

A Response to Dr. Joe Carter, DVM

Norman Transcript · March 27, 2026 · Bobby W. Chambers, Founder
— End Homelessness NORMAN

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

— JOHN 13:34-35, KING JAMES VERSION

Dr. Carter, I read your words with genuine admiration. Your compassion is real. Your moral instinct is right. Your love for Norman and for our most vulnerable neighbors is exactly the spirit this community needs more of — and I am grateful you put it into print. I stand with you completely on that foundation.

I also stand with you on Proposition 5. The City of Norman and its Citizens should vote yes on April 7.

But from the very first word of this response — so there is absolutely no confusion — I must be honest with you and with every Norman voter about what a yes vote is, and what it is not. In its current form,

the \$8 million bond is a construction check. Another building. And without everything that must be built around it, another wasted opportunity. A shelter standing alone, without a coordinated system behind it, is not a solution. It is a waiting room with no exit.

But it doesn't have to be just that. It shouldn't be just that. And with more information, facts, and a real knowledge base on the bigger picture — what it should be, and what it can quickly become, is something far more profound. Most specifically to the Federal Agencies and philanthropic funding organizations that are watching communities like Norman: it becomes a declaration of intent. A signal to the world that The City of Norman and its Citizens are serious about effectively ending homelessness through a Housing First approach. A key that avails millions of dollars never before attainable.

If End Homelessness NORMAN's strategy — the EHN Coordinated System — is executed with the precision it has been engineered for, The City of Norman and its Citizens may never need to DRAW DOWN a single dollar of that bond. Not one. Because the federal government and the global philanthropic community will have arrived first — with multi-million dollar grants, awarded annually and continuously — drawn here by a community that finally did what was required to receive them. And if Proposition 5 fails? End Homelessness NORMAN will pursue every alternative fundraising mechanism available — because this mission does not begin or end on April 7. ~~It begins the moment Norman decides to be serious.~~

~~This is what The City of Norman and its Citizens are really voting on. Not a building. A future. Everlasting change.~~

Our goal — stated plainly, from this moment forward — is functional zero homelessness.

Not a utopian promise. A measurable standard. Homelessness in Norman becomes rare, brief, and non-recurring. Managed so effectively it never overwhelms our community again. Paid for not primarily by Norman taxpayers, but by federal and state programs and the national and global philanthropic community that invests in cities serious enough to build a real system. This is not a dream. It is a documented, replicable, funded standard that other communities have already achieved. And it is the standard against which every decision The City of Norman and its Citizens make from this day forward must be measured — for ourselves, and for the generations who will inherit what we build. I am talking about a world-class system, engineered to serve The City of Norman and its Citizens for one hundred years and beyond. That is what is at stake on April 7.

Dr. Carter, your compassion is exactly right. Your diagnosis is precise.

You write that "Norman has focused on treating the symptoms instead of the root causes of homelessness for too long." I agree — completely and without reservation. And that is precisely the question that must be asked of the proposal before us: is a 120-bed shelter on Reed Avenue a root cause solution? Or is it — however well-intentioned and however necessary as a first step — another symptom-management tool dressed in permanent clothing?

These are not rhetorical questions. They are the questions we all should have been asking for years. And I have discovered that others have. Cities and communities around the world have asked them, wrestled with them, funded the answers — and found

solutions that manifest in measurable, documented, reproducible results. The ignorance of those findings is collective and entirely understandable. The knowledge is hard-won. I am sharing it freely today.

I have walked the streets of London, where I volunteered at Naismith House Mission and first witnessed what a coordinated system of care looks like when it is genuinely funded and genuinely working. I have seen what Dublin does differently. I have studied Houston up close. I have followed Medicine Hat's journey from commitment to functional zero. I have engaged with Prince William's Homewards Initiative and the global network of cities that are solving this problem — not managing it. What I am sharing with you today is not theory. It is testimony.

So let us ask the questions your op-ed, with the greatest respect, does not answer:

What is the exit pathway for the person who enters that shelter? What does success look like in year three? Which cities built a standalone shelter — without a coordinated system behind it — and watched homelessness actually end as a result? And how is what is being proposed in Norman any different from what has been in place and falling short in communities across America for decades?

