



Item Number: 18

**City Council / Board of Directors**

**Written Communications**

**Meeting of: June 6, 2023**

**Submitted By:**

Scott Webb, City Planner

**Subject:**

Consultant/Professional Services Provider Agreement with Symba Center as Wraparound Services Provider of the Interim Shelter and Wellness Center

**Recommendation:**

That the Honorable City Council:

- 1) Approve a Consultant/Professional Services Provider Agreement with Symba Center, for an initial twenty-three (23) month term, through June 30, 2025, to provide the Wraparound Services at the Interim Shelter and Wellness Center that includes start-up funds in an amount not to exceed \$1,312,565.00 that will be later reimbursed back to the City; and
- 2) Authorize non-substantive changes to the Consultant/Professional Services Provider Agreement, if necessary, as agreed upon by the City Manager and City Attorney.

**Fiscal Impact:**

The start-up funds in the amount of \$1,312,565.00 identified in the Consultant/Professional Services Provider Agreement ("Agreement" – Attachment A) will be initially funded from Measure P and later reimbursed by Symba Center back to the City during the term of the Agreement. It is anticipated Symba Center's operation will be self-sustainable within six months of operation. Once sustainable, Symba Center will not require City funds to continue operations and will utilize its reimbursements from insurance providers to fund their scope of services.

Account	Expenditure
1054020W 52300 (Measure P Contract Services)	\$1,312,565.00

As mentioned in the discussion section of this staff report, the Agreement requires Symba Center to pay the City an established bed fee for recuperative care clients and a monthly license fee for the use of the medical clinic building at the Wellness Center for primary

care services. These funds will be tracked as program income and used solely to support and maintain the Wellness Center and the services provided thereon. Based on initial projections, the bed fee for recuperative care clients and the medical clinic license fee is expected to generate \$2,601,368.00 in revenue over the initial term through June 30, 2025.

**Strategic Plan Goal:**

This project aligns with Goal D, Strategy 1 in the 2020 Strategic Plan, “Reduce Homelessness” and “Establish a wellness and recuperative care center as a navigation resource and shelter for homeless and at-risk populations”.

**Background:**

Governments, at various levels, across the entire country are struggling to address increasing number of unsheltered and at-risk individuals who are living precariously and without stable housing. A variety of factors have contributed to the situation, including, but not limited to, economic factors, lack of affordable housing, lack of mental health services, a rise in substance abuse, and a wide range of other contributing factors.

Homelessness in the state of California has significantly increased over recent years and as of 2022, approximately half of the nation’s unsheltered homeless population reside in the state. According to the 2023 Point-In-Time Count (PITC) Report, the County of San Bernardino saw a 26% increase in homelessness from the prior PITC, with a total count of 4,195 homeless adults and children counted during the 2023 survey. More than one-third (39.9%) of unsheltered adults and children counted as homeless became homeless for the first time during the 12 months prior to the homeless count, and 44.1% of adults experiencing homelessness were chronically homeless, meaning they have been homeless for a year or more and have a disabling condition such as mental illness, a chronic health condition or a physical disability.

In 2023, Victorville remained the city with the second highest homeless population in the County at 607, second only to the city of San Bernadino at 1,502. Specific to Victorville’s homeless population, 19% were incarcerated during the last 12 months, 19.8% have a mental health disorder, 10.4% have a physical disability, and 33.5% have a substance use disorder.

Guided by our Homelessness Solutions Task Force, the City continues to address the homeless challenge within our community. Specific to our Homelessness Solutions Strategic Action Plan, the 4.5 acre, 170-bed Wellness Center currently under construction at 16902 First Street will provide an innovative, enhanced shelter model that will utilize a housing first approach to increase the number of beds available to our unsheltered population. This approach helps manage the impacts of homelessness while complying with Federal court determinations from Martin v. Boise,<sup>1</sup> which limits enforcement of illegal camping on public property to those times during which shelter beds are available to accommodate the City’s unsheltered population. Furthermore, our recuperative care model will provide a safe place to discharge homeless patients when they no longer

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<sup>1</sup> City of Boise v. Martin (2019) 920 F.3d 584.

require hospitalization but still need to heal from an illness or injury. Our Wellness Center will allow individuals to continue their recovery and receive treatment for minor illnesses while case managers facilitate access to primary care, behavioral health services, and other supportive social services, such as transportation, food, and housing. Recuperative care saves taxpayer dollars, costs significantly less than extended hospital stays, and leads to fewer hospital re-admissions. Clients served are also more likely to find permanent housing.

