

# Thinking about the homeless

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Affordable Housing](#) April 8, 2021

 *Latest post in a series on Affordable Housing* 

Confronting the homeless situation is almost a universal campaign topic among our candidates, so these stories are thought provoking.

selections from [Stephen Althouse](#), “*New position proposed to address homelessness in Allentown.*” *WFMZ, April 8, 2021.*

A new position devoted to addressing homelessness in Allentown was proposed Wednesday night by city council.

Council forwarded legislation that would create a “homeless service coordinator” position responsible for “providing coordination and support for the initiatives of the Allentown Commissioner on Homelessness,” according to the bill.

The hire would be tasked with educating the public and local government officials on issues regarding people without homes. They would also develop and implement related strategies and services, as well as coordinate the efforts of agencies already serving homeless people, such as the local government and not-for-profit and faith-based providers.

The homeless service coordinator would also be expected to increase the number of landlords willing to rent to homeless individuals, acquire federal and state funding to expand rental assistance to help people who are facing eviction, and expand affordable housing options.

Ultimately, the work of the position should result in “reducing the number of people and families that experience homelessness, so that homelessness in Allentown is rare, brief and non-reoccurring.”

selections from [Paul Muschick](#), “*Tiny homes for Allentown homeless worth a try. Here’s why.*” *Morning Call, March 25, 2021.*

The idea of building tiny homes for Allentown’s homeless has merit and I hope city officials will consider it.

It's not a perfect solution to addressing the problem of homelessness, as critics have pointed out. But there is no perfect solution. The problem has nagged society for centuries.

Tiny home communities are one of the latest concepts. They exist in some places, mostly out West.

Are they working? That's depends on who you ask. But the lack of universal consensus shouldn't kill the idea here. Allentown shouldn't be afraid to try something different.

There are more pros than cons, and that's why they should be considered.

Some of the pros are obvious.

A tiny home — even one that some Morning Call readers have [described as nothing more than a glorified shed](#) — at least puts a roof over a head. It doesn't have a toilet or kitchen, but has heat and air conditioning. And a door that locks.

People would be more comfortable, and safer, than sleeping in the woods in a tent or in an abandoned building or doorway.

Other pros are not as obvious and should not be overlooked.

[The tiny homes plan pitched for Allentown](#) — Hope Village of Allentown — would be maintained and operated by nonprofit Operation Address The Homeless.

Plans call for the village to receive mail, meaning people who live there would have an address to use on applications for benefits and jobs. That's a huge barrier for the homeless.

The agency would help residents get identification, another barrier.

Residents would be required to open a bank account and save money. They would have to participate in six to 12 hours of programming a week on topics such as cooking; computer and trade skills; fitness; parenting; GED classes; family counseling; mental health; and drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

Residents would have to work, either on- or off-site. They would have to pay rent of \$25 to \$50 a month, depending on their income. But the rent would be refunded back to them to be used to help pay for permanent housing. The length of stay for each resident would vary.

All of those services would help get residents in a position of stability where they could live on their own, without such intensive support.

The biggest con to the plan is finding a location.

Where do you put a village of 25 tiny homes and its communal facilities? And how do you convince people living nearby to accept it?

Another con of a tiny homes community for the homeless is that it segregates them, as pointed out by opponents of the plan in a recent [op-ed in The Morning Call](#).

I also wonder how many people would want to live in a tiny homes community. There's a reason that some homeless people prefer to live in the woods. They want their independence.

Living somewhere with rules — such as a 9 p.m. curfew unless you're working, and requirements to work and have a bank account — likely wouldn't be popular with some. Nor would paying rent, even if that rent is returned to them.

Then there is the cost. It's big.

Operation Address The Homeless is seeking nearly \$500,000 in public funding, plus an additional \$200,000 if Allentown and Lehigh County

can't donate property. That's a big sticking point for a city with financial struggles.

But it could be looked at as investment because, if it works, a tiny homes community could mean lowering other costs related to serving the homeless.