

10-13-2013

Homeless Issues in Downtown Salt Lake City : Situation Assessment Proposal

Michele Straube

S.J. Quinney College of Law, University of Utah, michele.straube@law.utah.edu

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Recommended Citation

Straube, Michele, "Homeless Issues in Downtown Salt Lake City : Situation Assessment Proposal" (2013). *Environmental Dispute Resolution Program*. 7.

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Wallace Stegner Center
for Land, Resources and the Environment
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH S.J. QUINNEY COLLEGE OF LAW

Situation Assessment

Homeless Issues in Downtown Salt Lake City

PROPOSAL

Environmental Dispute Resolution Program
332 South 1400 East, Room 101, Salt Lake City, UT 84112-0730
801-585-5516 - michele.straube@law.utah.edu
<http://www.law.utah.edu/stegner/environmental-dispute-resolution/>



Description of Proposed Project

All levels of government have been working to improve conditions for the homeless population for years, and much progress has been made. Perceptions about homelessness differ widely, but the emotion and rhetoric surrounding homeless issues in downtown Salt Lake City has risen significantly within the past few months. Various stakeholder interests have suggested potential solutions to discrete issues, but often solutions to one issue have unforeseen consequences or create new problems.

Salt Lake City has a history of, and recognizes the value of, using a collaborative approach to address significant public issues. A collaborative approach will only be successful, however, if it is grounded in a realistic assessment of the current landscape surrounding the homeless issues. The intent to collaborate is not enough. A thoughtful and strategic assessment of collaborative opportunity should include these kinds of questions -- What are the significant issues that need to be resolved? Who is interested in what outcomes? What is already being done to address the issue, by whom? What are the opportunities for collaboration and consensus? What are the challenges? What value can municipal government add to resolving the issue?

This project proposes to provide a comprehensive Situation Assessment of the homeless issues affecting downtown Salt Lake City – exploring public perceptions and stakeholder willingness to be part of the solution, while also presenting a complete picture of existing efforts to address homeless issues downtown. The information gathered and analyzed should enable city government to move beyond Bandaid fixes and engage in effective and strategic problem-solving to provide long-term solutions to specific problems identified through the situation assessment.

The project will involve the following tasks to complete the Situation Assessment:

- 30-50 confidential interviews with the full range of stakeholder interests involved with and/or affected by homeless issues in downtown SLC, including but not limited to:

RDA	Downtown Alliance	Downtown businesses
Homeless service providers	Downtown residents	Salt Lake City Council
SLC Mayor's office	SLC CED staff	Homeless individuals
SLC Police	Homeless court	State Community Services

To the extent possible, all interviews will be attended by two individuals (two sets of listening ears).

- Research into past, present and future strategic planning and collaborative efforts that may include or impact the homeless population in downtown Salt Lake City.

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- Research into unique approaches to downtown homeless issues taken by 1-3 other cities, with particular focus on strategic priorities and partnerships.
- Synthesis of the information gathered into a final Situation Assessment Report.

Deliverables

Based on the information-gathering described above, we will write a final Situation Assessment Report which will include the following:

- Summary of stakeholder perspectives on homeless issues to be resolved and potential solutions (taking care to maintain confidentiality);
- Summary of existing strategic plans and ongoing projects related to homeless issues affecting downtown Salt Lake City;
- Identification of potential strategic opportunities for city government to leverage stakeholder interest and add value in addressing homeless issues in downtown Salt Lake City; and
- Process design suggestions for moving forward in a collaborative, efficient and effective manner.

We anticipate that the proposed project can be completed within a three-month timeframe. This is an ambitious timeframe which assumes the ability to promptly schedule stakeholder interviews.

Staffing

Michele Straube, Director of the Stegner Environmental Dispute Resolution (EDR) Program, will be the project coordinator. Ms. Straube will make every effort to participate in all interviews. She will supervise all research and be responsible for approving and editing the content of the final situation assessment report.

Haley Carmer, a third year law student, will receive credit toward a *pro bono* Certificate of Service¹ as a result of her work on this project. Ms. Carmer will participate in interviews, conduct research and assist with writing the final report.

¹ <http://www.law.utah.edu/probono/about-pro-bono/>

Students from the Environmental Clinic² will receive clinical credit as a result of their work on this project. All four clinic students will participate in interviews and will assist with synthesis and analysis through their weekly “case rounds” clinic sessions. One of the four clinic students will also conduct research and assist with writing the final report.

Patti Beekhuizen, Administrative Assistant to the EDR Program, will facilitate scheduling of interviews, compile data as needed, and provide editorial and formatting assistance for the final report.

² <http://www.law.utah.edu/clinic/clinic-list/the-environmental-clinic/>