



Public Comment #6
 County of El Dorado Clerk of the Board <edc.cob@edcgov.us>
BOS RCU D 11-2-21

Item #6 on today's agenda

Marissa Muscat <mmuscat@bartonhealth.org>

Tue, Nov 2, 2021 at 7:47 AM

To: edc.cob@edcgov.us, bosone@edcgov.us, bostwo@edcgov.us, bosthree@edcgov.us, BOS Four <bosfour@edcgov.us>, bosfive@edcgov.us

Dear Members of the Board of Supervisors,

I would like to make a comment related to Item 6 on the BOS Agenda for 11/2/2021. First, in reviewing the materials for this item I noted that \$37.5 million dollars were being allocated but there were requests throughout the county for over \$118 million dollars. I do not envy you nor the CAO and the difficult decisions that you have to make. I am unable to attend today's meeting and ask that you consider my comments for this topic in lieu of my attendance.

As a physician in El Dorado County for over 17 years (all opinions here are my own and not of my employer), I would like to strongly encourage you to support the funding of over \$7 million dollars for Behavioral Health to meet current and future needs for residents of our county of all ages. Unfortunately, in my experience, our county's behavioral health department is staffed by great people who are underfunded and overworked. I was encouraged to see the slide that outlined developing local treatment and services programs including bridge funding to cover costs associated with Psychiatric Health Facility (PHF) administrative days and Institute for Mental Disease (IMD) placements which have been impacted due to COVID facility closures and reduced capacity for placements; developing lower levels of care (I.D.E.A. System Assessment); Crisis Residential Treatment (CRT); Crisis Respite Programs; and Transitional Housing Programs. Every day residents in crisis are in our emergency rooms and hospital beds, often for multiple days, awaiting placement or crisis care. This should never be an acceptable outcome, but it is particularly distressing in a pandemic where our medical facilities are full and short-staffed. Persons who have real medical emergencies are at risk of receiving the care they need because of this issue.

As I reviewed the full request of HHS for funding to support the Public Health and Health and Human Services Departments, I felt there was more that could be done by our county to support vulnerable community members. I encourage you to expand ARPA funding for these issues. The funding request included support for vulnerable seniors, foster youth/families, and housing and other support for those experiencing homelessness. As a member of El Dorado County's Continuum of Care, I also would support more funding for unsheltered homeless residents. I encourage you to ask more about how ARPA funding could assist our residents experiencing homelessness in our community. Fully funding requests for Behavioral Health and homelessness could create a variety of projects and supports to house unsheltered homeless residents, including solutions for permanent housing and case management. I would especially like to see permanent solutions for those in the Project Roomkey site, which could be addressed with ARPA funds.

Sincerely,
 Marissa Muscat MD

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Marissa R. Muscat, MD
 Hospitalist
 Utilization Management Medical Director
 Barton Memorial Hospital

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LATE DISTRIBUTION
 DATE 11-2-21



Public Comment #6
 County of El Dorado Clerk of the Board <edc.cob@edcgov.us>

BOS RCUD 11-2-21

Comment on Agenda Item 21-1680

Diane Rabinowitz <drabino1951@yahoo.com>
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Tue, Nov 2, 2021 at 1:22 PM

LATE DISTRIBUTION

DATE 11-2-21

Dear Board of Supervisors,
 Thank you for reading my comment.

I am puzzled why, with all the money flowing into this county from state and federal programs to end homelessness, there is still no emergency shelter. People in this community have been working on this problem for years, yet obstacles continue to obstruct the development of a place where the homeless population can be safe, clean, and on their way to a productive life. Why?

In the following memo, I am laying out the case for community development of an emergency shelter that can meet all guidelines. It just requires the appropriate overlay to be granted by the county planning department. After all, this is the same industrial park that hosts the amazing animal shelter for unwanted animals. Surely the county could approve and support the development of a shelter for humans to get clean, safe, and move onto a productive life.

