



Essential Needs - Housing, Food, Clothing



Description

Abilene was a stock shipping point on the Texas and Pacific Railway in 1881 – bypassing the 1881 County Seat of Buffalo Gap. Abilene’s rich, nearly 140-year history reflects care for its citizens and a deep sense of community. In any community, including Abilene, people face challenges in meeting their essential needs – shelter, food, and clothing. During the Community Visioning process, over 2,000 residents indicated that meeting the essential needs of “their neighbors” was a high priority.

Abilene is comprised of friendly, caring, philanthropic residents who genuinely care for (as they often say) “their neighbors.” More importantly, though, many actively demonstrate that they are willing to not only “care” but “do!” During Open Forums (which included a total of approximately 400 people), nearly 100% of residents indicated that they would take action to help other community members in need. The area has a strong faith-based community, highly engaged and generous healthcare systems, an active group of citizens within the disabled community, for-profit and non-profit businesses that selflessly reach out to disadvantaged communities, and others.

As we enter a new decade, the face of Abilene is changing, too. Basic needs of those facing economic challenges, people experiencing homelessness, and other groups clearly resonate with Abilene residents’ inclination to “help their neighbors.” For example, increased ethnic diversity and immigrants bring new opportunities for cultural and economic vibrancy, as well as, in some cases, greater need for basic services. Through the Community Visioning process, community members shared ideas and insights regarding ways to meet core needs and inclusively embrace all Abilene communities.

Downtown revitalization, expanded outreach to ethnic communities, enhanced services for people with disabilities and those facing economic challenges, programs for new immigrants, and other activities provide a renewed purpose and a growing sense of unity.



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Vision Statement Options

- To be a “front porch” community that prioritizes resources to meet essential needs -- housing, food, clothing, etc. -- through innovative, intentional, community-based resources.
- To be a beautiful and economically forward-thinking community dedicated to providing opportunity for prosperity for ALL.

Strategies

- Create a central location for food and clothing - food co-op/better communication between different resources in Abilene
- Enact local regulations that support home ownership, provide advocacy services for renters, and provide shelter for people experiencing homelessness.
- Work with churches, the Department of Social Services, schools, large healthcare providers, and others to identify individuals or families facing housing, food, clothing, or other basic needs. Create a database of potential resources and personnel who can help guide or liaise between those in need and potential resource providers.





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Key Indicators

- Percent of families spending over 30% of their income on housing
- Number of free/reduced lunch students in K-12 schools
- Number of 211 calls related to resources from local agencies
- Number of homeless individuals (Point-In-Time count)
- Number of affordable homes developed

Supporting Indicators

- Local eviction rate
- Poverty rates
- Section 8 waitlist
- Crime rates
- Number of backpack feeding programs
- Number of homeowners in low-income neighborhoods and in all Abilene
- Number of individuals and families receiving TANF & SNAP benefits
- Number of people applying for housing assistance
- Number of people receiving food and clothing assistance
- Percent of students on free or reduced lunch



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Potential Partners

- Association of Realtors and Real Estate Agents
- Big Country Homebuilders Association
- Businesses/Employers (Private Sector)
- Churches and Faith-based Organizations
- City Link
- Farmers Markets
- Food Banks
- Habitat for Humanity
- Homebuilders, Landlords, Housing Complexes
- Housing Authority/HUD
- Hug-a-Root Family Farm and Other Local Farms
- International Rescue Committee
- Meals on Wheels
- Non-profit Organizations
- ONS
- Prison Units
- Schools
- Social and Government Programs and Services
- Uber/Lyft
- West Texas Homelessness Network



Cause Area #2: Essential Needs – Housing, Food, Clothing

- Change mindsets from “Hand-up vs. hand out”
- Create a “Homeless to ‘home-yes’” program
- Create a Community land trust
- Create a standard Tenant Bill of Rights - protection for renters, education for renters
- Create better definitions for homelessness and food insecurity
- Create homeowner/neighborhood associations in areas needing revitalization
- Create landlord organizations with incentives to revitalize
- Create more emerging shelter options for longer-term transitional homeless individuals
- Create or increase first-time homebuyer incentives
- Decrease societal callousness - understanding root causes and increasing compassion for others to overcome
- Develop home ownership and renter courses (i.e., home maintenance, eviction, etc.) and offer them throughout Abilene – especially in ethnic and economically challenged areas
- Develop stiffer sanctions against landlords that won’t comply with regulations
- Educate and converse with landlords to encourage improvement
- Encourage community gardens/local food growth
- Expand backpack programs for the whole family, not just one student
- Improve 2-1-1 communications
- Improve neighborhood safety and appearance
- Increase ownership vs. renting
- Make downtown buildings and housing accessible for all by adding elevators
- Place public transportation routes in more location-strategic places (i.e., food/clothing pantries)
- Promote financial literacy
- Provide incentives for developers to build low/moderate housing within the city
- Provide safe and affordable housing options, especially for the elderly