

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

Strategic Framework to Make Homelessness Rare & Brief

Making homelessness rare and brief by June 2031.



City of Durham | Durham County | 2026–2031

Prepared by the Durham Community Safety Department

A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

The work is yours as much as anyone's.

Public Partners

The City of Durham and Durham County provided the governance commitments, funding, and operational coordination that anchor this framework.

Provider Partners

Dozens of provider agencies carry out the daily work of outreach, case management, housing placement, and stabilization. Special thanks to Housing for New Hope, Families Moving Forward, and Urban Ministries for their leadership on the Core Leadership Team.

Community Safety Department Staff

The HOPE team, the Street Outreach team, the Familiar Neighbors program, and the Care Navigation program built or supported the operational architecture this framework describes — and run it every day.

Anchor Partners

Duke University and Duke Health, Alliance Health, the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, and Community Solutions / Built for Zero contributed financial investment, methodological grounding, and continuous learning that shaped every part of this work.

People with Lived Experience

People with lived experience of homelessness in Durham shaped the design and decisions reflected here. Their continued participation is the most important indicator of whether the framework works for the people it is built to serve.

Peer Cities

Colleagues across the country — from Atlanta and Denver to Charlotte, Raleigh, and the Gulf Coast Region — whose honest conversations, published experience, and shared toolkits made this framework better than it would have been in isolation.

To everyone who has attended a case conferencing meeting, visited an encampment at 7 a.m., called a landlord at the eleventh hour, or sat with a family while paperwork came together: thank you.

AN OPENING WORD · FROM THE COMMUNITY SAFETY DEPARTMENT

The question is no longer whether homelessness can be ended — but how fast, and how broad.

This Strategic Framework represents a commitment to a specific, measurable goal: that by June 2031, homelessness in Durham will be rare and brief.

That goal is not abstract. It is anchored in evidence from communities that have proven homelessness is solvable when a community decides to solve it — and in the lived demonstration, here in Durham, that this approach works. In February 2026, a one-month sprint to house ten families ended with fifteen housed.

The pages that follow lay out the strategy, the architecture, the operational functions, the investment, and the path — organized so that anyone reading, from an elected official considering a budget to a resident wondering whether anything will change, can see in concrete terms what Durham intends to do, and how.

The Year 1 targets are ambitious. They are not promises; they are commitments. We will adjust as we learn, report what works and what does not, and be honest about pace.

The work begins now.

Durham Community Safety Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Framework at a Glance

By June 2031, Durham will make homelessness rare and brief. That is the North Star of this five-year, cross-sector plan — built to **prevent** homelessness, **end it quickly** when it occurs, and **ensure it does not recur**. The problem is concentrated, knowable, and solvable.

Year 1 Targets — by June 2027

30%	30%	50%
reduction in unsheltered homelessness	reduction in veteran homelessness	reduction in youth & young adult homelessness

Why This Will Work — three things have changed

The evidence is in. Communities using the Built for Zero methodology have shown homelessness is a solvable system problem, not a permanent feature of urban life.

Durham has proven it works here. In February 2026, a 25-day sprint targeting ten families ended with fifteen housed and three more in non-congregate shelter.

The partners are aligned. A \$5M private community investment campaign anchors a Year 1 budget of roughly \$13M in new investment, with the City, County, Duke, and the A.J. Fletcher Foundation committed.

How it's built. Six interlocking operational functions — Street Outreach & Coordinated Entry, Case Conferencing, the Flexible Housing Assistance Fund, Landlord Engagement, Housing Stabilization Case Management, and Housing Sprints — anchored by a clear implementation structure.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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01 The Vision	The North Star, Year 1 targets, the February 2026 proof point, and what success looks like.
02 The Strategy	From managing homelessness to ending it — the Built for Zero approach and populations of focus.
03 How We're Organized	The implementation architecture: Champions Table, CoC Governing Board, backbone, and frontline bodies.
04 How the Work Gets Done	The six operational functions, from the front door to the 12-month stabilization arc.
05 Investment, Accountability & Learning	The Year 1 budget, the metrics we publish, peer cities, and storytelling.
06 The Path Forward	The five-year trajectory and how every part of Durham can engage.

We define each term the first time you meet it — functional zero, by-name list, sprint. The work belongs to the whole community, so nothing here is walled off by jargon.

PART ONE · THE VISION

The North Star

By June 2031, Durham will make homelessness rare and brief. Rare means few people enter homelessness each month. Brief means those who do exit quickly into stable housing.

Together these describe a functional-zero condition — not zero on any given night, but a system condition in which the number of people experiencing homelessness is consistently fewer than the number the system can house each month. When that condition holds, homelessness becomes a temporary disruption people recover from, not an ongoing experience.

