



# **Criminalization is Not the Answer:**

## Shifting the Way We Approach Homeless Encampments

**Rebecca Hikom**

Director Of CAS,  
Housing Forward Texas

**Jesse Rabinowitz**

Campaign & Communications Director,  
National Homelessness Law Center

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Brilliant By Design Consulting

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Tri-County COC Board Member

Housing as a Human Right: Driving Progress in Times of Uncertainty

September 26, 2025



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**Jesse Rabinowitz**

Campaign & Communications Director,  
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# From Tickets to **Detention Camps:** *Anti-Homeless Actions*

Jesse Rabinowitz (he/him/his)  
National Homelessness Law Center



**HOUSING**  
**NOT HANDCUFFS**



# A Quick Look at Homelessness

More people are sleeping outside than ever before

Homelessness is increasing because housing is too expensive and wages are too low

Homelessness is caused by systemic racism

50% of renters pay more than they can afford

The solution to homelessness is housing and support

# How We Got Here

- Laws making it a crime to be poor, sick, or disabled are not new
- The increase in anti-homeless laws and the Trump admin's focus on them is a clear escalation



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**Cicero**

**Grants Pass**

**Executive  
Order**

**DC Takeover**



# State-level Laws

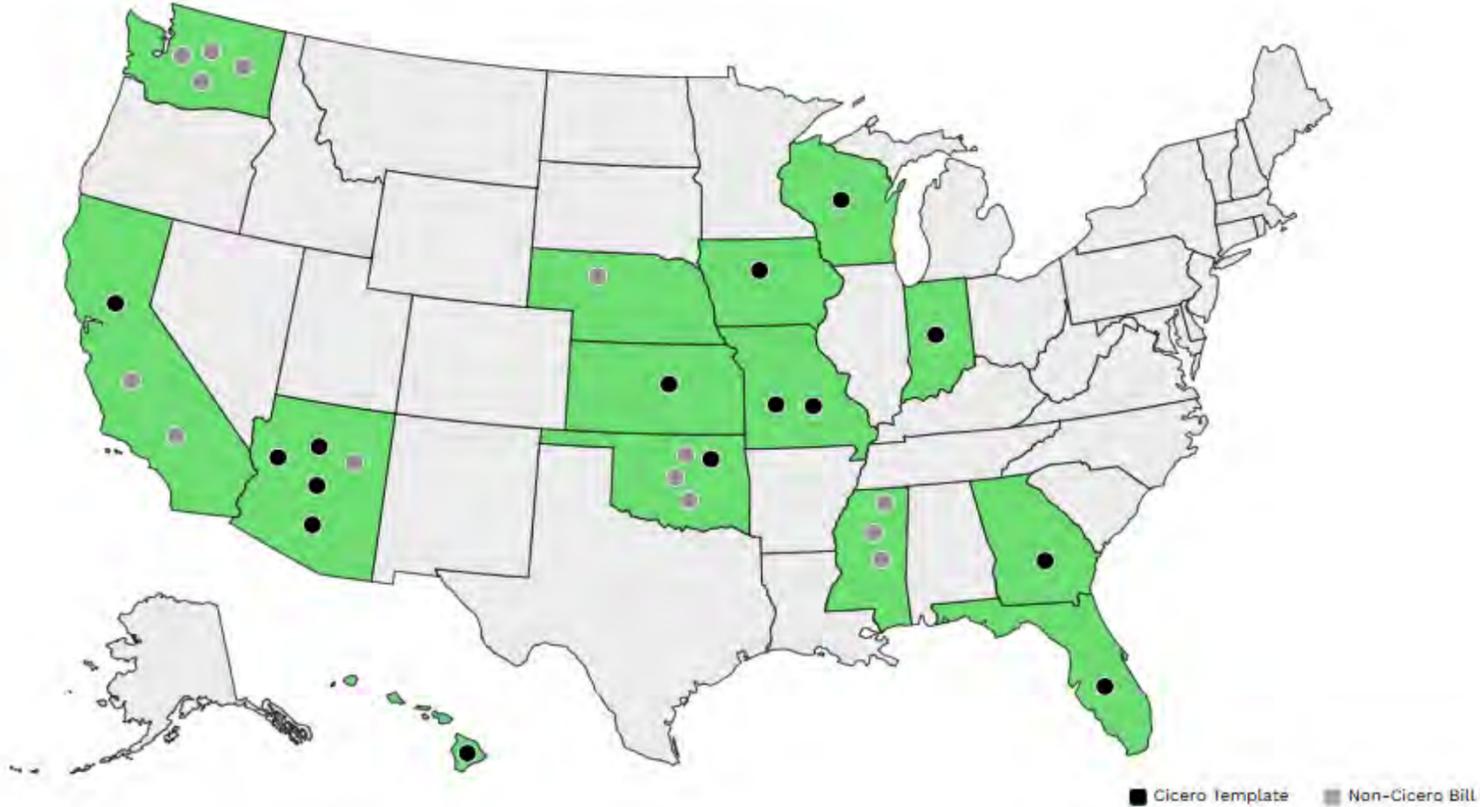
## Emergent Threats

This map depicts current bills that aim to make homelessness a crime and/or restrict funding for housing.



## Defeated Bills

This map depicts past bills attempting to criminalize homelessness that have been defeated or failed to advance.



No. 23-175

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IN THE  
**Supreme Court of the United States**

CITY OF GRANTS PASS, OREGON,

*Petitioner,*

*v.*

GLORIA JOHNSON, ET AL., ON BEHALF OF THEMSELVES  
AND ALL OTHERS SIMILARLY SITUATED,

*Respondents.*

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ON WRIT OF CERTIORARI  
TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT

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**BRIEF OF *AMICUS CURIAE*  
CICERO INSTITUTE  
IN SUPPORT OF PETITIONER**

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March 4, 2024

*Counsel for Amicus Curiae*

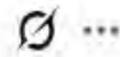
320+ bills that make it  
a crime to be homeless  
have been introduced since the Grants  
Pass Supreme Court case last year.

WE NEED HOUSING  
NOT HANDCUFFS.





 **Joe Lonsdale**   
@JTLonsdale

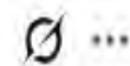


Proud to host @JDVance & @GregAbbott\_TX at our home in Texas, and to bring together some of Austin's best entrepreneurs and leaders.

I've known JD for years; he's competent, and cares deeply about helping everyday people.

We're supporting Trump/Vance for a brighter future.

 **Joe Lonsdale**   
@JTLonsdale



Spent the day in meetings around the Pentagon and w/ friends in other agencies, and stopped by the White House.