Utilizing what was learned while aiding, assisting, and operating the seasonal warming shelter, the 24-hour emergency shelter, and the Interim Shelter, respectively, City staff concluded that a different approach would be needed to provide the highest level of care that will efficiently and effectively address the issues the homeless population face. This different approach includes improving on-site supportive services (medical, mental health, case management, etc.), enhancing outreach efforts, and seeking innovative ways to link individuals to permanent housing solutions.

Ultimately, the model that was deemed most appropriate was one in which an organization with expertise in shelter operations and one with expertise in wraparound services would be selected simultaneously. These two entities will work with City staff in a collaborative partnership designed to reduce and address homelessness utilizing evidence-based practices.

Currently, High Desert Homeless Services (“HDHS”) operates the Interim Shelter, located at Westwinds Sports Center 18241 George Blvd., and HDHS will continue to operate the Interim Shelter as a shelter operator until the transition to the Wellness Center takes place. As provided for in the proposed Agreement, Symba Center will assume all supportive services at the Interim Shelter, with the addition of recuperative care starting on August 1, 2023. During the transition period from the Interim Shelter to the Wellness Center, Symba Center will coordinate services with HDHS at the Interim Shelter and with the new shelter operator at the Wellness Center. In a separate agenda item, staff is recommending Hope the Mission (“HTM”) as the shelter operator of the Wellness Center. HTM’s proposed agreement will designate a site Program Manager who will acclimate himself/herself and HTM with the current Interim Shelter operations and begin operational and logistical planning for the Wellness Center. This will ensure continuity of care and consistency for all current clients. Occupancy of the Wellness Center is expected to take place in the Fall of 2023.

## **Discussion:**

### **Request for Proposal Process**

On February 20, 2023, staff issued a Request for Proposal (RFP), pursuant to Section 2.28.280 of the Victorville Municipal Code to solicit a Wellness Center Wraparound Services (“WCWS”) Provider to oversee the on-site supportive services of the Interim Shelter and the Wellness Center once the facility is completed. The on-site supportive “**Wraparound**” services include the development of pathways toward permanent housing; assistance with income stabilization; medical and behavioral health services;

recuperative care; substance abuse counseling; case management; job training/placement; assistance with documentation readiness; etc. Two organizations responded to the RFP.

On March 16, 2023, a selection committee comprised of City staff evaluated the proposals submitted in response to the RFP in accordance with the following criteria:

- Organizational Experience;
- General Program Overview;
- Levels and Types of Services;
- Community Service Partners;
- Levels and Types of Services;
- Client Selection and Service Delivery;
- Participation in Coordinated Entry System;
- Annual Operating Budget; and
- Connection to and Knowledge of the Local Community.

Based on this evaluation criterion, staff are recommending that Symba Center serve as the Wellness Center Wraparound Services Provider. Symba Center has agreed to provide the full scope of core services outlined in the Agreement (Attachment A). These services include, but are not limited to, housing navigation, medical and behavioral health services, recuperative care, substance abuse counseling, case management, job training/placement, assistance with documentation readiness, and coordination with partner referral entities.

### **Symba Center History**

Symba Center has provided services to the homeless population in the local Victor Valley Community for the last few years. Symba Center is a faith-based nonprofit, free clinic providing primary healthcare services to uninsured patients in the High Desert. Pharmacists, Dr. Shawn Smith and Dr. Bowtie Brian founded Symba Center in 2019 with the shared purpose of improving community wellness by increasing access to healthcare for all individuals, especially those who are uninsured or homeless.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Symba Center providers put themselves on the frontline to protect Victorville's homeless community. They collaborated with homeless shelters, including the City's Interim Shelter, to establish intake, quarantine, and testing protocols in accordance with CDC guidelines to prevent the spread of this deadly disease to the city's vulnerable homeless population and homeless shelter staff. Symba Center conducted training for shelter staff on how to identify COVID-19 symptoms, the proper use of PPE and performed COVID-19 testing.

Symba Center continues to conduct wellness checks and chronic disease management for the most vulnerable in Victorville's homeless shelters and for homeless individuals in San Bernardino County's Project Roomkey. Symba Center is collaborating with Victor Valley College to bring case management services to college students experiencing

homelessness. It also currently plays a pivotal role at the Interim Shelter, providing medical and mental health oversight for clients.

