


Agenda Report Reviewed by:
City Manager: 

**CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM REPORT**

Meeting Date: September 15, 2020
To: Honorable City Councilmembers
From: Mayor Slayter
City Administration
Subject: Discussion and Direction on the Roles and Responsibilities of Home Sonoma County Regarding Homelessness in Sonoma County
Recommendation: Council Direction on Actions Listed in Report Below
Funding: Currently Budgeted: _____ Yes _____ No XX N/A
Net General Fund Cost:
Amount: \$ _____

Account Code/Costs authorized in City Approved Budget (if applicable) AK (verified by Administrative Services Department)

Purpose/Introduction:

This item requests City Council direction on policy issues regarding the roles and responsibilities of Home Sonoma County and:

1. Authorize the Mayor to sign a letter reflecting the City’s positions which would include the following:
 - a. The Home Sonoma County Leadership Council should include one seat for each jurisdiction.
 - b. Direction on consideration of contributing to the costs to properly fund an effective lead agency that reports to the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council.
 - c. Home Sonoma County Leadership Council should be supported by a manageable advisory structure of subject matter experts who provide meaningful input on policy decisions.
 - d. There should be a commitment to better align funding allocations, particularly for federal and state funding allocated for County-wide purposes.

2. Appoint a Councilmember to join a new Ad Hoc Committee with representatives from each City to collaborate on making changes to Home Sonoma County, including the Leadership Council.

Background

Homelessness is one of the most challenging issues facing Sonoma County. Addressing it successfully requires substantial resources and a well-coordinated effort among many entities, including the County, cities, health providers and hospitals, non-profits serving those experiencing homelessness, and others. There are significant challenges in how we are addressing homelessness County-wide. The amount of available funding is a major challenge. Additionally, the fragmented structure for setting policy and allocating funding is also problematic. This is an appropriate time to consider changes to the system. This report summarizes the key issues.

Attachment A outlines the current governance structure.

Attachment B outlines a proposal from the County for a new structure.

Discussion:

Governance Structure: In Sonoma County there is no centralized agency with clearly defined responsibility for homelessness. The Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires a Continuum of Care

(CoC) to have the lead role at the local level. That responsibility is currently assigned to the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council.

Home Sonoma County, including the Leadership Council, was established in 2018 to replace the prior governance structure, which was fragmented and led largely by organizations providing services. The intent of creating Home Sonoma County was to promote a more coordinated and accountable approach. The County and cities are often held accountable by residents to address challenging issues such as homelessness, but in the prior structure lacked authority over funding decisions to address the issue.

The purposes of the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council include:

1. Setting the vision and principles for addressing homelessness in the County.
2. Owning the issue within the county and being widely recognized as the owner, and communicating with the public on issues related to homelessness.
3. Providing leadership to realign and unify homelessness-related funding and policies throughout the county; establishing Sonoma County's homelessness funding priorities and making decisions on funding awards in unified consolidated homeless services funding processes; aligning and unifying all homeless services funding and contracting processes with the goal of eliminating duplication.

As shown on Attachment A, Home Sonoma County established a Leadership Council with a majority of representatives from what HUD calls "entitlement jurisdictions." These are jurisdictions with populations over 50,000, including Santa Rosa and Petaluma. The County is also an entitlement jurisdiction, intended to represent the interests of the seven medium and smaller cities as well as the unincorporated areas on the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council. The Leadership Council currently includes two permanent seats designated for Santa Rosa, two for the Board of Supervisors and one for Petaluma.

The Home Sonoma County Leadership Council also includes four members for two-year terms selected by a 25 member Technical Advisory Committee (TAC.) (Per HUD regulations, one of these must be a person who has or is currently experiencing homelessness). Seven Task Groups report to the TAC.

Even with Home Sonoma County, responsibility for homelessness remains highly fragmented. While the County and each city have a role in addressing the issue, the current structure includes permanent representatives from only three jurisdictions (County, Santa Rosa, and Petaluma). This differs from the other collaborative governance structures in the County where each jurisdiction has a seat at the table (Waste Management Agency, Sonoma Clean Power, etc.).

There is a strong interest in re-structuring the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council to include broader city representation. The Mayors and Councilmembers Association expressed a desire for greater city representation at their February, 2020 meeting. With broader representation, Home Sonoma County will be better positioned to develop County-wide policy on homelessness including priorities for the use of shelter beds and protocols for responding to homeless encampments.

