are neatly **organized or stored** within a box, bag, bucket, tent, shopping or handcart, or other container (excluding trash or recycling receptacles) or within a tent or lean-to.

**(8)** **Public Facility** means a facility open to general public, such as a retail store, government facility, laundromat or restaurant, as well as other facilities that offer free meals or other charitable services, housing assistance, or psychological or addiction support services. When evaluating whether a camp is nearby, consider whether tents, lean-tos, bedding, cooking supplies, or other indications of human occupation are present.

# Endnotes

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(4)(5) Maricopa Association of Governments. "Point-in-Time Homelessness Count." Maricopa Association of Governments. https://azmag.gov/Programs/Homelessness/Data/Point-In-Time-Homelessness-Count.

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(8) All About Arizona News. "Homeless Petition Citing Safety and Health Concerns Gains Traction | All about Arizona News." All About Arizona News. https://www.allaboutarizonanews.com/homeless-petition-citing-safety-and-health-concerns-gains-traction/.

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(12) Signals Arizona Staff. "Phoenix city Manager Ed Zuercher Names Ginger Spencer and Gina Montes Deputy city Managers." Signals AZ. https://www.signalsaz.com/articles/phoenix-city-manager-ed-zuercher-names-ginger-spencer-and-gina-montes-deputy-city-managers/

(13) Rihl, Juliette. "Phoenix's New Homelessness Office Is Prioritizing More Shelter Beds." The Arizona Republic. https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2023/02/17/phoenixs-new-homelessness-office-is-prioritizing-more-shelter-beds/69877264007/.

(14) City of Phoenix. Neighborhood Services Private Property Cleanup." Phoenix.gov. https://www.phoenix.gov/nsdsite/Pages/Private-Property-Cleanup.aspx.

(15) Boehm, Jessica. "Garbage Bins and Zip Ties Create 'Lifesaver' Storage Program for Phoenix Homeless Population." The Arizona Republic. https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2022/02/10/phoenix-homelessness-new-storage-program-lifesaver/6585998001/.

(16) American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). "Fund for Empowerment v. Phoenix, city Of." American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). https://www.aclu.org/cases/fund-for-empowerment-v-phoenix-city-of.

(17) City of Phoenix. "Task Force Presents Recommendations on Strategies to Address Homelessness Plan." Phoenix.gov. https://www.phoenix.gov/newsroom/human-services/2318#:~:text=Its%20recommendations%20were%20presented%20to%20the%20city%20Manager%2C.

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