**The New York Times**

## Elon Musk Allies Help Start Pro-Trump Super PAC

The super PAC, according to three people close to the organization, is led in part by Joe Lonsdale, a co-founder of the software company Palantir and a politically ambitious venture capitalist in Austin who serves as a political confidant to Mr. Musk. Mr. Lonsdale, the people say, has played a key role in fund-raising for the group in its opening weeks, encouraging his network of influential entrepreneurs to support the super PAC. His personal company donated \$1 million to the group.

# What does the EO do?

- **Messaging**
  - **Traffics in racist myths about poor people**
  - **Scapegoats poor, sick, and disabled folks**
  - **Signifies backwards view of Trump admin**
- **Policy**
  - **Makes it easier to put people behind bars and institutions**
  - **Backtracks on proven solutions to homelessness**
  - **Urges defunding of harm reduction programs**
  - **Attempts to make involuntary commitment easier**
  - **Makes homelessness worse**



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# What the EO does NOT do:

- **Fund housing or supports**
- **Add funding for mental health programs**
- **Solve homelessness**
- **Help people struggling to make ends meet**



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# Cicero Template vs EO

## Cicero Bills

- “Prohibit camping” and “creating a criminal offense” (TX HB 1925)
- “Property designated ... by camping for homeless individuals” (TX HB 1925)
- No funding for programs that “lack behavioral and rehabilitative requirements” (KY HB 5)

## Executive Order

- “Enforce prohibitions on urban camping and loitering”
- “Who are living on the streets and cannot care for themselves, through assisted outpatient treatment or by moving them into treatment centers or other appropriate facilities via civil commitment or other available means”
- “Ending support for “housing first” policies that deprioritize accountability and fail to promote treatment, recovery, and self-sufficiency”

# What is a homeless detention camp?

- Louisiana spent \$17.5 million to force ~100 homeless folks into a freezing and remote warehouse during Super Bowl under threat of arrest
- Could have housed 1,200 people, 80% of the homeless population of New Orleans, for 1 year



Source: The New York Times

# DC Takeover



# DC Takeover



# This is Textbook Authoritarianism

- Sets the stage for expanded forced detentions of “undesirable” groups.
- Tests power grabs on groups believed to have little public sympathy
- Shifts blame away from politicians’ failures and onto people trying to survive
- Will not stop at groups targeted in order



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# What can you do?

1. Support the Housing Not Handcuffs Act
2. Join the Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign
3. Let us know how we can partner and support your work
4. Talk about homelessness, its causes, and its solutions
5. Outside of DC- tell Congress to stand down the federal escalation!

<https://freedcproject.org/allies>



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# Stay in touch!



# HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS

**Visit us:**  
[homelesslaw.org](http://homelesslaw.org)

**Follow us:**  
[@homeless\\_law](https://twitter.com/homeless_law)

**Visit us:**  
[housingnohandcuffs.org](http://housingnohandcuffs.org)

**Contact:**  
[Jrabinowitz@homelesslaw.org](mailto:Jrabinowitz@homelesslaw.org)



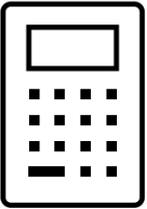
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# DALLAS AND COLLIN COUNTIES, TEXAS



3,541 people experiencing homelessness on any given night.



9<sup>th</sup> Most Populated City in the US



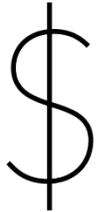
23% Reduction in overall homelessness  
28% reduction in unsheltered homelessness



16 Funded Coordinated Outreach Staff  
6 Geographical Outreach Zones



Effectively ended street homelessness in downtown Dallas  
Effectively ended veteran homelessness



Housed 16,000 individuals between 2021-2025

# CONTINUING TO MOVE THE NEEDLE ON UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS

## *Street-to-Home Encampment Response*



*Address public health and safety, while ending homelessness through connections to housing and support*

*Target and prioritize locations across the community*

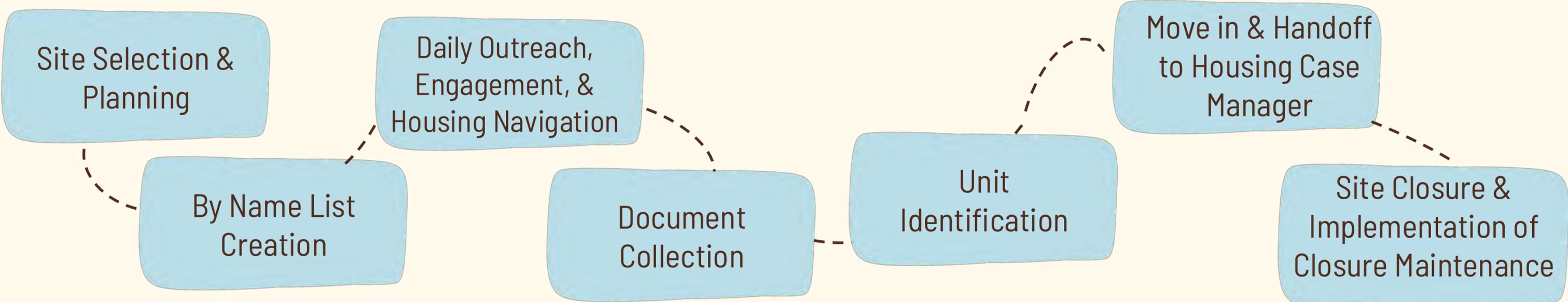
*Bring rehousing services and integrated behavioral healthcare to each site*

*Coordinated with local government to maintain site closure*

# STREET TO HOME ENCAMPMENT WORK OVERVIEW

**VISION:** Permanently close an encampment site 4-8 weeks by offering every encampment resident permanent housing.

**GOALS:** Improved effectiveness, efficiency, intentional way of closing an encampment, done in tandem with the City of Dallas to ensure a comprehensive closure maintenance strategy.



