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HUD chief Scott Turner visits Dallas for talks on tackling homelessness

In exclusive interview with The Dallas Morning News, nation’s top housing official said the collaboration between public and private entities in Dallas is a model cities should emulate.

By [Chase Rogers](#) and [Leah Waters](#)

Staff Writers

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U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Scott Turner speaks during an interview at OurCalling in Dallas, Texas, on March 19, 2025. (Jason Janik / Special Contributor)

Update:

1:12 p.m. March 20, 2025: Updated to include information about Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson's testimony last week.

U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Scott Turner visited Dallas on Wednesday to speak with city and local nonprofit leaders addressing homelessness to discuss his vision to expand affordable housing and tout the efficacy of public-private partnerships.

Turner, a Richardson native and former professional football player who served as a Texas state representative from 2013 to 2017, was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on Feb. 6 to lead HUD. The agency is responsible for enforcing the nation's housing laws and helping low-income people, including those experiencing homelessness, find housing.

The roundtable, hosted by OurCalling, a nonprofit ministry serving the city's unhoused population, was closed to the press, but Turner spoke with *The Dallas Morning News* afterward to describe the discussion.

“I was very encouraged by the collaboration in which they work together,” Turner said of the city officials and nonprofit leaders. He went on to describe the city's posture on public-private partnerships as a model that merits replication in other cities across the country.

Related: OurCalling raising \$50M to build tiny-home community for homeless North Texans

Homelessness rose 18% nationally last year, HUD announced in December. But officials in Dallas and Collin counties [have reported seeing a decline](#), according to a federally mandated point-in-time count conducted in January last year.

Since peaking in 2021, overall homelessness in the two counties has dropped by 19%, with unsheltered homelessness falling by 24%, according to Housing Forward, the lead agency overseeing the counties' homeless response.

Related: Dallas, Collin counties see lowest count in homelessness since 2015, according to data

While officials acknowledge there is still work to be done, they see the progress as proof the system — backed by millions in private and public funding — is working.

Housing Forward leaders credit the decline to an [overhaul of the local](#) homelessness response system, [increased funding from HUD](#) over the years and greater collaboration among the All Neighbors Coalition, a network of about 150 local organizations working to end homelessness.

Coalition members attending the roundtable included OurCalling, Austin Street, Catholic Charities, The Bridge Homeless Recovery Center, Family Gateway, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Union Gospel Mission and [the Stewpot](#).

Wayne Walker, pastor and CEO of OurCalling, said the roundtable not only gave Turner insight into local efforts to address homelessness but also highlighted the strong cooperation that has driven the response.

“None of us could do any of this without the other agencies, and today was just another opportunity to collaborate,” he said.

Related: [Housing Forward wins \\$9.3M federal grant to address youth homelessness in North Texas](#)

Walker said the roundtable was a dynamic discussion, mixing moments of laughter with serious conversations about the impact of homelessness, especially when Turner discussed his own family and upbringing.

During his testimony before his cabinet appointment, Turner talked about how homelessness had impacted his family growing up, sharing that one of his uncles was a veteran who fell into homelessness for a time.

Turner, who is also an associate pastor at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, has worked as an advisor for OurCalling, Walker said. Last fall, Turner gave the opening prayer at the groundbreaking for the nonprofit’s [planned tiny home development](#) for unhoused people near Ferris, about 25 miles southeast of Dallas.



OurCalling CEO Wayne Walker speaks during a ground breaking ceremony for OurCalling's OurCommunity, Wednesday, Oct. 16, 2024, in Ferris, Texas. OurCommunity will be a 500-tiny home neighborhood with full support for residents who need long-term care. (Eliás Valverde II / Staff Photographer)

Impact of federal dollars

Testifying before lawmakers before his confirmation, Turner described HUD as falling short in its core mission of serving the nation's most vulnerable populations and addressing a debilitating affordable housing crisis.