A more comprehensive picture of our collective findings, then, is this:

Houston, Texas reduced chronic homelessness by over 63 percent. They have housed more than 26,000 people since 2012. Ninety percent remain housed two or more years later. They ended veteran homelessness entirely by 2015. Houston did not do this with a

shelter. They did it with a system. Housing First. Coordinated entry. Shared data. Wraparound services. A city that finally decided to work together instead of in parallel.

Medicine Hat, Alberta — a Canadian city of 63,000 people, almost precisely Norman's scale — committed in 2009 and achieved functional zero chronic homelessness by June 2021. Hospital days dropped 28 percent. Jail days dropped 66 percent. Shelter use dropped 64 percent. They accomplished it with one-eighth the per-capita budget of larger cities. But here is the critical lesson: functional zero lasted five months before a motel closure and wavering funding caused numbers to rise again. The model did not fail. The sustained commitment wavered. A real system requires continuous investment and unrelenting coordination — not a one-time facility.

Now for the cities that chose differently. California has spent \$24 billion on homelessness since 2019. Homelessness increased. San Francisco spends \$846 million annually. Walk their streets. Chicago saw a 116 percent increase between 2023 and 2024. These are Democrat-led failures, and they are real.

But let no one mistake this for a partisan argument. Jacksonville, Florida — Republican-led. Fort Worth, Texas — Republican-led. Birmingham and Mobile, Alabama — Republican-led. Oklahoma City and Tulsa — right here at home. All spending. None solving. Party is not the variable. System is. That is not an opinion. It is the documented conclusion of every serious examination of homelessness in modern America.

What every successful community had — and what Norman does not yet have.

Dr. Carter, you may not be aware of the precise language the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development uses as a precondition for its Continuum of Care grant program — \$3.9 billion in annual competitive funding. You are not alone. Most people, including most elected officials and most nonprofit leaders, have never seen it. But it is the single most important underlying imperative that must be understood and expedited without delay. Without it, it will not matter how many shelters are built or where they are placed. The money will not come.

HUD's Notice of Funding Opportunity states explicitly:

"Applicants must demonstrate a coordinated entry system, active participation in a Homeless Management Information System — HMIS — and a Housing First approach as preconditions for funding eligibility."

Norman has a Continuum of Care designation — OK-504, anchored by Thunderbird Clubhouse. It exists on paper. But The City of Norman and its Citizens have never received meaningful federal CoC funding — and that is precisely the point. The grants that flow to Houston, to Medicine Hat, to Helsinki — those communities earned them by building what Government Agencies and Philanthropies require. Simply put: Norman has the address. It does not yet have the house.

HMIS — the Homeless Management Information System — is far more than software. It is a shared covenant among every entity in a community that touches homelessness: the City, the County, every shelter, every service provider, every faith-based organization, every hospital and law enforcement agency. A commitment to share real-time information, coordinate responses, track outcomes, and measure progress against a defined goal. It means that when a man walks in from the street, Norman knows immediately — and responds immediately: Does he have a State ID? A birth certificate? Is he enrolled in SoonerCare? Has he been connected to Aetna Better Health, Humana Healthy Horizons, or Oklahoma Complete Health? Does he have family somewhere who doesn't know where he is? Has he had a medical evaluation? A mental health assessment? A substance use screening? Does he need the VA? A nursing home? An apartment? A hand — not a handout?

This is not bureaucracy. This is dignity. This is the difference between a bed and a pathway. Between a shelter and a system. Between managed homelessness and functional zero.

The City of Norman and its Citizens do not yet have this. Not because the need isn't there. Not because Norman's citizens don't care — this community has demonstrated its heart in a thousand ways. But because the system isn't built and the components have never been united under one coordinated vision. That is what must change. That is what must change before the first significant federal dollar will flow to this community. And that is precisely what the EHN Coordinated System is designed to build.

The Salvation Army changes everything — if we let it.