**Leadership Oversight & Community Response**

Sarah Kahn (CEO Housing Forward) | Assistant City Manager (City of Dallas)  
DDI CEO | Housing Forward Comms & PR | City of Dallas Comms & PR

**Housing & Outreach  
Lead Project Manager**  
Hannah Sims

**On-Site Lead**  
Housing Forward  
Outreach  
Coordinator

**Outreach Lead**

**Outreach Teams**  
CoC Coordinated Outreach  
Teams

**Critical  
Document Team**

**Housing Teams**  
CoC Housing Partners | County Housing Authority

**Unit Acquisition**  
Housing Forward  
Unit Lead

**Unit Engagement Team**  
Housing Forward

**Properties**  
Leasing Offices & Property  
Managers

**Supportive Services**  
Street Medicine | Behavioral Healthcare | Move In Kits

**Closure Maintenance  
Lead Project Manager**  
Director City of Dallas  
Emergency Management &  
Crisis Response

**Multidisciplinary Response Team (MRT) | Downtown Dallas, Inc. (DDI) |  
Coordination with Private Security Vendors | Law Enforcement | RIGHT Care | Medic 01**

**Complex Needs  
Lead Project Manager**  
Housing Forward Policy  
Transformation Lead

**Behavioral Healthcare**  
Regional Behavioral Health  
Authority | Deflection Center

**Healthcare Partners**  
Street Medicine Teams  
Local Hospital Systems

**Criminal  
Justice  
Department**  
Dallas County

**Complex Needs  
Outreach**  
Downtown Dallas,  
Inc. (DDI)

**Housing  
Teams**

## Leadership Oversight & Community Response

Provide oversight and system-wide problem solving | Support communications strategies and media requests

### Lead Project Management

Coordinate all response work related to rehousing teams, closure maintenance, and complex case coordination

### Outreach / Navigation

Provide outreach, engagement, and housing navigation support; to include document collection, unit applications, move-in support

### Housing Team

Complete program enrollments in HMIS | Upload documents in HMIS | Complete unit applications | Accompany clients to lease signings | Assist client with housing stabilization

### Unit Acquisition

Engage portfolio of properties to secure units for all those on encampment BNL

### Closure Maintenance

Clean up marked trash following site clearing | Fence sites where appropriate | Posting/Notices | Coordinate Law Enforcement patrols to support closure maintenance

### Supportive Services

Access to health and behavioral health services | Access to Move In Kit at time of lease signing

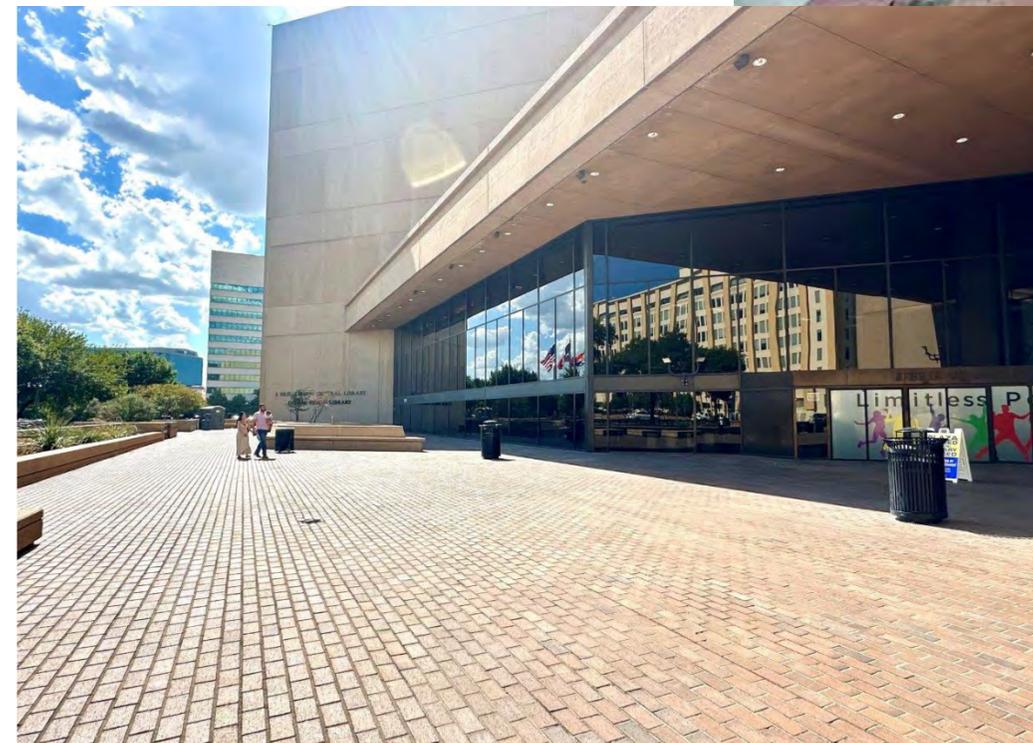
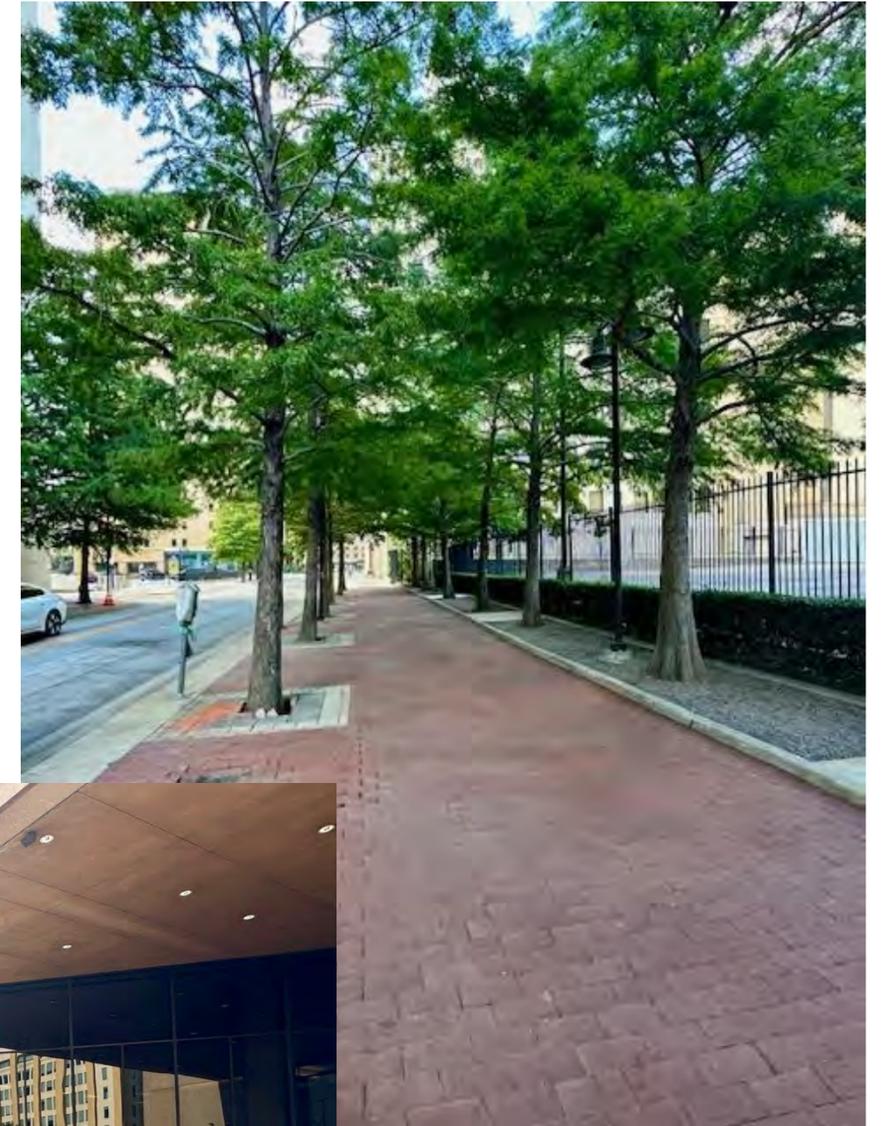