The County supports adding cities to the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council. Its proposal (Attachment B) includes a disproportionate number of representatives from the unincorporated areas by including representatives from Municipal Advisory Committees in three of the five Supervisorial Districts.

Additionally, the County believes that it has guidance from HUD making it the final authority on any changes to the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council. That contradicts the Leadership Council's approved governance charter which clearly gives this authority to the Leadership Council. As of this writing this issue is under review.

To provide subject matter expertise and advice to the Leadership Council, Home Sonoma County created a 25 member Technical Advisory Committee and seven Task Groups. However, the result has been a large and unwieldy

advisory structure without sufficient staff support. Consequently, these groups do not have a meaningful role in governance.

There is also disagreement on the role of subject matter experts. Some believe that HUD requires that they have seats on the Leadership Council, while others believe that a robust advisory structure is sufficient. This issue is also under review.

Regardless of HUD requirements, there needs to be a stronger role for expertise to inform policy decisions through an effective advisory structure. This is especially important in assisting the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council in making evidence-based decisions when it comes to setting policies and allocating funding.

Funding: While restructuring the Home Sonoma Leadership Council should reduce fragmentation in policy making, it will not be sufficient. In particular, decisions on allocating funding from various sources are also fragmented:

- a. The Leadership Council allocates some of the federal and state funding provided for County-wide purposes.
- b. The County Board of Supervisors allocates other federal and state funding provided for County-wide use.
- c. The three largest jurisdictions (County, Santa Rosa, Petaluma) directly receive and allocate federal funding provided to entitlement jurisdictions (those with populations over 50,000).
- d. Most local jurisdictions allocate discretionary funds to address homelessness.
- e. If it passes, the County Board of Supervisors will allocate all funds from the sales tax proposed for the November ballot to support mental health needs, a portion of which is to be spent to address homelessness.

Allocating funds is perhaps the most significant policy role for any governing body. With the current funding system, a restructured Home Sonoma County Leadership Council which is supposed to 'own' the issue of homelessness will lack the authority to make some of the most important decisions. Responsibility for an issue such as homelessness should be aligned with the authority to make decisions on that issue.

Revising the structure for allocating funds should be part of revising the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council. At a minimum, consolidating all Federal and state funding provided to address homelessness on a County-wide basis will allow the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council to more truly 'own' responsibility for homelessness and be accountable for progress.

Lead Agency: Staff support for the Leadership Council is provided primarily by the County's Community Development Commission, which reports to the Board of Supervisors. In homelessness, this role is known as the 'lead agency.' The Mayors and Councilmembers have expressed a desire for a new lead agency that would report to the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council as the governing board, similar to other regional bodies such as the Sonoma County Transportation Authority and the Sonoma County Library.

County staffing levels for the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council are insufficient. This is due in part to minimal federal and state funding for administrative costs. The staff are also called upon to support other duties within the Community Development Commission and appear to respond to serving the desires of the Board of Supervisors on homelessness before the Leadership Council. Creating a new Lead Agency may require funding from all jurisdictions to provide sufficient staff support.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

As of the writing of this staff report, the City has not received any public comment. However, staff anticipates receiving public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this staff report. Such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting. In addition, public comments may be offered during the public comment portion of the agenda item.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

This item was noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to scheduled meeting date.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to this item tonight. However, the Council is asked to provide direction on consideration of contributing to the costs to properly fund an effective lead agency that reports to the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council Discuss and Consider direction on the future of Home Sonoma County are underway. The Mayors and Councilmembers discussed the issue earlier this year, the Board of Supervisors recently developed their proposal, the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council is considering the topic, and all cities will have the opportunity to consider these issues.

Staff recommend that the City Council participate in these discussions in two ways.

1. Consideration of authorizing the Mayor to sign a letter reflecting the City's positions which would include the following:
 - a) The Home Sonoma County Leadership Council should include one seat for each jurisdiction.
 - b) Consideration of contributing to the costs to properly fund an effective lead agency that reports to the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council.
 - c) The Home Sonoma County Leadership Council should be supported by a manageable advisory structure of subject matter experts who provide meaningful input on policy decisions.
 - d) There should be a commitment to better align funding allocations, particularly for federal and state funding allocated for County-wide purposes.

