

Homeless Courtyard sees big dip in private sector funding



Harlan Thompson picks up trash at the Courtyard Homeless Resource Center in Las Vegas, Thursday, July 25, 2019. Thompson was homeless and used the Courtyard Homeless Resource Center to get off the streets. The center eventually hired him. He is now an operations supervisor, drug-free, and has an apartment. (Rachel Aston/Las Vegas Review-Journal) @rookie_rael

By [Shea Johnson](#) Las Vegas Review-Journal



December 26, 2019 - 12:52 pm

Don't miss the big stories. Like us on Facebook.

Like 218K

Updated December 26, 2019 - 2:45 pm

Private sector contributions to the city of Las Vegas' homeless Courtyard significantly slowed this year through the city fund set up for philanthropic investors, records show.

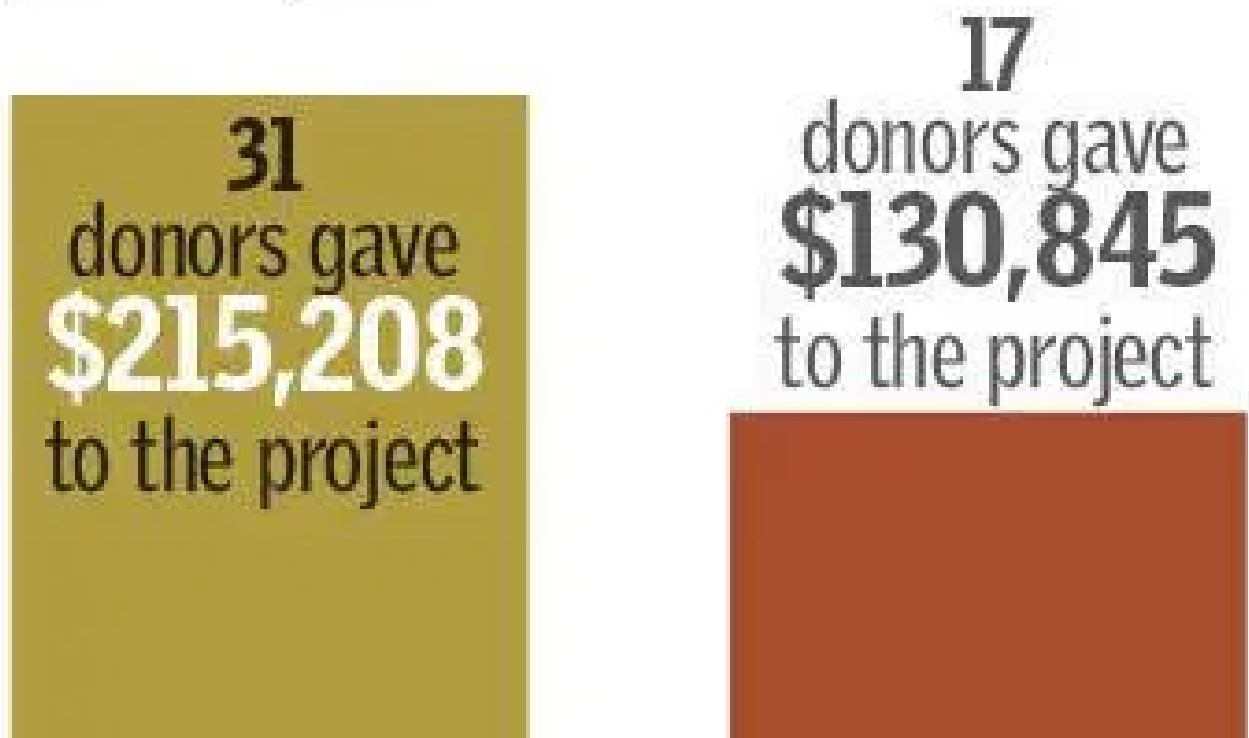
Las Vegas officials processed more than \$215,000 from 31 donors who earmarked aid to the Courtyard Homeless Resource Center through the Mayor's Fund for Las Vegas LIFE during the last three months of 2018. The fund, however, saw only about \$130,000 from 17 donors through nearly all of 2019.

The decline of investment appropriated to the Courtyard, identified in a Review-Journal analysis of donations processed through Dec. 17, comes as operating costs for the project vaulted by more than \$1 million this fiscal year, to \$4.3 million.

But Mayor Carolyn Goodman said she is confident that sluggish returns late into the year do not signal a waning appetite among the corporate community to give to the Courtyard, where private donors have been expected to play a key role in the public-private partnership.

Dwindling donations

Contributions to Las Vegas' homeless courtyard project through the city fund set up for individual, corporate and philanthropic investors slowed significantly in 2019.