# STREET TO HOME INITIATIVE

*Coordination w/ local government on enforcement*

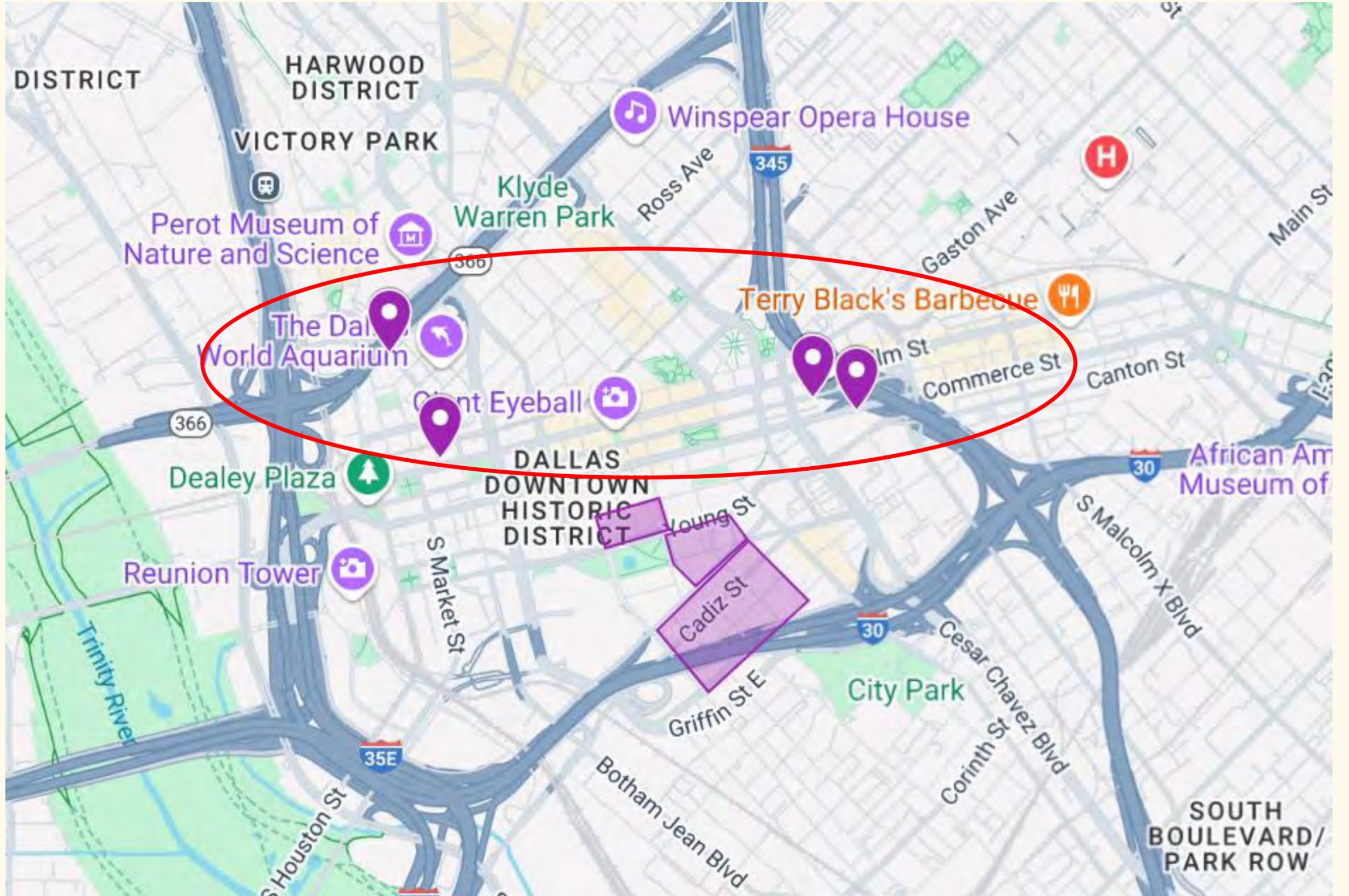
## What does Closure Maintenance Look Like?

