



Policy Primer

## POLICY BRIEF

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# Cultivating Stakeholder Support to Address the Growing Homelessness Crisis in Santa Fe

*Santa Fe, New Mexico should use strategies including a siting assessment tool and a tech enabled civic engagement platform to encourage community support for micro-communities.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Santa Fe, New Mexico, is experiencing a homelessness crisis. Based on conversations with key officials at the Santa Fe City Council, over 1,200 individuals are in need of permanent housing, but only 150 to 200 emergency shelter beds are currently available. Micro-communities—sites that provide temporary pallet shelters for unhoused individuals—offer a viable and scalable solution, but city officials report that progress has been stalled by political and community resistance during the site selection process. We recommend that the City of Santa Fe select appropriate sites by using our siting assessment tool, secure public support through a technology enabled civic engagement platform, create a community design competition and communication plan, and increase implementation capacity by hiring dedicated staff. Together, these strategies should create the conditions for successful, community supported micro-communities.

## BACKGROUND

A lack of sufficient housing for unsheltered and unhoused individuals in Santa Fe is causing a public health and humanitarian crisis. City officials have [committed to addressing homelessness](#) in Santa Fe by adopting a multifaceted approach comprising housing expansion, service co-ordination, and data driven decisionmaking. As part of its Homelessness Emergency Action Plan, the city plans to build up to 3 new micro-communities, comprising 20 to 30 pallet shelters each, as a stopgap measure. The City Council [has approved funding](#) for the pallet shelters, and it is considering 5 city owned properties as sites for the micro-communities. The biggest challenge has been getting community buy-in to select and use 1 to 3 of the city owned sites.



Community members have voiced opposition to the proposed micro-community sites at City Council meetings. They have [expressed concerns](#) about proximity to children and liquor stores, the negative impact on property values, the unfair placement of all homeless services in 1 district, and the [lack of transparency](#) and communication from the city during the process of identifying sites. The City of Santa Fe has a privately established [micro-community at Christ Lutheran Church](#), and [the response from neighbors](#) has been positive. Some residents of this micro-community have already moved on to permanent affordable housing, and more are on the waiting list. Evidence from other cities indicates that [micro-communities decrease crime](#) and have a [significant positive impact on residents](#).

Despite the availability of funding, proven models, and identified sites, Santa Fe continues to face long delays in establishing micro-communities, largely because of the cumbersome site-by-site approval process and inefficient, unrepresentative public engagement. To move forward, the city needs a replicable, easy-to-implement approach to community engagement and site selection to enable it to deploy micro-communities quickly and at scale.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The success of the micro-communities hinges on 3 factors: selecting the right sites to develop, securing public support, and increasing capacity to deliver micro-communities. We offer 5 recommendations for achieving these goals.

### Selecting the Right Sites to Develop Micro-Communities

The City of Santa Fe aims to identify 3 new micro-community sites. We propose that it do so by conducting a **community and political readiness assessment, while simultaneously launching a proactive community engagement campaign and increasing implementation capacity** to ensure that the micro-communities will be successful.

**Recommendation 1: Implement a tailored 2-stage micro-community siting community and political readiness internal assessment**, which would form the basis for a publicly shared 1 page narrative summary for each site. This process would allow city leaders to identify the most viable sites (among the 5 options) in a principled and consistent manner while also fostering transparency and trust with the public (see Appendix 1). The assessment would occur in 2 stages, to accommodate the capacity constraints reported by city officials: The first stage would involve a quick, high level check of each site, intended to be completed within an hour; in the second stage, a longer review would be undertaken only for sites that show realistic potential for development.

- **Stage 1—Rapid readiness internal check:** A short-form scorecard assessing high level community sentiment, political alignment, and symbolic fit. This step would quickly identify which sites are more or less viable and which require deeper review.



