

# The Unhoused Crisis

The difficult and serious nature of unhoused people in Boulder County.

story by John Kowalski



An abandoned shopping cart, only a few blocks from Pearl Street.  
photo by John Kowalski.

Boulder, Colorado is one of the richest cities in the U.S.A. With beautiful landscapes, highly ranked education in all sectors, and a thriving community, Boulder is understandably one of the most desirable places to live in the country. Of course, this all comes at a cost. Boulder's average household income is \$25,180 more than the national average according to the US Census Bureau. The average cost of a home listing was 1.3 million, over half a million more than the U.S average. In general, Boulder is a very expensive city to live in.

For some, the city is an affordable and lovely place to make a living. For others though, the city is a difficult place to sustain a comfortable lifestyle, with many struggling to make ends meet every day. Sometimes, people find themselves not able to afford a house, or able to pay their rent. Sooner or later, they find themselves living outside.

The City of Boulder's unhoused population, estimated at 171 people by PIT Count, has been an ever-present topic amongst the community. "It is the number one issue that I hear about from my constituents... I hear from residents of Boulder about this all the time" said Aaron Brockett, the mayor of Boulder. "Homelessness is a significant problem in the city of Boulder as it is around

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**Aaron Brockett,  
Mayor of Boulder.**

the region and around the country. I personally encounter people experiencing homelessness on a pretty regular basis."

Throughout Boulder, various encampments have sprung up around the city, causing some concern from residents. "You hear regularly from people 'hey there's an encampment near my house/along the route that I frequent, and I don't feel safe, what are you going to do about it' ... I hear a lot of concerns about encampments, particularly around Boulder High School, probably the largest concentration of people experiencing homelessness is in that area," said Brockett. Alongside these concerns regarding encampments, various citizens have brought up the issue of harassment from unhoused peoples. "There have been complaints about harassment on certain occasions... and then occasionally about actual violent incidents. But I have heard, upon occasion, of an assault committed by somebody who is homeless," said Brockett.

Violence against the unhoused is also a frequent issue, with statistics from the National Coalition for the Homeless stating that 1,437 acts of violence were perpetrated

on unhoused individuals from 1999 to 2014. Many of these individuals suffer from deteriorated mental and physical health, affecting the way they can respond against attacks.

The students of BVSD are not immune from these scenarios, with many facing problems with their home stability or cost of living. "There are students who have scarcity of housing. So scarcity can be

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**Nohar Mesika Tarsi (11).**

defined as living in a car, in a hotel room, couch surfing with friends," said Rupali Hofmann, a community liaison and student services specialist. "So not a regular housing situation and there are, in fact, a number of students here at Fairview that fall under that [situation]" said Hofman. One student mentioned their friends that are facing housing scarcity. "I've had one friend, um, lose their house and I've had another friend almost lose their house to eviction notices and rent being really high. I say it's definitely worrying for a lot of families," said Eli Gruenewald (11).

Throughout Fairview, no matter the grade level, everybody seems to notice the steep prices of living in Boulder. Max Meza (9) mentioned how affordability has been part of discussions with his friends. "It has definitely come up, like, oh stuff's super expensive, or maybe their parents are having trouble paying rent," said Meza. Nohar Mesika-Tarsi (11) mentioned the cost of housing. "For some people it's absolutely non-negotiably impossible to live in a house in this area... It's impossible to live here unless you're absolutely loaded," said Nohar. "It's really expensive... I have two kinds of friends. I have really rich friends and I have really poor friends... I mean money is just a big issue for some of my friends," said Gruenewald.

**"Money is just a big issue for some of my friends."**

**Eli Gruenewald (11).**

With many people around the city facing severe housing difficulties, some may find themselves having to go to the Boulder Homeless Shelter, a location dedicated to helping the unhoused. Students from Fairview have opted to volunteer at the shelter, helping with food services. "So my dad started doing it just kind of because he wanted to," said Moto Kanda (12). "I was in the spring of my seventh grade when he decided to bring me for the first time.. I really enjoyed it and I enjoyed working with the people... it was a really good way to give back," said Kanda.

Volunteering at the shelter has also helped shed light on misconceptions about the unhoused. "I think it's really easy to make prejudgments on people based on their situations... It's been really interesting getting to meet them," said Mari Kanda (9). "They're all really thankful and lovely," said Kanda.

The City of Boulder is working on addressing the unsheltered population crisis. Voters recently passed the Safe Zones initiative, which creates a 500 foot "prioritized zone" around schools and a 50 foot zone around multi-use paths. The measure states that "within these zones, the removal of tents, propane tanks and other prohibited items would be prioritized."

The City is also working to increase access to shelters during inclement weather. "[during the recent] ferocious cold snap, I had a number of people reach out to me and say, 'hey, how are we going to keep people safe and sheltered during this period of intense cold?' ... We opened up an emergency warming center in the East Boulder Recreation Center," said Brockett. "A focus has been working with [The Boulder Homeless Shelter] to increase capacity and services there. They are increasing to 180 beds. They're also implementing two new services there. One of them is a day center. So previously people couldn't stay at the shelter during the day. So we're opening a day services center there where people can go and get a hot shower, get a meal and connect with services, whether that's to help find housing or to recover lost documents or get addiction treatment," said Brockett.

The shelter also is opening a respite center, one which helps the unsheltered sick even after they've been released from the emergency room. So that's going to be a substantial increase in services. "Instead of going straight out onto the streets, they would go to the respite center where they could recover from their injuries or illnesses in a special care area there," said Brockett.

For many, the possibility of being unhoused is very real, and a sometimes terrifying reality one may need to face. For some students in Boulder the scenario is closer than they would like it to be. "Obviously in Boulder, that's a huge problem right? Housing prices are through the roof. But there are really good homeless services here and the whole goal of those shelters is to get people off the streets and in homes. I would say they're doing a pretty good job and they're pretty successful in doing that... Obviously it's a scary thing. But there are things in place to assist with that" said Moto Kanda.

"Start with your school and then reach out to the Emergency Family Assistance Association as well. There should be the resources to help any student who finds themselves in that unfortunate situation," said Brockett.