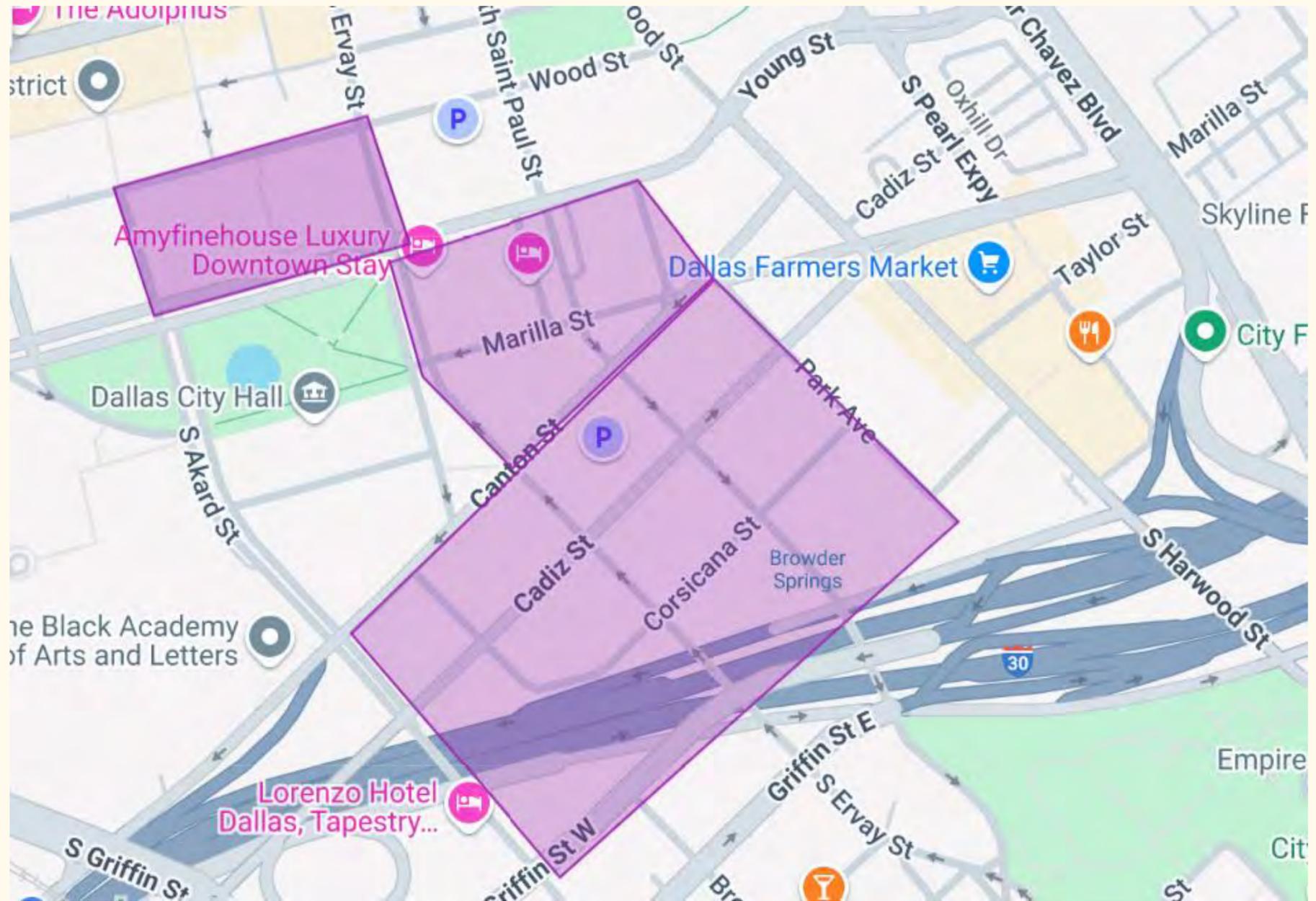
- Regular sleepers have been housed
- Comprehensive **enforcement** of restrictions on camping, loitering, sleeping, etc.
- **Re-activation of public spaces** -- patrols and security support long term closure maintenance
- Homeless response system continues to house people, from next locations and shelters