End Homelessness NORMAN proudly and wholeheartedly supports what the Salvation Army of Norman is building — and I plan to stand behind it, resource it, and elevate it through the EHN Coordinated System. The City of Norman and its Citizens are in full partnership with a soon-to-be-constructed, state-of-the-art, 120-bed shelter — owned and operated by the Salvation Army — arriving at zero cost to the City. Zero. \$10 million of private commitment, already in motion. It is not a footnote. It is a cornerstone. A critical, irreplaceable component of the EHN Coordinated System and a powerful declaration to the world that Norman is serious.

I intend to combine what the Salvation Army is building with what The City of Norman and its Citizens raise — through Proposition 5 or through whatever alternative mechanism the moment requires — and carry that combined commitment to every federal agency and every major philanthropic foundation with a single, powerful sentence: "Norman already has a \$10 million private facility commitment. Now help us build the system around it." That is a winning narrative. That is the sentence that opens doors in Washington and in foundation boardrooms that The City of Norman and its Citizens have never been able to open before.

The Salvation Army becomes the front door. HMIS-connected entry. State ID secured. Birth certificate obtained. SoonerCare enrollment completed. Medical evaluation scheduled. Mental health assessment arranged. Family contacts identified. Every basic necessity lined up, and then some. And then — out through the back door into a real life. An apartment. A mobile home. A small

home. A nursing home. A VA placement. A room with a key and a future. Not a revolving door. A pathway home.

Reed Avenue — not a slum. A one-hundred-year community anchor.

What I envision for Reed Avenue is not a homeless facility. It is a precisely engineered community redevelopment project that will serve every Norman resident for generations — and is designed to cost The City of Norman and its Citizens close to nothing, because every dollar is stacked and leveraged from federal programs, foundation grants, and public-private partnerships.

The model already exists forty minutes north of here. The Nick Harroz Community Center in Midwest City — in Congressman Tom Cole's own district — features 8,961 square feet of community space above ground, including a main hall of over 5,200 square feet capable of serving 250 to 400 people, a full commercial kitchen, and a FEMA-funded underground community tornado shelter beneath it — constructed at 75 to 90 percent federal cost through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. No disaster declaration required. Just a community organized and eligible enough to apply.

Norman's Reed Avenue campus follows that model and expands it significantly. An underground community tornado shelter serving all Norman residents. And above ground, a much-needed community center that complements and connects with the redevelopment of the historic Griffin Memorial Hospital grounds directly across the way — a transformative mixed-use revitalization already beginning to take shape, with residential, commercial, green space, and preserved historic elements that honor Norman's story while

building its future. Reed Avenue, in this vision, becomes a corridor of community renewal — not a concentration of need.

That campus includes a 30 to 40-room boutique hotel in the tradition of the Marriott Delta at the Reed Conference Center in Midwest City — because the Midwest City model was built with fewer than 20 rooms and they have expressed regret about it ever since. Norman will not repeat that mistake. Hotel revenue partially self-funds the operation. It signals to the world that this neighborhood is a destination, not a stigma. It generates economic activity that lifts the entire corridor and proves that compassion and commerce are not mutually exclusive.

And woven throughout all of it — honored, elevated, and embraced as the cornerstone it has always been — is Food & Shelter, Inc. Whatever is built on Reed Avenue must deepen and dignify the extraordinary work Food & Shelter has given this community for decades. They are not a neighbor to work around. They are a partner to build with, to stand beside, and to resource in ways they have never been resourced before. The same spirit extends to the United Way of Norman, whose organizational credibility and community relationships make them an indispensable partner in the EHN Coordinated System. And every NGO — every organization that has had skin in this game, that has shown up year after year with limited resources and unlimited heart — is brought forward. Not left behind.

The most underutilized resource in Norman's homelessness response.

Norman has 53 faith communities. Buildings. Kitchens. Buses. Volunteer networks. And a mandate — in every tradition represented — to love their neighbor.