Year 1 Targets — FY 2027

- ◆ 30% reduction in unsheltered homelessness by June 30, 2027.
- ◆ 30% reduction in veteran homelessness by June 30, 2027.
- ◆ 50% reduction in youth and young adult homelessness by June 30, 2027.

These translate to specific by-name list reductions the system tracks monthly and reports publicly. Subsequent years carry targets for additional populations — including chronic homelessness and families — designed to compound progress year over year toward the 2031 North Star.

What Success Looks Like — by June 2031

A resident in crisis is reached within days, with a clear path to housing rather than a waitlist, and moves in within weeks — supported toward stability for the year that follows. A landlord knows rent will arrive on time, a real person will answer the phone, and risk is shared, not absorbed. A provider knows their work is part of one coordinated effort, with accurate tools and barriers cleared at the system level. That is the city this framework is designed to build.

PART ONE · THE VISION

The Proof Point — February 2026

A winter storm displaced ten families to hotel rooms paid through Durham's White Flag emergency response. Families Moving Forward — the city's only family shelter — was full. Without intervention, the families would have cycled into longer homelessness once the storm passed.

15

FAMILIES HOUSED IN
A 25-DAY SPRINT —
AGAINST A GOAL OF
10

The Community Safety Department, with Housing for New Hope, Families Moving Forward, and the City, organized a 25-day sprint to house ten families before White Flag funding ended. It worked because every component the system needed showed up at once, around the same households, with a deadline — flexible payments within one business day, multiple unit options, housing-focused case management, and daily coordination that cleared stuck cases in hours, not weeks. **Three more families moved into non-congregate shelter.**

THE PROOF OF CONCEPT

“Sprints make the system act like a system. Each successful sprint is a proof point that the work is solvable — and a learning opportunity that sharpens the system before the next push.”

— On the February 2026 family sprint

PART TWO · THE STRATEGY

From Managing Homelessness to Ending It

For decades, homelessness response was organized around managing homelessness — shelter, meals, and outreach as ongoing services for a population presumed permanent. Durham’s framework rejects that premise. It is organized around ending homelessness for each person who experiences it: housing them as fast as the system can produce a unit, supporting them afterward, and ensuring the conditions that led there do not repeat.

The Built for Zero Approach

Built for Zero is Community Solutions’ national initiative supporting 140+ communities. Durham is a participating community. The methodology rests on four operating ideas:

1 Count every person in real time

The by-name list — updated weekly, drawn from HMIS, segmented by population — is the operational truth of the system. Decisions are made from it, not in spite of it.

2 Set population-specific goals

Vague systemic targets do not move budgets. “30% reduction in veteran homelessness by June 2027” moves budgets.

3 Improve the system, not manage programs

Stuck cases are signals about the system, not failures of clients. Recurring barriers mean the workflow needs to change.

4 Sequence resources around people

Most homelessness ends when housing assistance, a unit, and case management reach the same person at the same time. The job is to make that routine.

PART TWO · THE STRATEGY

Populations of Focus

Population	Year 1 Target	Approach
Unsheltered individuals	30% reduction	Often experienced in encampments and outdoor settings.
Veterans	30% reduction	Toward a rare, brief, nonrecurring condition using VASH and SSVF.
Youth & young adults	50% reduction	Specialized sprint cohorts and developmentally appropriate placements.
Families	Continued sprints	Building on February 2026, with sustained provider partnership.

The Operational System

The strategy unfolds through six interlocking functions. Each has its own discipline, contracts, and metrics — but they are designed to work as one system. Part Four describes each in detail.

1. **Street Outreach & Coordinated Entry** — the front door.
2. **Case Conferencing** — where the by-name list becomes action.
3. **Flexible Housing Assistance Fund** — money at the speed of opportunity.
4. **Landlord Engagement** — the unit pipeline.
5. **Housing Stabilization Case Management** — the 12-month arc.
6. **Housing Sprints** — time-bound pushes against a deadline.

PART THREE · HOW WE'RE ORGANIZED

Implementation Architecture

A five-year framework only works if the structure underneath it can execute, learn, and adjust. Durham's architecture separates strategic direction, HUD-funded governance, day-to-day coordination, and frontline action — each with a defined role, none doing the others' work.

Champions Table

Cross-sector leadership for strategic direction and barrier-clearing.

Executive Table

Ensures alignment across the homelessness system and clears pathways.

Durham County

Implementation partner, working upstream of homelessness.

Lived Experience Table

The formal channel for people with lived experience to shape system design, surface barriers, and hold the work accountable.