Sept. 12 -
Dec. 31
2018



Jan. 1 -
Dec. 17
2019

Source: City of Las Vegas

Las Vegas Review-Journal

Goodman, who gave \$10,000 of her money to the cause, said she believed that more cash would start to flow to the Courtyard as the homelessness initiative's success is proved. She also noted that the philanthropic fund only launched in September 2018, and that it offers a broad selection of issues besides the Courtyard to get behind, including schools, veterans, youth employment and technology innovation.

The fund had collected more than five times its \$1 million yearly goal by December, city data shows.

"We're trying to give everybody an opportunity to choose an area where they want to support," Goodman said. "Some people may not want to help the Courtyard. Fine, but what are you interested in? Help something."

It's worth noting that roughly half of all contributors have picked the Courtyard over other causes, according to the data, although the share is elevated by 17 individuals who gave \$100 or less last year. The city also may invest a recent undesignated donation of \$750,000 from NV Energy however it chooses, including on the Courtyard.

Haven for inspiration

City officials modeled the Courtyard after Haven for Hope, the sprawling homeless resource center in San Antonio that has largely been shepherded by private industry, particularly former oil refinery chief executive William E. Greehey. Private dollars bankrolled 60 percent of the \$100 million construction for the campus.

“The city would not have been able to put \$100 million into that campus,” said Melody Woosely, San Antonio’s human services director, adding that private sector spending encouraged others to follow.

Woosely also noted that significantly reducing homelessness in downtown San Antonio over the past decade has been instrumental to showing would-be donors that the plan is working.

“I think as time goes by that (it) becomes more important, that you are continuing to demonstrate the impact,” she said. “If that data wasn’t showing impact, I think our fundraising would have declined.”

In San Antonio, Haven for Hope leads fundraising efforts by seeking grant money and contributions from private and philanthropic partners, according to Woosely. Las Vegas officials, per city policy, cannot solicit donations through the Mayor’s Fund.

The Courtyard in Las Vegas, located within the Corridor of Hope where many homeless services are clustered, at Las Vegas Boulevard North and Foremaster Lane, [is expected to cost about \\$15 million to fully build out by late 2021](#). The construction will largely be paid for through federal grant money.

“Money will flow from the private sector, I’m sure of it, but they’ve got to know the government is doing something to show that it means business,” said former Las Vegas Councilman Bob Coffin, who was a policymaker [when the Courtyard broke ground in May 2018](#).

Coffin said the city should not rely on the private sector, however, to fund Courtyard operations.

Long-term viability

The snapshot of private sector engagement for the Courtyard does not take into account investments made directly to providers doing work there [or master leases between the city and private landlords to house Courtyard residents](#). And the idea that success will breed more donors is not the lone perspective.

The Legislature [this past session flipped a city bill](#) that would have raised an estimated \$20 million yearly for homelessness through a sewer surcharge. Assemblywoman Dina Neal, D-Las Vegas, urged city officials instead to work alongside Clark County and other jurisdictions on a regional solution.

Some say that multijurisdictional collaboration might not only galvanize more private sector involvement, but will be necessary to sustain serious efforts to reduce homelessness in the Las Vegas Valley.

“I think they’d be willing to jump in if there was a coordinated effort between city, county and state,” Councilman Brian Knudsen said when presented with the Review-Journal’s findings.

Knudsen said the more pressing issue is long-term funding, meaning a bigger pot at the state level and continuing conversations about potential new tax revenues. He echoed Goodman’s position that state lawmakers should meet annually so the city doesn’t have to wait two years to lobby for help.

Rich Worthington, president and COO of the Molasky Group of Companies, said he has donated to the Courtyard and to its service providers. He gave \$20,000 through personal and business contributions to the city project.

“I think that ultimately the success in dealing with homelessness will be a regional issue,” Worthington said. “I think in the meantime, the private sector can play an important role.”

A previous version of this story misspelled the name of Rich Worthington on first reference.

Contact Shea Johnson at sjohnson@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0272. Follow [@Shea_LVRJ](https://twitter.com/Shea_LVRJ) on Twitter.

Even as private sector money to the Courtyard lagged in 2019, the Mayor’s Fund received broad support.

Launched in September 2018 as the primary city investment vehicle for donors in exchange for charitable contribution tax breaks, the fund has seen donors provide funds for programs backing schools, youth employment, technology innovation, veterans, public art and others.

The city processed **nearly \$5.5 million** in cash and in-kind contributions to the causes between the fund’s inception and **Dec. 17**, according to an itemized list of donors obtained in a public records request.

The fund surpassed its \$1 million yearly goal with **\$5.1 million** in donations from Jan. 1 to **Dec. 17**, buoyed by a \$3.8 million in-kind contribution from Cisco for transportation initiatives expected to support self-driving vehicle technology and safer roadways.

Lisa Morris Hibbler, the city’s chief community services officer who oversees the fund, presented the fund’s successes to the City Council in October.

“There has been an organic embrace of the Mayor’s Fund within the community,” she said.