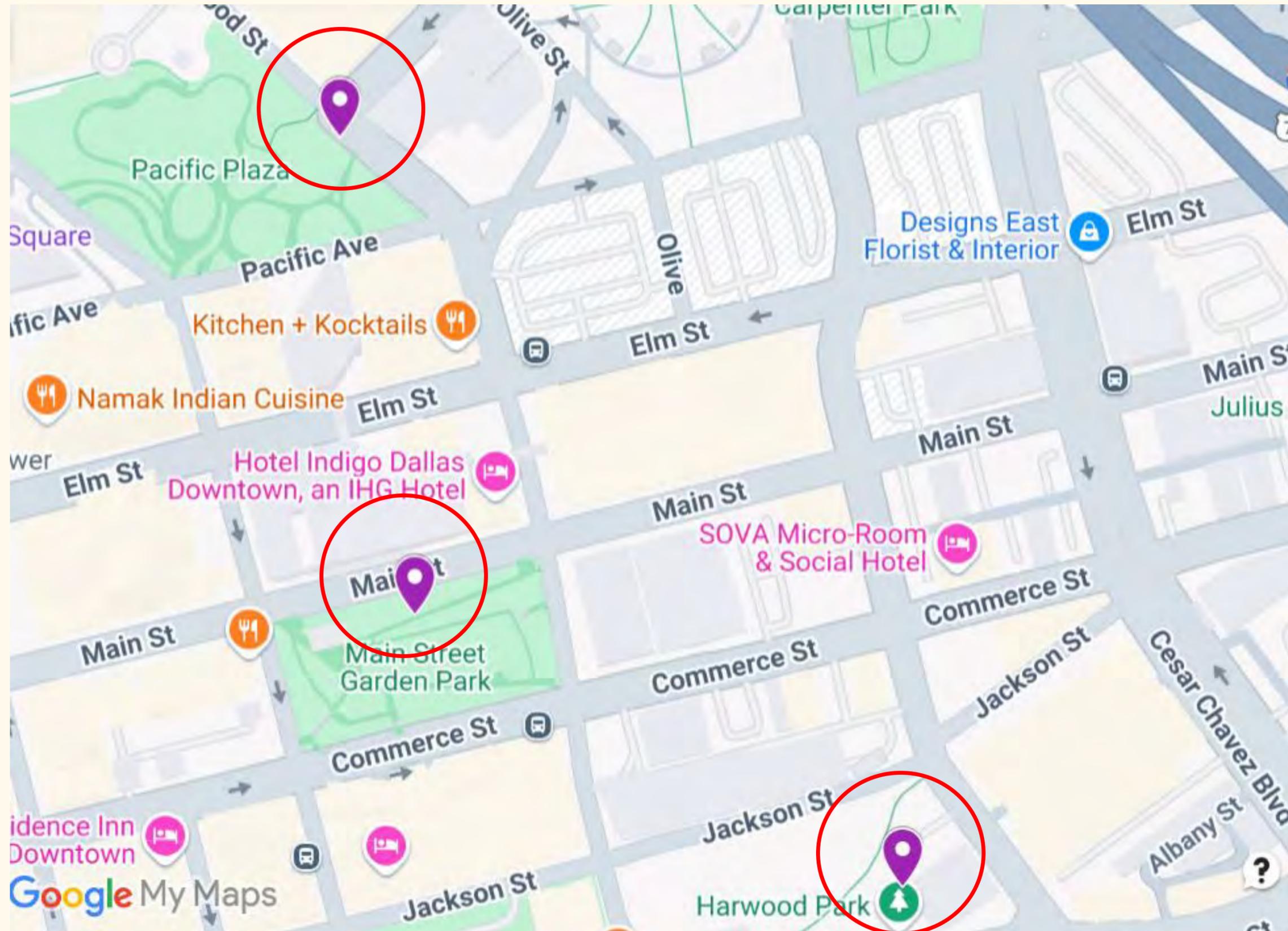


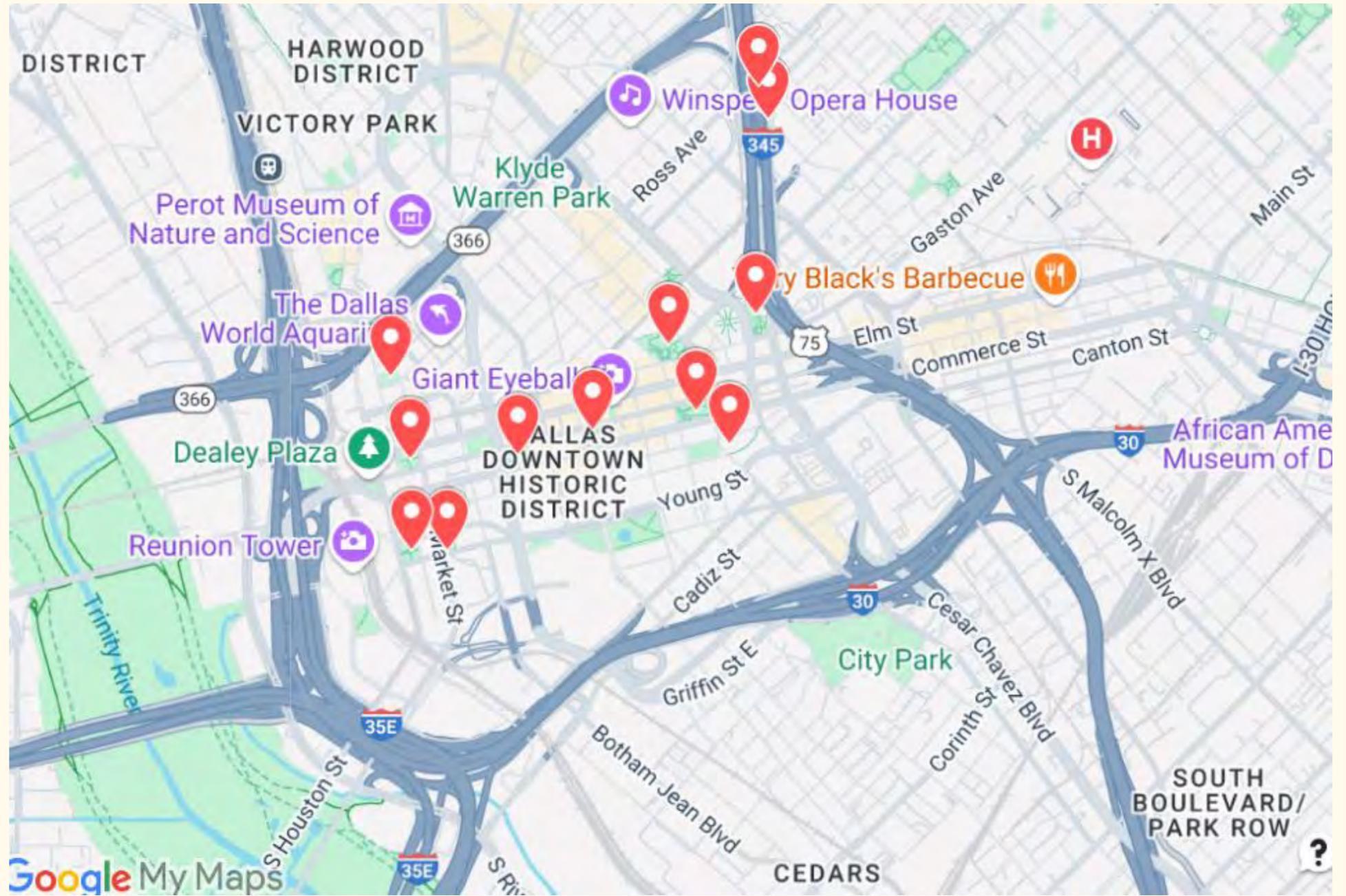
# COMMUNICATION & MEETING STRUCTURE

Meeting Type	Facilitator(s)	Participants	Frequency	Agenda
Encampment Coordination Call	On-Site Lead, Housing Forward Outreach Coordinator	Outreach Unit Teams Housing Teams Housing & Outreach Lead PM	Daily, 2:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daily progress updates for each client on the By Name List (BNL)</li> <li>Tasks and targets for the following day</li> </ul>
Project Management Meeting	Housing Forward & Outreach Lead Project Manager	Closure PM Lead Complex Needs PM Lead DDI (Downtown PID)	Weekly, Thursday Afternoons	<p>Each PM report out on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenges   Risks/Red Flags</li> <li>Priorities for the next 7 days</li> <li>Align on Asks for Leadership Team meeting</li> </ul>
Leadership Team	Housing Forward President & CEO  Assistant City Manager, City of Dallas	Housing Forward DDI The City of Dallas	Weekly, Thursday Afternoons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updates on progress</li> <li>Focus on eliminating barriers for Field Team &amp; Project Managers</li> <li>Ensuring resources, communication strategy, aligning on goals and outcomes</li> </ul>
Coordinated Outreach Coordination	Housing Forward Outreach Lead Project Manager	Outreach Case Managers Participating municipalities	Weekly, Thursday Afternoons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain list of active encampments</li> <li>Feedback from municipalities on areas of interest</li> <li>Share best practices</li> <li>Review coordinated outreach data</li> <li>Problem solve</li> </ul>









# 257 HOUSED OUT OF DOWNTOWN IN 12 MONTHS



257









# A “YES” CULTURE APPROACH



**We work as a cohesive team & communicate with our neighbors as a singular unit**



**We follow up when and where we say we will**



**We are data-driven and action-oriented**



**We are flexible learners who are transparent and reliable**



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**Brittany Odom**  
Brilliant By Design Consulting

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# From Punishment to Partnership

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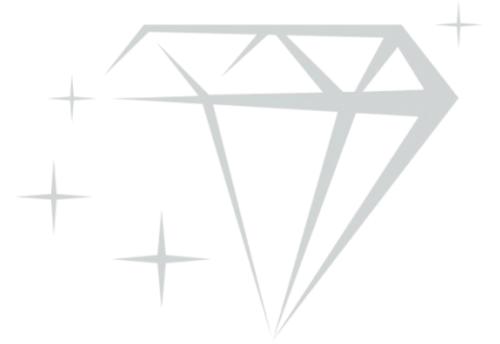
*Advancing Effective Solutions to  
Unsheltered Homelessness Through  
Cross-Sector Collaboration*



**September 2025**



## Criminalization is on the Rise



- In *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, decided on June 28, 2024, the Supreme Court ruled that the Eighth Amendment's protection against cruel and unusual punishment does not prohibit local governments from penalizing people for camping on public property, even when no alternative shelter is available.
- Cities increasingly criminalize homelessness through **anti-camping ordinances**, **“move-along” orders**, and **ticketing** even amid shelter shortages.