CoC Governing Board

Governance, funding, and compliance authority for HUD-funded programs only.

Community Safety Dept.

The day-to-day backbone, carrying the City's CoC Lead Agency function.

Frontline bodies

Improvement Teams, case conferencing tables, and Communities of Practice.

Each body does what only it can do, and no body carries weight that belongs somewhere else.

PART THREE · HOW WE'RE ORGANIZED

Strategic Leadership: The Champions Table

A small, cross-sector body of 11–13 members appointed by the City and County. Its function is path-clearing — using members' authority, networks, and access to resources to remove barriers no single agency can move alone. Champions are working leaders, not advisors. They are asked to:

- ◆ Endorse and champion the framework publicly and within their sectors.
- ◆ Clear barriers and align resources across institutions and funding streams.
- ◆ Provide accountability by reviewing real-time data and pressing on progress.
- ◆ Commit to two to three path-clearing actions per year that only their authority can unlock.

HUD-Funded Governance: The CoC Governing Board

The body responsible for governing the Continuum of Care. It has 13 voting members across institutional, sector, and at-large seats, serving three-year terms. Its formal authority is limited to HUD-funded programs: HEARTH/CoC oversight, HMIS, the annual Point-in-Time Count, Coordinated Entry standards, and the HUD Consolidated Application. Strategic direction and operational improvement live with the Champions Table, Executive Table, and frontline bodies.

The Executive Table

A standing body of system leaders that keeps both strategic and operational work moving — convening to align resources, sequence action across agencies, and clear the operational pathways that day-to-day implementation depends on. The Executive Table provides key insight, guidance, and recommendations on the Strategic Framework from leaders within the homelessness system.

The Lived Experience Table

The formal channel for people with lived experience of homelessness to shape the system. Its members review policy and performance, surface the barriers data alone cannot, and hold the framework accountable to the people it is built to serve.

PART FOUR · HOW THE WORK GETS DONE

01 Coordinated Entry & Street Outreach

The front door. Coordinated Entry routes people to the right resource at the right time. Street Outreach reaches unsheltered neighbors where they are, builds rapport, verifies homelessness, and connects them to housing pathways.

- ◆ **Defined contact standards.** First contact within one business day; six in-person attempts within two weeks before a case closes for non-contact.
- ◆ **A three-phase model.** Outreach, Engagement (Housing Barriers Assessment, HMIS start), and housing-focused Case Management.
- ◆ **A single Coordinated Entry administrator.** Referrals match by-name list priority and policy in a streamlined and predictable process.

02 Case Conferencing

The recurring, multi-agency meeting where the by-name list becomes action — organized around taking one meaningful step for every neighbor, not around updates.

- ◆ **Population-segmented meetings.** Veterans, chronic, families, and general — so the right providers are in the room, in person at least monthly.
- ◆ **The Learning Loop, per client.** Name the largest system barrier, record a next step with owner and date, set a target move-in date. Two to three minutes each.
- ◆ **Target move-in dates as discipline.** Missed dates are treated as system learning opportunities, not staff judgments.

PART FOUR · HOW THE WORK GETS DONE

03 Flexible Housing Assistance Fund

The financial infrastructure that lets the system act when opportunity opens. Households exit homelessness in moments — when a landlord says yes, when arrears clear, when a deposit lands on time — and the Fund is designed to move at that speed.

- ◆ **A pre-approved menu of costs.** Application fees, arrears, deposits, landlord incentives, moving and utility costs, risk-mitigation reserves.
- ◆ **Speed standards.** Funds disbursed within one business day of complete documentation. No late fees absorbed by participants.
- ◆ **A progressive payment model.** Designed to transfer full rent responsibility to the household within 12 months.

04 Landlord Engagement

The unit pipeline. The framework only works if there are units to move people into — so the system recruits property owners, makes the partnership worth their while, and supports them through every lease.

- ◆ **A dedicated owner support team.** One consistent point of contact for lease-up, renewals, and damage claims.
- ◆ **Risk mitigation.** Damage coverage and vacancy-loss protection — the single most important conversion lever.
- ◆ **A Year 1 target of 500 units available to lease** by June 30, 2027, tracked monthly and tied to provider compensation.

PART FOUR · HOW THE WORK GETS DONE

05 Housing Stabilization Case Management

Getting a household into a unit is the first step; keeping them housed once the subsidy ends is the goal. HSCM provides intensive, time-limited support during the months when households are most likely to succeed if helped — and most likely to return to homelessness if not.

