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.
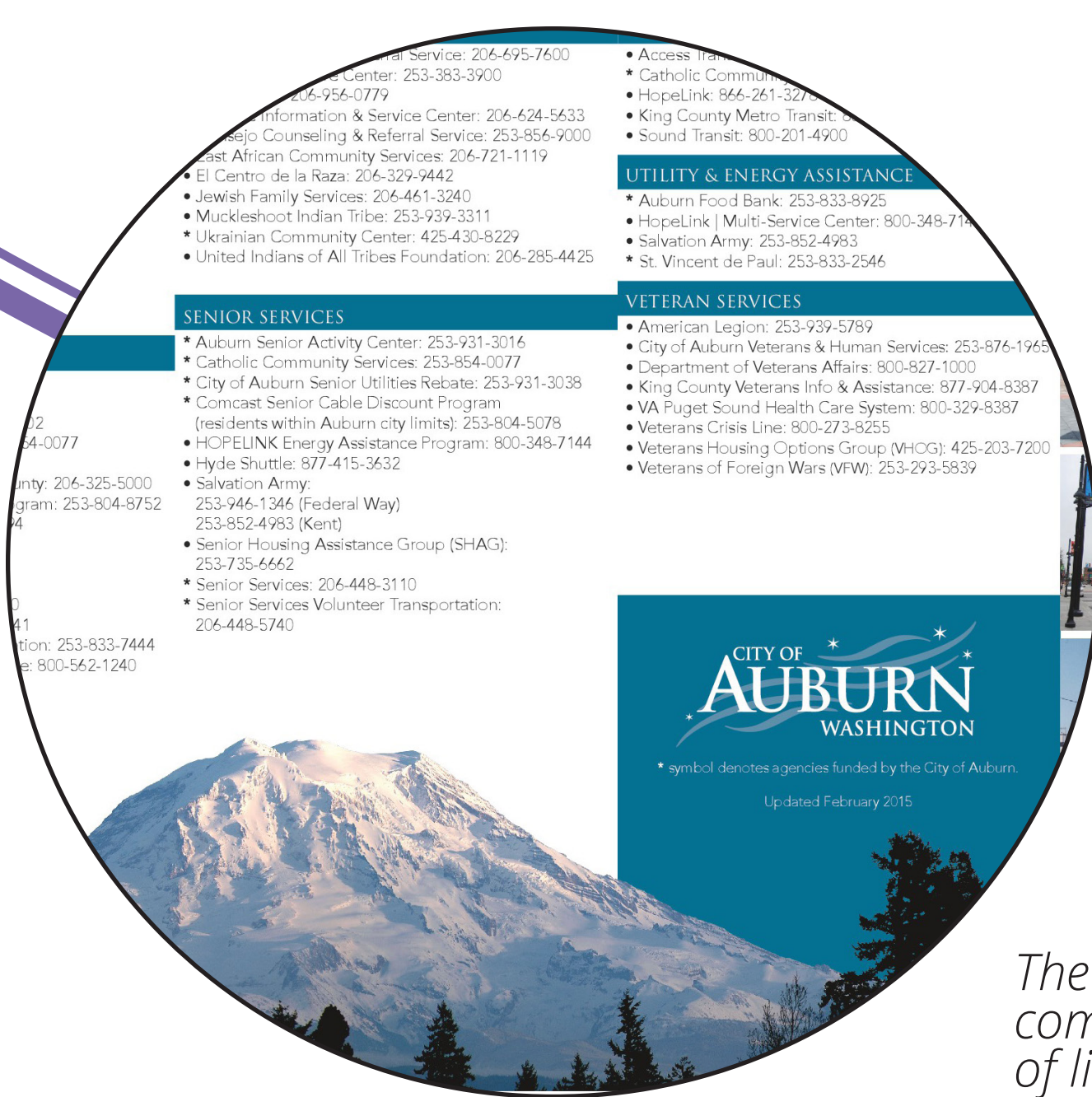
Other Cities

In general, we found that most other cities conduct a yearly Point-in-Time count of their homeless populations. Many of the cities we looked at, surveyed and interacted with homeless populations during their quantitative count to learn more about the demographics and causes of homelessness. Other strategies employed included voluntary GPS monitoring of transportation and other service use, more frequent counts, and methods for collecting demographic details.

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

Location and population data for those without permanent shelter in King County population data for those without permanent shelter in King County. Credit: City of Auburn

Summary of the 2015 Unsheltered Homeless Count in Selected Areas of King County

	Seattle	Kent	North End	East Side	SW County**	Fed. Way	Renton	Night Owl Buses	Auburn	Vashon Island**	Total
Men	695	21	7	48	69	13	20	96	22	2	993
Women	165	6	1	24	14	4	1	10	5	0	230
Gender unknown	1944	101	40	55	126	88	58	0	98	8	2518
Minor (under 18)	9	7	0	7	0	0	0	1	7	0	31
Total	2813	135	48	134	209	105	79	107	132	10	3772
Benches	35	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	40
Parking Garages	31	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	42
Cars/Trucks	776	44	32	18	88	81	37	0	54	8	1138
Structures	641	11	8	2	38	3	10	0	19	0	732
Under roadways	173	6	0	10	0	0	7	0	4	0	200
Doorways	306	3	0	1	4	4	3	0	0	0	321
City Parks	47	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	10	0	61
Bushes/Undergrowth	94	28	1	10	4	6	6	0	31	0	180
Bus stops	32	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	38
Alleys	26	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	31
Walking Around	303	19	4	2	21	8	6	0	11	1	375
Other	349	21	1	76	48	1	8	107	2	1	614
Total	2813	135	48	134	209	105	79	107	132	10	3772

21%	Increase	
2015	3772 people outside	
2014	3123 people outside	

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

The City of Auburn has a comprehensive brochure of listing local services. Credit: City of Auburn

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.

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