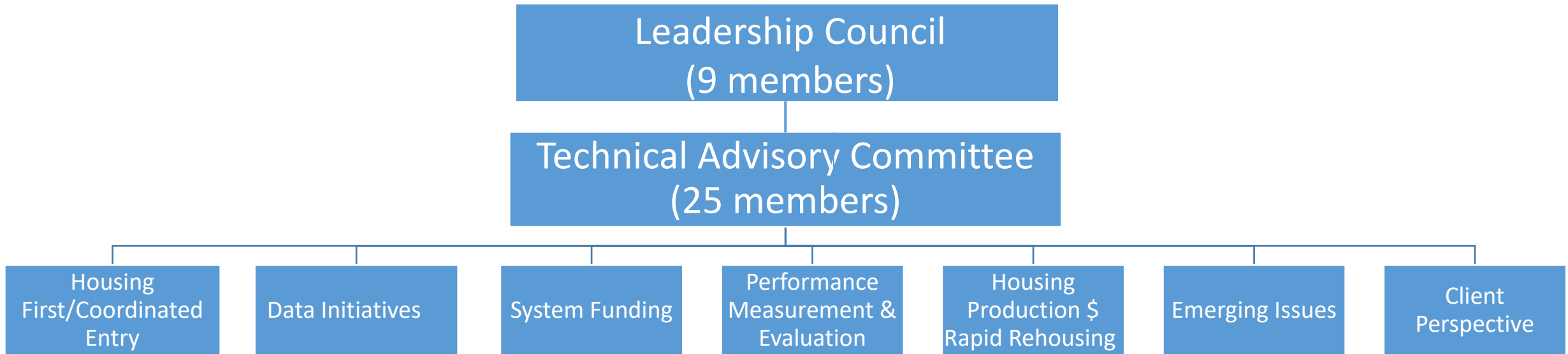
These recommendations are consistent with input provided by the City Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness. The Committee also supported allowing jurisdictions to appoint staff or elected officials to the Leadership Council, minimizing the number of Leadership Council members other than those from the County and cities, and being open to a non-profit organization as a new lead agency.

2. Consideration of City Council appointment of a Council member to join a new Ad Hoc Committee with representatives from each City to collaborate on making changes to Home Sonoma County.

Attachment

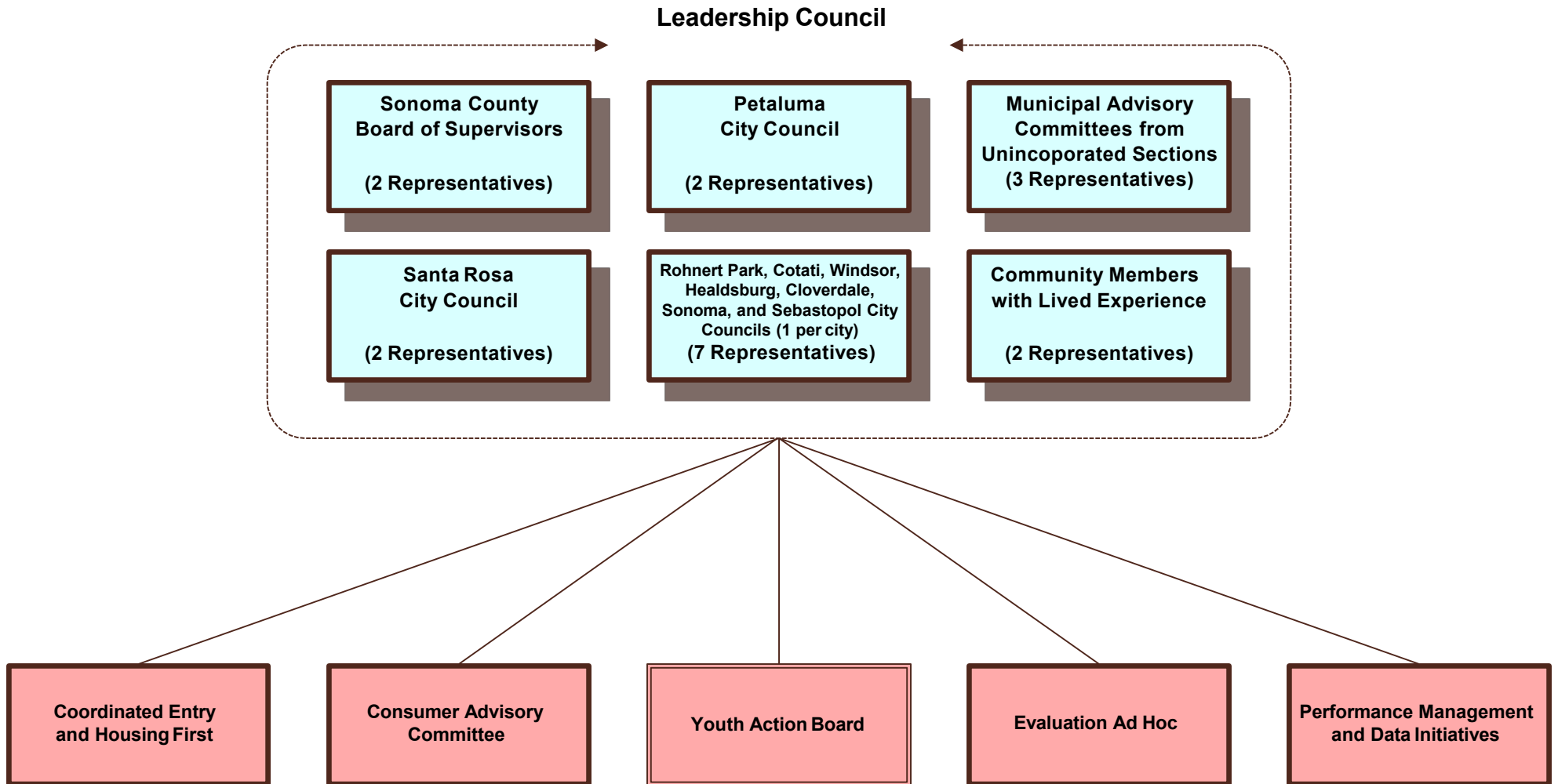
1. Attachment A: Current Structure of Home Sonoma County
2. Attachment B: County Proposal for Restructuring Home Sonoma County
3. Presentation