- ◆ **A 12-month, phased arc.** Durham adapts the Critical Time Intervention model — Transition, Try-Out, Transfer — plus a Month 13 Readiness phase so the transition to Year 2 is a planned step, not a cliff.
- ◆ **Flexible and responsive.** HSCM providers tailor plans to specific household needs. Some may require transition into longer-term support, some may be naturally positioned for family reunification, and some may be entirely self-sufficient after 12 months.
- ◆ **Many providers, one objective.** Capacity distributed for reach — and intentional learning between providers to discover what works best to house neighbors in Durham.

06 Housing Sprints & Interim Housing

A normal-paced system produces normal-paced results. Sprints accelerate throughput on a defined population, in a defined place, against a defined target — by pulling existing assets into focused coordination over 4–6 weeks.

- ◆ **A defined cohort and timeline.** The February 2026 family sprint targeted 10 households in 25 days and housed 15, plus three into non-congregate shelter.
- ◆ **Daily coordination.** Case conferencing intensifies from weekly to daily; stuck cases escalate within hours.
- ◆ **Interim housing as a bridge.** Hotel rooms, pallet sites, and travel trailers provide safe, dignified shelter while permanent housing is identified.

PART FIVE · INVESTMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY & LEARNING

Year 1 Investment

The Year 1 budget represents approximately \$13 million in new investments, anchored by City and County commitments and a \$5 million private community investment campaign. Public funding provides the operating floor; private investment provides the agility to act on opportunities that public funding cycles do not accommodate.

Funding Area	Amount	Share of Budget
Flexible Housing Assistance + Interim Housing	\$9.0M	70%
System-wide Case Management	\$1.25M	10%
Inflow Reduction Strategies	\$1.2M	9%
City + County Staffing	\$950K	7%
Technical Assistance	\$325K	2%
Unit Recruitment & Retention	\$300K	2%

New investments above current City & County commitments. The City continues funding for White Flag, Coordinated Entry, landlord engagement, HMIS, street outreach, and a match ESG dollars.

PART FIVE · INVESTMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY & LEARNING

Measuring What Matters

The framework is measured against three categories of metrics, published monthly and reviewed by the Champions Table as well as the Executive Table and Lived Experience Table.

System Outcomes

- ◆ **The One Number** — households actively homeless, by population, monthly
- ◆ **Inflow** — new households entering homelessness
- ◆ **Outflow** — households exiting to permanent housing
- ◆ Length of time homeless; returns within 24 months

Operational Performance

- ◆ **Case conferencing** — % with target move-in dates, % moved in on time
- ◆ **Fund turnaround** — days from documentation to payment
- ◆ **Landlord engagement** — units available to lease, lease-ups, network size, retention
- ◆ **HSCM** — completion of the 12-month arc and Month 13 readiness

Equity & Voice

- ◆ Disaggregated outcomes by race, ethnicity, gender, age, household
- ◆ Lived-experience input through the Lived Experience Table as the formal channel

Storytelling & Communications

A strategy that works can still fail if no one believes it is working. Durham's communications discipline is real-time, not retrospective; shared, not single-voice; and specific, not abstract — a monthly public dashboard, sprint reports, a public annual report, and a continuous story stream, designed to reach the movable middle whose confidence determines public support over time.

PART SIX · THE PATH FORWARD

The Trajectory

This framework is the beginning of a five-year arc, not the end of a planning process. Year by year, Durham will report what worked, what didn't, what changed, and what comes next.

● YEAR 1 · FY 2027**The system stands up**

30% reductions in unsheltered, veteran, and (50%) youth homelessness. The Champions Table convenes, the CoC Board transitions from HSAC, and the first unsheltered sprint scales to two more areas by December.

● YEARS 2-3**Deepen and broaden**

Operational fidelity deepens; focus broadens to chronic and family homelessness with population-specific targets; the unit pipeline expands; the public-private model proves sustainable.

● YEARS 4-5**Rare, brief, sustained**

Verified rare, brief, and nonrecurring conditions for veteran and chronic homelessness; reduced length of time homeless and returns; sustained inflow reduction through upstream prevention.

AN INVITATION

How to Engage

This framework belongs to Durham — to the City, the County, the institutions that have committed, the providers who do the work, the people whose voices guide it, and the residents who will hold it accountable. Engagement happens at every level.

Sector leaders

Join or champion the work through the Champions Table.

People with lived experience

Join the Lived Experience Table and shape system design.

Funders & philanthropy

Contribute to the \$5M Year 1 investment goal or align grants to the framework.

Provider agencies

Participate in case conferencing, the Executive Table, and Communities of Practice.

Property owners

Join the landlord network and become part of the unit pipeline.

Residents & neighbors

Champion the work, contribute to the Flexible Housing Assistance Fund, and take part.



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