Catholic Charities operates one of the largest non-governmental social service networks in the world, with job training, housing assistance, and direct service already present through the Oklahoma Diocese. The LDS Church runs sophisticated online employment resource centers alongside a Bishop's storehouse and welfare network operating quietly and effectively through multiple Norman wards. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, through ADRA — the Adventist Development and Relief Agency — deploys world-class mobile medical units capable of serving thousands in a single weekend: primary care, dental, vision, mental health screening. The Jewish community's federation and social service network brings institutional depth and decades of experience in dignified, effective human services that most people never think to call upon. Four international faith-based networks. Each with global reach. Each with a presence right here in Norman. Completely untapped as a coordinated force.

Each believes, with complete sincerity, that it is already doing wonderful work. Each of them is right. And none of them has ever been woven into a single coherent system. Working together, they too will achieve more than any of them could alone. The knowledge has existed for decades. The coordination never has.

The most underutilized resource in Norman's homelessness response is 53 faith communities with buildings, kitchens, buses, and a mandate to love their neighbor.

I will let you complete that thought.

The world is watching communities like Norman.

Chicago is currently the only American city designated as an Institute of Global Homelessness Vanguard City — a United Nations-connected designation featured in the UN Secretary-General's own report. I have already reached out to IGH on Norman's behalf. The opportunity to become the second Vanguard City in the United States — a community of our size, in the American heartland, proving what is possible without a billion-dollar budget — is real. But only for a city that has built the system to deserve it.

Prince William's Homewards Initiative — whose work I encountered firsthand during my years in London — is among the global networks already doing what Norman is preparing to do. The Y-Foundation in Helsinki. Built for Zero Canada. The Houston Coalition for the Homeless. The International Mayors Council on Homelessness — which Mayor Holman should join without delay. These are the networks, the funders, and the partners waiting for The City of Norman and its Citizens to raise their hand and say: we are ready. We have done the work. Now send the resources.

Give them what they require. We get what Norman needs.

What we should be building.

A world-class system. Not for this generation alone, but for the next one hundred years of Norman's life as a community. A system so carefully constructed, so rigorously aligned with what the federal

government and major foundations require, that the grants flow continuously, the partnerships deepen year over year, and the day comes — sooner than anyone dares to imagine — when homelessness in Norman is rare, brief, non-recurring, and never again allowed to overwhelm this community.

Houston proved it works in a major American city. Medicine Hat proved it works at Norman's scale. Norman will prove it works in the heart of middle America — in Oklahoma, in the Bible Belt, with Oklahoma values, Oklahoma faith, and Oklahoma determination.

Dr. Carter, your compassion is exactly right. Your diagnosis is precise. The prescription — a shelter, standing alone, without the system around it — is where the evidence, the data, and the accumulated wisdom of every community that has genuinely solved this problem asks every one of us to pause, seriously take the time to look more carefully, and realize that we must all participate and expect a lot more. Something worthy of the love that motivated the proposal in the first place.

I agree with you completely: Vote YES on Proposition 5. And then let us unite — The City of Norman, its Citizens, its faith community, its NGOs, its business leaders, its elected officials — in building everything around it that makes the vote mean something for one hundred years. More than another shelter. More than another slum. More than another missed opportunity. Something enduring. Something historic. Something our great-grandchildren will point to and say — they knew what they were doing when they built this.

Learn more. Read the research. Review the funding pathways already mapped and waiting. Visit

EndHomelessnessNorman.org. The homework has been done. It is waiting for you.

United, our goodness can and will achieve the impossible.

MANY YEARS AGO, I HEARD THE LATE PRINCESS DIANA
MAKE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

"I think the biggest disease this world suffers from in this day and age is the disease of people feeling unloved, and I know that I can give love for a minute, for half an hour, for a day, for a month, but I can give — I'm very happy to do that and I want to do that."

— DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES

Dr. Carter, I see we both agree: we have the time, the will, and the boundless capacity to love those in our city who need it the most.

Bobby W. Chambers

FOUNDER, END HOMELESSNESS NORMAN

EndHomelessnessNorman.org

(405) 253-5399 · PO Box 356, Norman OK 73070

Our Love Makes A Difference.

End Homelessness NORMAN · Independent citizen-led nonprofit · No government affiliation · No political party · One mission.