Attachment A: Home Sonoma County





Attachment B Organizational Structure – HOME Sonoma County



Homelessness in Sonoma County: Governance

August, 2020

Homelessness Governance in Sonoma County

- Federal requirement for regional governance: Continuum of Care
- Historically in Sonoma County:
 - Continuum of Care consisted of non-profit service providers
 - Federal/State funding decisions made by non-profits
 - Potential conflicts of interest
 - Local government: Responsibility without authority
- Most other funding not coordinated with regional perspective

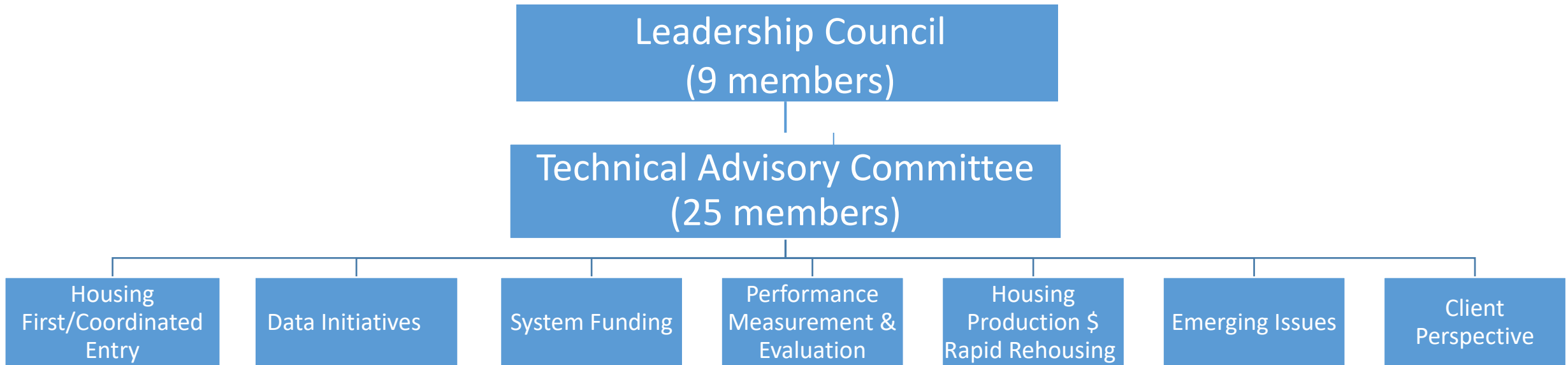
Homelessness Governance in Sonoma County

- 2018: Home Sonoma County Formed
 - Designed by Ad Hoc from Board of Supervisors and Santa Rosa
 - Medium/small cities not included
 - To be represented by Board of Supervisors
 - Service providers were to remain deeply involved

Home Sonoma County Roles

- County-wide policy setting, such as:
 - Housing First as overall approach
 - Addressing Encampments
 - Setting priorities for accessing shelters
- Align/Unify funding decisions
- “Own” the issue