*What can CoC administrators and homeless services providers do to help mitigate the harmful impacts of punitive measures against people experiencing homelessness?*

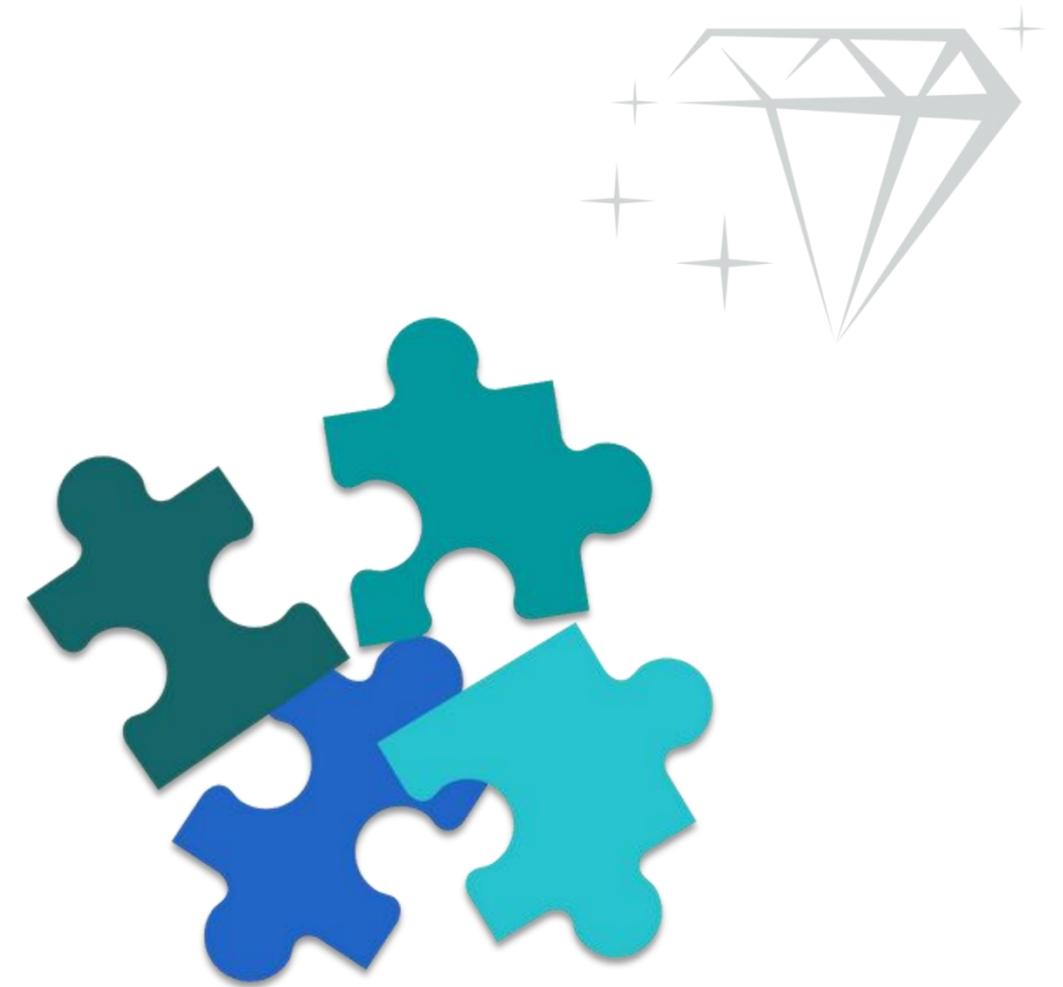
## Components of an Effective Encampment Response Strategy

**Planning, Preparation, & Coordination**

**Engagement & Service Connection**

**Closure Operations**

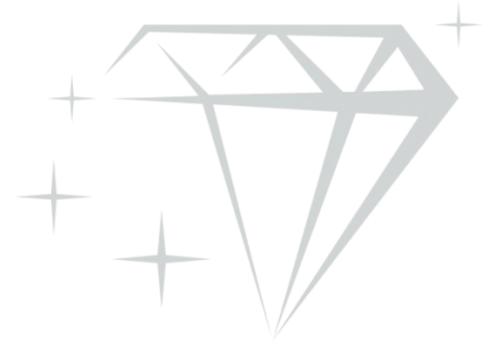
**Post-Closure Stabilization & Maintenance**



### **Community Examples**

- [Dallas, TX – Street to Home Initiative](#)
- [San Francisco, CA – Healthy Streets Operation Center \(HSOC\)](#)

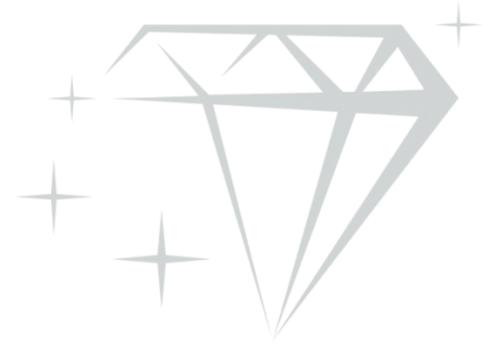
## Collaboration Between the CoC and Law Enforcement



- Co-develop written **dispatch protocols** with 911/dispatch so non-criminal, quality-of-life calls route to outreach or co-responder teams. Use a joint steering group (CoC + PD + EMS + public health) to **refine criteria** and **review high-acuity cases** regularly.
- Conduct **ride-alongs** that pair officers with outreach workers and vice versa so each side sees the other's work in context.
- Run recurring **joint trainings** for officers and outreach staff on: trauma-informed care, harm reduction, de-escalation, cultural humility, and local housing resources.



## Collaboration Between the CoC and Law Enforcement

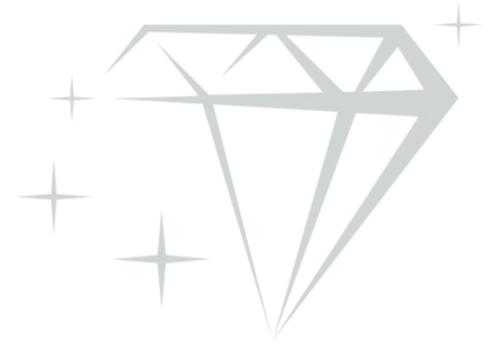


### **Develop a written agreement (MOU/MOA) that defines roles, limits, and outcomes.**

- Negotiate an **MOU or MOA** between the CoC (or lead agency), law enforcement agencies, public health, outreach providers, and behavioral health partners.
- Include: **shared goals**, who leads what on **outreach vs. enforcement**, **data-sharing rules**, **confidentiality**, **dispute resolution**, and **metrics for success** (e.g., housing placements, referrals, use-of-force incidents).