Symba Center has obtained an active contract with Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP) and has a pending contract with Molina Healthcare to provide recuperative care and case management services. For reference, IEHP has provided a letter confirming Symba Center's active contract (Attachment B). Symba Center is also in the process of obtaining State approval to provide primary care services from the Wellness Center's medical clinic building.

### **Symba Center Staffing**

Symba Center will maintain on-site staffing levels necessary to meet the level of care for the number of homeless clients served by the Interim Shelter and has agreed to interview/consider hiring existing staff employed by HDHS to fill some of the WCWS positions. The staffing plan proposed by Symba Center for the Interim Shelter and Wellness Center operations includes the following:

<b>WCWS Interim Shelter Staff</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Administrative Specialist	1.0
Case Manager/Housing Navigators	5.0
Occupational Therapists	0.5
Dietitian Consultant	0.5
Licensed Vocational Nurse	4.5
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist	1.0
Associate Marriage and Family Therapist	2.0
Nurse Practitioner (Medical)	0.5
Nurse Practitioner (Psychiatric)	0.5
Registered Nurse Case Manager	1.0
Substance Use Counselors	1.0
Wellness Services Director	0.75
Wellness Services Manager	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>19.25</b>

<b>WCWS Wellness Center Staff</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Administrative Specialist	1.0
Case Manager/Housing Navigators	10.0
Occupational Therapists	0.5
Dietitian Consultant	0.5
Licensed Vocational Nurse	8.5
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist	1.0
Associate Marriage and Family Therapist	4.5
Nurse Practitioner (Medical)	0.5

Nurse Practitioner (Psychiatric)	0.5
Registered Nurse Case Manager	1.0
Substance Use Counselors	2.0
Wellness Services Director	0.75
Wellness Services Manager	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>32.25</b>

### **Compensation Arrangement**

After evaluating Symba Center's operational model, which focuses on the partnership with the community at large (organizations, colleges, other government agencies), donations, volunteerism, grants, and contracts with Medi-Cal providers (which will provide revenue); staff anticipates Symba Center will effectively assist in offsetting the shelter operation and maintenance costs of the Wellness Center. Symba Center will also invest its own resources back into the community, specifically for permanent and/or permanent supportive housing.

Given that the City will be providing certain components of Symba Center's operations, such as shelter, food, and utilities for Wellness Center clients, the compensation arrangement as explained in Section 4 of the Agreement (Attachment A) is summarized as follows:

- **Start-Up Period Funding** – The City will provide up to \$1,312,565.00 in funding to assist Symba Center in providing services until service reimbursements are received from Medi-Cal providers. Symba Center is required to pay back to the City all start-up period funding by the close of Fiscal Year 2023/2024 and will self-sustain all required services for the duration of the Agreement, including any extensions.
- **Recuperative Care Bed Fee** – Symba Center will be authorized under the Agreement to utilize a minimum of 25 beds at the Interim Shelter and a minimum of 53 beds at the Wellness Center for recuperative care clients. Symba Center will receive funding from health insurance providers for eligible recuperative care clients that receive services at the Interim Shelter and Wellness Center. To offset the City's operational cost, such as utilities, security, janitorial services, food, shelter and general maintenance, City staff have negotiated an initial \$75 per day Recuperative Care Bed fee at the Wellness Center for the first 180 days or until operations commence at the Wellness Center, whichever occurs first. Following the initial 180 days or when operations commence at the Wellness Center, the fee will increase to \$91.00 per day for each recuperative care bed in service.
- **Medical Clinic Fee** – When the Wellness Center medical clinic building is certified for clinic use, Symba Center will be responsible to pay a monthly license fee of \$10,000.00 to the City for use of the Medical Clinic to provide Out-Patient Services

to clients of the Wellness Center and to those at risk of homelessness in the community.

**Term**

The term of this Agreement shall commence on August 1, 2023, and shall continue for twenty-three months (through June 30, 2025), as further detailed in Section 6 of the Agreement. The term of this Agreement may be extended for three (3) successive one-year terms upon mutual agreement of the parties.

## Recommendation

Given the pressing need to address the service needs of the homeless population and reduce homelessness within the community, staff recommends that the City Council approve the Consultant/Professional Services Provider Agreement with Symba Center in an amount not to exceed \$1,312,565.00 to serve as the Wraparound Services Provider at the Interim Shelter and Wellness Center for an initial term through June 30, 2025.

City staff and representatives from Symba Center will be available during the meeting for any questions the City Council may have.

**Attachments:**

- A. Symba Center Professional Services Provider Agreement  
B. Inland Empire Health Plan Letter