COUNTING METHODS FOR AUBURN’S HOMELESS

Executive Summary

Auburn uses a yearly Point-in-Time count to assess rates of homelessness in the city. In this project, we examined the efficacy of this method, described practices in other cities, and offered suggestions which can be adopted to produce more accurate assessments of the homeless population. We believe these changes could assist Auburn in reaching its goal of better understanding and aiding those without permanent shelter.

Gaps in Accuracy

We found that robust data collection and population counts can aid cities in most effectively understanding and aiding those without permanent shelter. Some aspects of Auburn’s current counting methodology can contribute to an inaccurate count of the homeless population.

- Seasonal fluctuations are not fully accounted for
- Date of count may not adequately account for population dynamics
- Not all Census tracts are covered
- Data collection methods risk being one-dimensional

Suggestions

- Produce more involved counts on a quarterly basis
- Utilize unsheltered volunteers in the survey process
- Surveys should seek to collect quantitative and qualitative information
- Gather information about homeless youth, who are often harder to identify
- Assess risk factors and populations already at risk of homelessness
- Consider developing digital tools or mobile apps
- Consider developing voluntary and ethical participatory monitoring programs

Conclusion

We believe that the suggestions made in this report will help Auburn maximize productive outcomes and insights when assessing the local homeless population. An accurate count is a critical first step towards achieving a multifaceted understanding of any unsheltered population. More accurate information will facilitate Auburn’s efforts to best serve those struggling with finding or maintaining stable housing. We believe it is important to reach out to the people during Point-in-Time counts to find out more about their experiences and factors that may have led to a loss of stable housing. We believe that Auburn has the potential to be on the forefront of best counting practices and productively working with unhoused communities.