New Governance Body: Home Sonoma County



Home Sonoma County Leadership Council: Current Membership

- Supervisors Hopkins and Gorin
- Santa Rosa Mayor Schwedhelm and Councilmember Olivares
- Petaluma Councilmember McDonnell
- Four from Technical Advisory Committee on two year terms
 - Two lived experience
 - One non-profit developer
 - One medium/small city representative

No permanent representation for other cities

2019 & 2020 Developments

- 2019: Leadership Council voted 6-1 against seat for other cities
- February 2020: Mayors/Councilmembers supported:
 - Greater role for cities on Leadership Council
 - New Lead Agency, reporting to Leadership Council and not County
- County and some Leadership Council members more supportive of role for all cities

2020 Developments

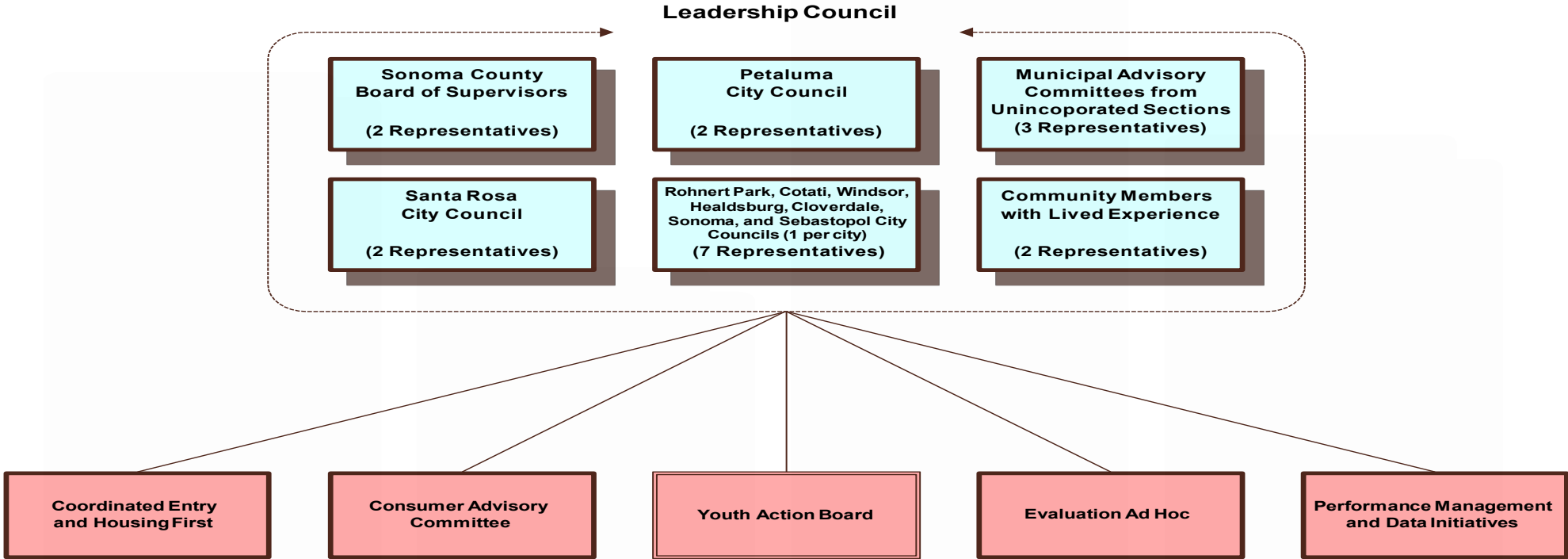
- Technical Advisory Committee has not met this year; many concerned about limited roles
- County has provided inadequate staff support (including pre-pandemic)
- County established internal Outreach team
- County proposing to take over Coordinated Entry ('front door')
- County appearing to move homelessness role to Health Dept

2020 Developments, continued

- Fragmented funding decisions remain
- Ballot measure to address mental health/homelessness retains County control
- County proposed new Governance Structure
- County claims authority to decide on new Governance Structure



County Proposal Organizational Structure – HOME Sonoma County



Staff Recommended Policy Positions

- One seat per jurisdiction on Home Sonoma County Leadership Council
- Consider funding Lead Agency reporting to Leadership Council
- Manageable advisory structure
- Better align funding

Next Steps

- Authorize Mayor to send a letter on policy positions
- Appoint Councilmember to Ad Hoc with other cities
- Other cities to consider this issue
- New Development: Lead Agency Analysis