The role contends with competing pressures to lower costs for Americans while cutting the federal budget. Once in office, Turner launched a Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, task force, aligning with [President Donald Trump's](#) and billionaire businessman and entrepreneur [Elon Musk's](#) broader push to cut government and target waste, fraud and abuse.

Related: [Why homelessness in Dallas needs all hands on deck, say advocates](#)

That assessment of HUD programs was ongoing, Turner told *The News*.

[Sarah Kahn, the CEO of Housing Forward](#), attended the roundtable. The opportunity, she said afterward, was valuable to highlight how federal dollars from HUD were being used to bolster what she saw as one of the city's greatest assets: its ability to unite the government, nonprofits and private sectors in addressing homelessness.

“It was great to be able to talk to Secretary Turner about the importance of the federal dollars in fueling the work we do locally on the ground,” she said in an interview.

Housing Forward's latest [Street to Home initiative](#), launched in 2024, is part of a \$30 million public-private partnership with significant contributions from the Meadows Foundation, Communities Foundation of Texas, The Perot Foundation, The Eugene McDermott Foundation and others.

Along the city of Dallas, Downtown Dallas, Inc. and other partners, the effort closed encampments downtown and housed over 100 people. The initiative is ongoing across the city with a goal to cut unsheltered homelessness in half by 2026 compared to 2021 levels.

Public-private partnerships have also been crucial in Dallas to increasing the city's available affordable housing, especially for the lowest incomes, said Marcy Helfand, a board member of Dallas Housing Finance Corporation, which brokers such partnerships to develop income-restricted units. Affordable units, local housing advocates say, help people leave homelessness and find stability.

Governments themselves aren't best suited to build housing themselves, Helfand said.

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“It's nuts, I think, to have governments build apartments or single-family homes or any kind of construction,” Helfand said. “They shouldn't be in that business.”

Instead, governments can support development through funding efforts, like the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, a public-private partnership where the U.S. Treasury sells tax credits to developers in exchange for making affordable units.

Most projects that Dallas Housing Finance Corporation helps develop are LIHTC properties, which have units that are restricted to lower-income households.

Without the tax credits as equity to fund the development, affordable housing wouldn't exist, Helfand said. Developers often have to subsidize their projects with a patchwork of funding mechanisms to make sure units are affordable for lower-income households.

Zoning reform

Turner said “regulatory reform” was needed at all levels of government to address what he sees as a housing crisis plaguing the country. HUD would encourage state and local governments to ease the regulatory environment.

“I’ve been encouraging our team and also the local leaders that I’ve been meeting with,” he said, “to take inventory of your regulatory environment and ease that so that we can come in, reduce those barriers, and build affordable housing.”

Related: [Here’s how cities across Texas changed their zoning to increase housing](#)

The week before Turner’s visit, [Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson testified](#) in Washington, D.C. before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, where Johnson said part of the solution to the affordability crisis was incentivizing the private sector to increase homebuilding.

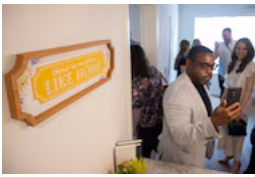
In fact, reforming zoning regulations is the single greatest weapon cities can use to boost housing supply, said Cullum Clark, director of the George W. Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative and adjunct professor of economics at Southern Methodist University.

Dallas could follow Texas cities like Austin and Houston in reducing the minimum lot size requirements, which [led to increases in housing](#) supply over time. Austin also reformed parking requirements, something [Dallas is currently weighing](#).

“Those are probably much more powerful than anything city could do by putting money on the table,” Clark said. “There’s not now and never is there going to be anywhere nearly enough money in the hands of city government to make more than a small dent in the problem.”

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By [Chase Rogers](#)

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By [Leah Waters](#)

Leah Waters is the equity reporter and former multiplatform editor for The Dallas Morning News. She reports on North Texas' equity crisis from a human-centered perspective that takes into account the historical contexts, structural barriers and public policy that have contributed to its growth. Topics: Housing, Homelessness, Public Policy, Growth

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