

What would it take to end homelessness in Brockton — as luxury housing keeps popping up?

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This article is part three of a three-part series by The Enterprise on homelessness in Brockton. Read parts [one](#) and [two](#) here.

BROCKTON – Two men stood at Montello and Centre streets in downtown Brockton. One man, dressed in a gray winter coat, tipped the open top of the dark red Dunkin’ cup in his hand toward the queue of cars stretching down Montello Street as they waited at the red light.

When the light turned green, the cars drove past the man and through the intersection.

The other man stood in the bike lane on Centre Street, swaying left to right as he held out a green Dunkin’ cup.

Finally, a woman in a silver car with torn metal just above the front bumper rolled down her window and handed something to the man before driving away.

Overlooking the intersection was [Enso Flats](#), a 113-unit high-rise apartment building downtown.

Meanwhile, another man wandered down the middle of Main Street, just two blocks away from [Perkins Park](#). He reached a cup toward the driver of a tall, burgundy semi truck carrying construction equipment on its trailer.

“Thank you, God bless,” he said to the driver.

Recently, panhandling became legal again in Brockton. In May, the Brockton City Council [voted to repeal an ordinance](#) banning panhandling – a law that was rarely enforced. The law was [enacted in 2019](#) by a unanimous vote but was repealed due to freedom-of-speech concerns.

"We have an issue with panhandling, especially at the mall," said City Councilor Shirley Asack of Ward 7 in May. "We were told by the ruling of the general court that we needed to repeal it."

The local government has taken a more progressive approach to tackling homelessness in recent years than in the city’s past, even compared to less than a decade ago.

“My whole mantra has been we have to have a compassionate approach,” said Mayor Robert Sullivan in an interview with The Enterprise.

'A tough mission'

John Yazwinski, president of [Father Bill’s & MainSpring homeless shelter](#) near [Perkins Park](#), said that although the public is generally supportive of the shelter, it does receive some criticism.

"We definitely have a tough mission. There's a stereotype of the homeless," Yazwinski said. "There's people who struggle with our mission, who don't support us. We face 'not in my backyard' issues when we try to site buildings for housing."

At least a thousand people come through the shelter each year, where resources are backed up and living conditions are decrepit, according to several guests who have stayed there. Stealing among the guests happens frequently, they said. And according to an analysis of police calls by The Enterprise, there were multiple reports of disturbances at the shelter and park over the past summer and fall and occasional reports of violence.

'We need to work together'

On a hot afternoon in July, a woman sat on an upside-down bucket underneath a tree in Perkins Park, with the bottoms of her feet in the dirt between a tangle of tree roots.

"Why doesn't (the mayor) put some floor down here? This hurts my feet," she said, shifting her weight.

According to Yazwinski, providing affordable housing for citizens experiencing homelessness could help reduce other city-wide issues like opioid use.

"If you give somebody a room, their own apartment, you start to see all of those activities decreased greatly," said Yazwinski.

"The goal is to get people in their own living quarters," said Sullivan. "We need to make sure we're helping people."

A state-of-the-art housing resource center

Father Bill's & MainSpring plans to construct an \$18 million Housing Resource Center at 124 Manley St. across from the veterans hospital. The state-of-the-art facility will include 32 affordable housing units.

Sullivan said in an interview that he supports the project.

In addition, during one of the hottest recent summers in Brockton, the mayor's office supplied people experiencing homelessness with fans and cooling supplies.

"They are residents of our city," Sullivan said. "We treat people with respect, whether they live in a house or on the street."

Affordable vs. luxury housing

Golden Circle is a small apartment development that sits at Spring and Pleasant streets. The development's 19 units are leased by Brockton Housing Authority to families who can't afford market-rate housing.

The Brockton Housing Authority owns 16 properties, some with 100 units or more, across the city that serve as affordable housing for seniors and families.

According to Brockton zoning adopted under a state affordable housing law called Chapter 40R, any market-rate apartment development built in the city's downtown district and on Thatcher Street must reserve at least 20% of its units for affordable housing. Developments classified as luxury are exempt from the law.

Enso Flats, the 113-unit high rise looming above the two men panhandling, is a market-rate complex that qualifies for Chapter 40R, meaning that 20% of the units are affordable housing.

Still, Yazwinski said that there isn't enough affordable housing in Brockton to account for the homeless population.

"We're just not, as a commonwealth, producing enough affordable housing," he said. "We can't keep building just luxury housing."

Plans for luxury housing developments are popping up across the city, particularly downtown. The old gym where famous Brockton boxer Marvelous Marvin Hagler trained is becoming luxury apartments. Building developer Ted Carman said in April that one-bedroom apartments could cost \$1,700 per month.

As construction in downtown Brockton continues, the need for affordable housing still persists, Yazwinski said.

"As long as I'm mayor there will always be a happy medium of market price and affordable housing," Sullivan said.