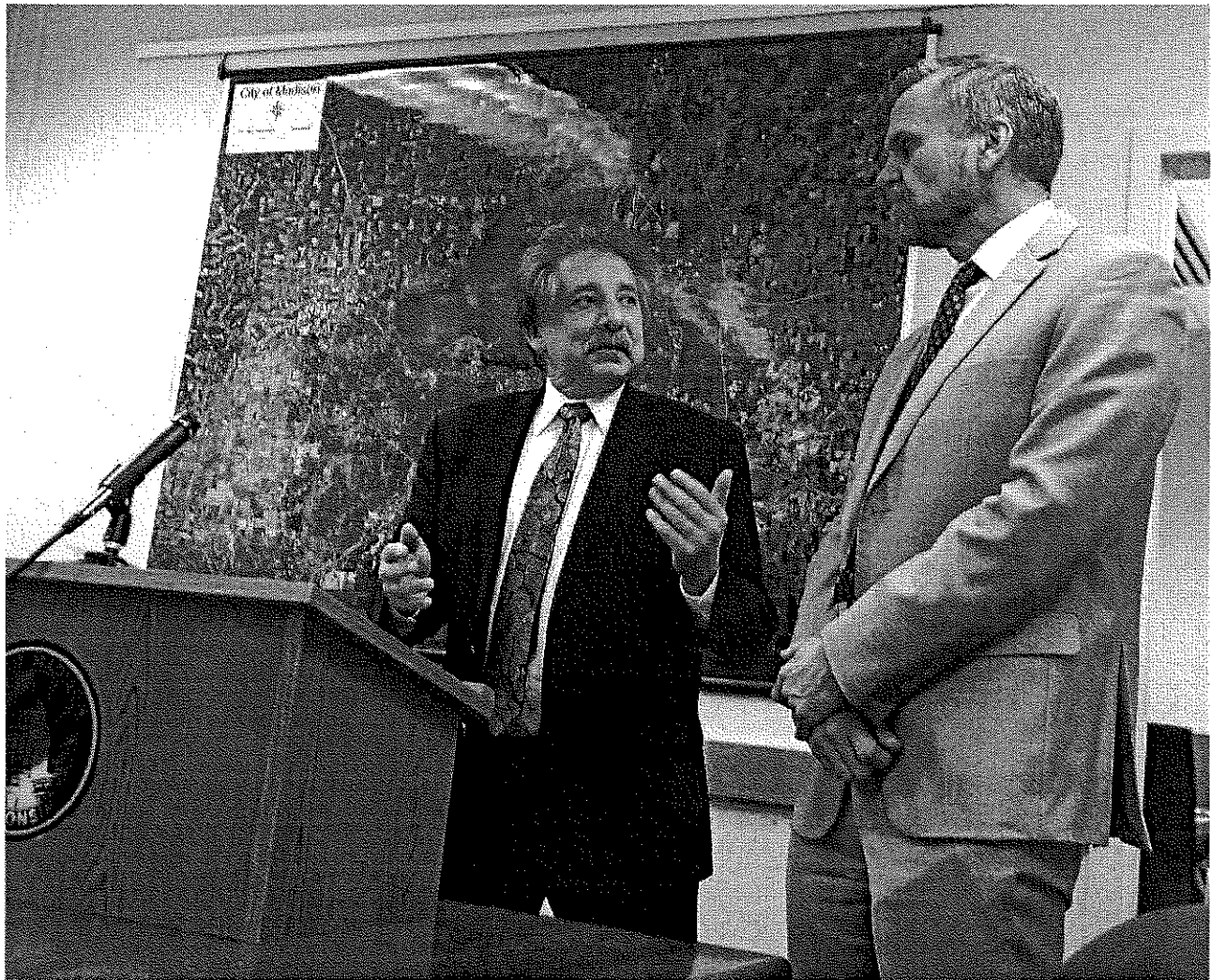


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Madison advances on ending homelessness for veterans

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Mayor Paul Soglin, left, and John Rohrer, director of the Madison Veteran's Hospital, converse during a press conference addressing the area's homeless military veterans at the City County Building on Monday.

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Madison is making good progress but still needs perhaps 50 housing units to effectively end homelessness for local

City Council delays decision on panhandling restrictions

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veterans, Mayor Paul Soglin said Monday.

In recent years, the city joined two national campaigns to end homelessness for veterans and moved to gather personalized data on homeless veterans and establish a prioritized community list with names and individual data documenting specific barriers to housing.

In 2015, the city and Madison Veterans Hospital partnered to meet a goal of housing 130 veterans by the end of 2016, and actually placed 193 veterans into housing in 2015-16, with roughly 50 veterans still on the streets, in shelter or in transitional housing, city officials said.

“It’s our hope we’ll reach zero by the end of 2017,” the mayor said at a press conference Monday afternoon.

The city’s estimates don’t include those who pay for motels with their own funds or who are doubled up with others.

Functional zero is reached when, at any point in time, the number of veterans experiencing literal homelessness, both on the streets and in shelters, is no greater than the city’s monthly veteran housing placement rate, according to Built for Zero, formerly Zero: 2016, a national effort to help end veteran and chronic homelessness.

A key has been an increase in federal housing vouchers for homeless veterans that limit rent payments for honorably discharged veterans to 30 percent of their income and provide case management. The city had 120 vouchers but secured 40 more plus another 25 project-based vouchers for Rethke Terrace. That 60-unit building for chronic homeless singles and veterans opened last summer on the East Side.

Nonprofit Porchlight Inc., with financial assistance from the city, will soon open six units to veterans on Lein Road.

Currently, there are 20 to 25 homeless veterans with vouchers who are still looking for housing, city community development director James O'Keefe said. Another 30 homeless veterans don't have vouchers, including 10 to 15 who have no need for or won't accept case management services or were dishonorably discharged, he said.

At the press conference, Soglin and John Rohrer, director of the Madison Veterans Hospital, applauded private landlords for taking homeless veterans and asked landlords to accept more such tenants, noting many have vouchers that guarantee stable rent payments and case management.

"Any landlord out there within 50 miles of Madison who's got a vacancy, we've got 25 veterans of U.S. military service who are looking for housing," Soglin said. "They are ready for a home."

It can be hard for homeless veterans to secure housing because the city has a very low vacancy rate, the population can have mental health or other disabilities, and state law allows landlords to be choosy, experts have said.

Finding housing for all veterans is "going to take collaboration of all parties," Rohrer said.

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