## Co-Responder Outreach Teams



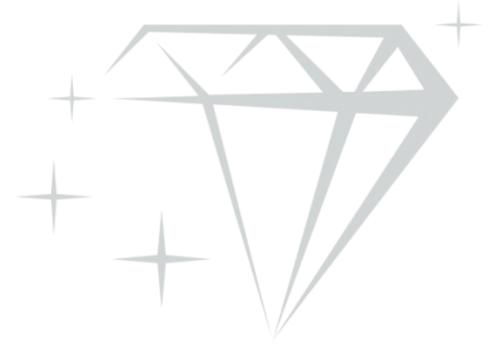
- Establish **co-responder teams** (clinician + outreach worker + medic, etc.) to respond to non-violent calls (mental health, substance use, encampment concerns).
- Ensure these teams can: de-escalate, provide on-site triage, do warm handoffs to housing case management, and follow up.

### Community Examples

- [Tucson, AZ – Multidisciplinary Outreach Team \(MDOT\)](#)
- [Eugene, OR – Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets \(CAHOOTS\)](#)
- [Houston, TX – Homeless Outreach Team \(HOT\)](#)



## Three Points of Action



**Upstream**  
(Before Enforcement)

*Help reduce the chances that people are in situations where camping bans or "move along" laws are enforced.*

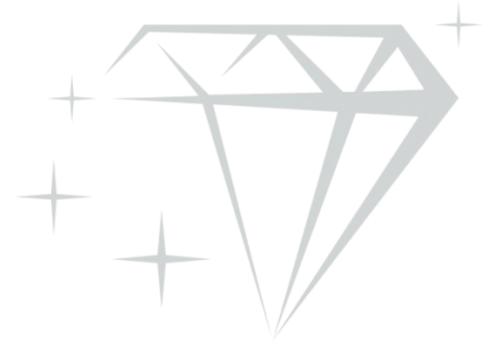
**At the Point of Enforcement**

*Intervention when enforcement is imminent or underway.*

**Downstream**  
(After Enforcement)

*If clients have already received tickets, fines, or jail time, minimize harm and help them resolve issues.*

## Upstream: Before Enforcement



### **Expand access to safe alternatives**

- Offer temporary storage and hygiene facilities (showers, bathrooms, lockers), since lack of these often triggers enforcement.

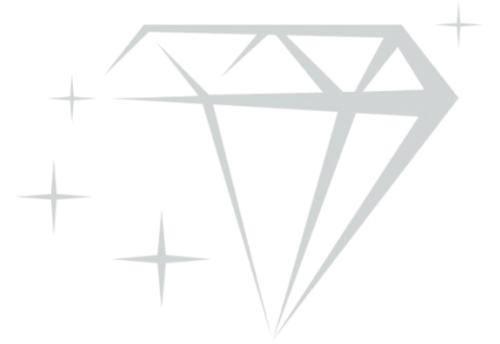
### **Information & preparation**

- Distribute “Know Your Rights” materials in plain language about local camping, loitering, and trespass rules. Share info on citation defense and local legal aid contacts.
- Train outreach staff to educate clients about which spaces are most at risk for sweeps or ticketing.

### **Prevention & diversion**

- Integrate benefits navigation (ID replacement, SSI/SSDI SOAR applications, Medicaid reinstatement) into outreach to stabilize people faster.

## At the Point of Enforcement



### **Rapid response outreach**

- Set up a hotline businesses/neighbors can call instead of police staffed by outreach workers who can de-escalate and offer services. Advertise the hotline to area business and the larger community.

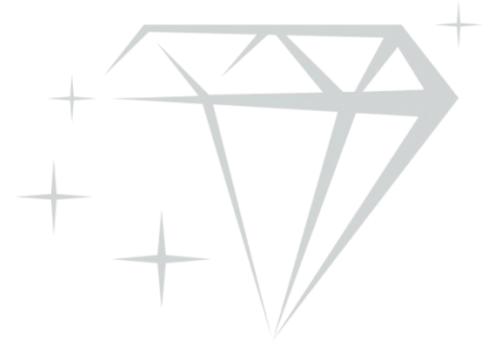
### **Service in lieu of citation**

- Work with local police or rangers to create diversion protocols where officers can refer someone to a provider (with a real-time contact) rather than issue a citation. Providers then document follow-up.

### **Presence and advocacy**

- Deploy outreach or peer staff at scheduled encampment “cleanups” or sweeps to help people connect with shelter, storage, or transportation, and witness enforcement to hold agencies accountable.

## Downstream: After Enforcement



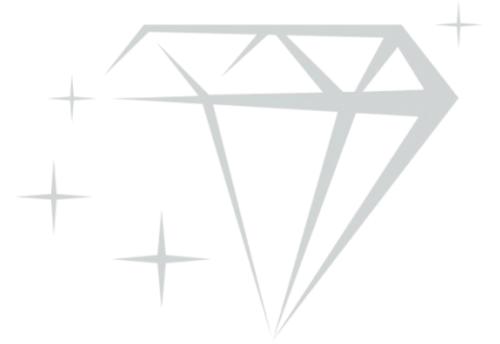
### **Court navigation**

- Accompany clients to court dates, help them keep track of paperwork, and connect them with homeless courts or diversion programs where fines can be waived in exchange for engagement with services.
- Host “legal aid days” at drop-in centers with pro bono attorneys who can help resolve outstanding warrants or fines.

### **Re-entry and jail in-reach**

- If people do get jailed, set up jail in-reach to connect them back to services immediately on release, to reduce recidivism and the cycle of enforcement.

## Downstream: After Enforcement



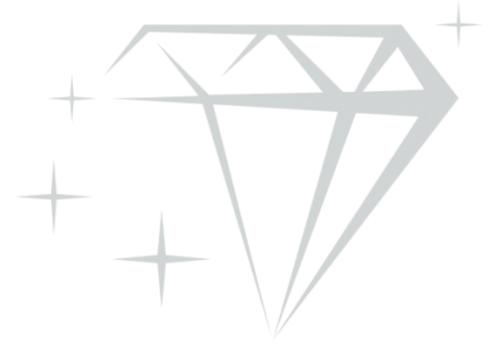
### Homeless Court partnerships

- Advocate with local courts and prosecutors to establish (or expand) homeless courts where citations can be dismissed or converted into service milestones (e.g., attending an intake, securing ID).

### Community Examples

- [Fort Lauderdale, FL – Community Court](#)
- [Hollywood, FL – Community Court](#)

## Resources



- [19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively](#) (USICH)
- [Encampment Resolution Guide](#) (UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative)
- [Encampment Prioritization Tool](#) (UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative)
- [Housing-Focused Street Outreach](#) (National Alliance to End Homelessness)



# Thank you to our Speakers!

**Rebecca Hikom**

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**Brittany Odom**

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