

CITIES WE'VE LEARNED FROM



Peer Learning in Durham's Strategic Framework to Make Homelessness Rare and Brief

Direct engagement, published experience, and the Built for Zero national network | April 2026

How We've Learned

Durham has not built this strategy in isolation. Over the past year, the Community Safety Department has engaged directly with peer cities across the country, participated in two Built for Zero convenings, and absorbed lessons from the broader BFZ network of 140+ communities at varying stages of the work. This learning has informed every layer of Durham's framework — from sprint design and case conferencing to interim housing siting, performance-based contracting, and strategic communications.

Direct Engagement

Durham has had the opportunity to directly connect with and learn from numerous cities (and often multiple times). Below is a list of cities with whom we've directly engaged and from whom we've learned.

- **Atlanta, GA.** Downtown Rising — zone-by-zone encampment resolution ahead of the FIFA World Cup, 445 housed February–April 2026, \$50M private capital, and Project HEAL connecting the health system to rapid housing. A direct reference for Durham's sprint sequencing.
- **Charlotte, NC.** A February 2026 housing sprint placed 17 against a goal of 10, with rare cross-sector turnout from banks, the university, the hospital, police, City, and County.
- **Chicago, IL.** All Chicago Making Homelessness History, the lead agency for Chicago's Continuum of Care. In their role, they support Chicago Rents, the city's landlord–tenant connection program, helping expand access to housing for residents in need.
- **Cincinnati, OH.** GeneroCity 513 — BID, City, and CoC braided with mental-health-board funding to expand outreach without losing housing focus.
- **Dallas, TX.** Direct exchange with the Housing Forward backbone model, whose Real Time Rapid Rehousing initiative housed several thousand people across 2021–2023. A reference point for backbone design and braided-funding mechanics.
- **Denver, CO. The most-studied national case.** Mayor Johnston's day-one emergency declaration; the House1000 / All In Mile High sprint infrastructure; performance-based shelter contracts; a Housing Command Center for throughput; 311-to-outreach via Salesforce; and an Urban Institute evaluation finding a 45% reduction in unsheltered homelessness from January 2023 to January 2025 and a 98% reduction in large encampments. A reference for Durham's sprint sequencing and non-congregate interim housing design.
- **Detroit, MI.** A new administration leaning into a 100-day strategy, with Pope Francis day center as an implementation anchor and a chronic by-name list build underway.
- **Greensboro, NC.** A direct site visit by Durham's Interim Housing Workgroup informed work on interim housing options. The Greensboro model is a case study only about an hour from Durham.
- **Gulf Coast Region, MS.** Open Doors Homeless Coalition — a Built for Zero proof point demonstrating that the methodology travels well outside major-metro contexts, with strong by-name-list discipline in a smaller-population region.
- **Jacksonville, FL.** Veterans-first reduction (30% off the by-name list), the Homeward Bound reunification program, BID-as-collective-backbone, and continued mayor–council alignment.
- **Minneapolis / Hennepin County, MN.** A truly housing-centered system with a 96% retention rate, mobile medical and crisis response, and active prioritization for chronic unsheltered residents.

- **Nashville, TN.** Resolution of a longstanding site via a Metro rapid-response fund, the NASH diversion tool, and a strategic communication effort.
- **New York City, NY.** NYC Mayor’s Public Engagement Unit (PEU), which connects residents to city services and provides ongoing case management support. PEU works with both tenants and landlords to improve access to housing and citywide resources.
- **Newark, NJ.** A second-generation strategic plan with the State at the table, anchored at the Newark Alliance, with drop-in center engagement designed to intervene before encampments form.
- **Portland, OR.** A behavioral-health-rich housing pilot for the highest-acuity individuals, scaling from 30 to a proposed 200, supported by cross-sector data-sharing agreements between health and homelessness systems.
- **Raleigh, NC.** Triangle peer that ran an unsheltered response pilot in early 2025. Ninety percent of participants in the pilot are no longer experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Proof point next door to Durham.
- **Sacramento, CA.** Encampment resolution with Clutch (100+ housed), safe camping site infrastructure, and an emerging micro-community for older adults.
- **San Diego, CA.** A 60% reduction in downtown tent encampments, 300 housed at a safe sleeping site, and unit-navigation work driving up VASH utilization for Veterans.
- **San Francisco, CA.** Brilliant Corners, a California-based nonprofit and housing provider that connects residents with housing services. Brilliant Corners specializes in supporting individuals transitioning from, or at risk of, homelessness or institutionalization.

Learning From Published Experience

Durham has also studied several communities at a distance, without direct conversation, both for the lessons their published experiences offer. Below are two examples that have been most helpful to our work.

- **Hartford, CT.** The Zero Inflow Project — Community Solutions’ work in two North Hartford zip codes to prevent inflow into homelessness upstream. A reference for Durham’s prevention thinking and for what cross-sector engagement with health systems and community land trusts can look like in practice.
- **Seattle / King County, WA.** A studied case in regional homelessness governance under the King County Regional Homelessness Authority, both for the structural design choices and the implementation challenges that have followed.

The Built for Zero National Network

Durham is a participating community in Built for Zero, Community Solutions’ national initiative whose theory of change draws on work with over 140 communities working to make homelessness rare and brief. The methodology, toolkits, and peer-learning convenings provide a constant feedback loop on what works.

Community Safety Department staff attended the Built for Zero Fall Learning Session in November 2025 in Denver, which convened the broader BFZ network and provided much of the methodological grounding now reflected in Durham’s case conferencing redesign, by-name list strategy, and the structure of the Year 1 sprints.