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- **Stage 2—Deeper readiness internal review:** A more detailed (10-question) assessment incorporating qualitative data (e.g., public comments, media tone, councilor positions). This review would support a more nuanced understanding of site-specific challenges and opportunities.
- **Publicly shared 1 page narrative summary:** A standardized summary document for each site synthesizing political, community, and strategic considerations. This summary could be used to brief City Council members, engage stakeholders, and communicate clearly with the public.

### Securing Public Support for Micro-Communities

**Recommendation 2: Implement a technology enabled civic engagement program** that integrates real-time community feedback into the site selection process, enabling city officials to proactively address community concerns, prioritize sites with favorable reception, and expedite approvals for transitional housing projects. This approach would ensure a more inclusive and efficient decisionmaking process, fostering transparency and trust between the city and its residents (see Appendix 2).

- **Multichannel community-facing platform:** Residents would be able to engage with the platform through mobile and web-based applications, as well as physical access points in public spaces. This flexibility would break down traditional barriers to engagement.
- **City-facing dashboard:** This would provide a centralized tool that aggregates and analyzes public sentiment data, providing city officials with actionable insights to inform decisionmaking and streamline the approval process.

This platform and its program design and delivery would adhere to the accessibility, inclusion, and transparency policies and best practices outlined in the March 2025 [Santa Fe Forward Public Engagement and Communications Plan](#) and the December 2023 [State Digital Equity Plan](#) proposed by New Mexico's Office of Broadband Access and Expansion.

**Recommendation 3: Pilot a community design competition** for the first micro-community site for families. Santa Fe should invite the community to participate in a design competition to ensure that the micro-community fits into the neighborhood aesthetically. Involving community members in the design process would increase their understanding of micro-communities while cultivating a sense of ownership. It would also help reframe the micro-community and land development as a value add for the community.

**Recommendation 4: Implement a communications plan** centered around community education, engagement, and narrative building. To build public buy-in and support successful implementation, the city should launch a community outreach plan grounded in storytelling, stakeholder engagement, and education. This strategy would foster empathy, amplify the voices of individuals with lived experiences, and highlight values based community public health solutions (see Appendix 3).

Finally, the City of Santa Fe **should increase implementation capacity** to ensure consistency and longterm success.



### Increasing Capacity to Deliver Micro-Communities

**Recommendation 5: Hire a dedicated staff member** to lead ongoing community engagement efforts, create and maintain cohesive relationships with diverse stakeholders, and build expertise in local homelessness solutions and buy-in. This staff member could be hired under the city's direct supervision as a special project coordinator, as a consultant, or in partnership with a local nonprofit as an implementing partner. Partnering with a nonprofit would reduce the hiring cost and administrative burden and allow the city to leverage the consultant's or nonprofit's existing expertise and relationships. Hiring a dedicated staff member who is public facing and responsible for robust community engagement would improve public sentiment and assuage doubts about the city's responsiveness to community concerns.

### CONCLUSION

Implementing these 5 recommendations would enable the City of Santa Fe to select and develop the best site(s) under consideration while strengthening community buy-in.

- The site assessment process would equip the city with a structured, replicable, and principled way to prioritize sites and build public confidence in its decisions.
- The technology enabled civic program, design competition, and communications plan would educate and involve the community and increase avenues for citizens to voice their opinions.
- Hiring a staff member would ensure that the city has the capacity to implement and prioritize competing priorities; having a dedicated person with institutional knowledge would lead to greater replicability in the future.

Given budget and time constraints, the feasibility matrix prioritizes the micro-community siting assessment and the community design competition as the most impactful efforts with the greatest ease of implementation.

### APPENDIX

[Appendix 1](#) – 2 Stage Micro-Community Siting 'Community and Political Readiness' Assessment: A quick guide to evaluating a community's sentiment toward a new micro-community.

[Appendix 2](#) – Technology Enabled Civic Engagement Program Specifications: A project overview, outlining how political leaders could transform public input into insights for future affordable housing developments.

[Appendix 3](#) – Communications Plan: A toolkit of messaging guidance to help transparently communicate about micro-communities.



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