TOPIC: EMERGENCY SHELTER PROPOSAL

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Diane Rabinowitz

DATE: 11/2/2021

RE: EMERGENCY SHELTER in EDC

INTRODUCTION:

There are currently approximately 100 unhoused individuals living in an encampment on Upper Broadway called "The Hill",⁴ with others scattered in camps in other parts of the county. The folks on the Hill get their meals at The Upper Room Dining Hall, a non-profit Christian inspired organization that has been providing dinners and services for the homeless for over 20 years. The Upper Room has been recognized for its service and for the help it provides in collaborating with the Sheriff's Department, the Health Department and other government agencies.

For years, local government, property owners and others have objected to the presence of the homeless—citing drugs, alcohol, fire danger, and unwanted behavior as reasons to not provide shelter. In this memo, I will argue that a gross misunderstanding of the causes of homelessness is blinding people to the issues and the solutions, and that providing shelter and indoor services will go a long way towards turning around the tragedies that have led to homelessness. I will argue in favor of establishing an emergency shelter/navigation center.

POLICY DEBATE

In study after study the evidence is clear.⁸ Providing housing first reduces substance abuse, improves adherence to antipsychotic medication, reduces re-offending, reduces public service needs, reduces health care costs, increases consumer choice and reduces harm among homeless individuals. Many states have implemented the Housing First model with some success, but shortage of affordable housing maintains pressure that keeps homeless counts high. New York state, for example, interpreted its state constitution in 1979 to give New Yorkers the "right to shelter." They have a large shelter system so that on any given night people who need to can find a safe place to sleep.⁹ Cities and states have successfully implemented this policy with innovations such as 10:

- building new housing specifically to house the homeless (Salt Lake City)
- creating a central coordinating system for referrals (Berkeley)
- building tents and temporary shelters (Sacramento, and others)
- building low barrier shelters (Louisiana)
- making sure services provide support for individuals to be able to succeed in permanent housing

Some people blame the homeless for their plight. While it is true that each of us has a responsibility for our own life, some people are dealt so many blows that it is difficult to get up without help and support. According to several people interviewed at various camps in Placerville, the leading causes of their homelessness are 4:

- Housing costs are prohibitive
- Job loss; difficulty finding a new one (especially during COVID)
- Parent passed away
- Lack of resources to fix a vehicle - lack of transportation to work
- Escaping traumatic and/or abusive situations
- Untreated mental illness.
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse (self-medication, escape from pain)

Neglect within the community exacerbates the blight they become on our community. While most people get their trash picked up once a week, the homeless encampment on the hill only has pickup once a month. Lack of opportunities and past traumas leave people adrift where they are preyed upon by drug peddlers and others. With no convenient hygiene facilities, they accumulate trash, which is only sporadically picked up. Eventually conflicts lead to the need to call the police for help.

However, attention rather than neglect mitigates these problems. Marshall Medical outreach last year prevented spread of COVID through the homeless community, and in fact produced the county's lowest concentration of COVID cases. Various non-profits have teamed up to help with monthly trash management. The residents on "the Hill" bag up their own trash and stack it; community members help them bring it down to the trash trucks on scheduled pickup dates. Other efforts by non-profits are mobile showers and a clothes closet.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although homelessness has become a problem in almost every American city, and there are about 553,000 people experiencing homelessness in the U.S., in California alone there were about 151,000 inhabitants experiencing homelessness in January 2020. ⁹ How did this come about? In the 1970s there was enough affordable housing so that homelessness was not a problem. But during the 1980s the federal government decided to cut funds for affordable housing and California cut taxes and gutted social programs, including funding for mental institutions.⁹ Punitive measures have not been effective, nor has rent control; and efforts to build low cost housing have largely failed.

The number of homeless in El Dorado County has been estimated at 600 based on a recent Point-In-Time (PIT) count.² This number has remained relatively steady over the past few PIT counts, and it represents individuals scattered throughout the county, in forests, park land, and in both Lake Tahoe and the "western slope" area, where the county seat of Placerville is located. This number includes all types of homelessness: temporary, couch sitting, car and van camping, tent camping, as well as long term chronic.

Over the past year, much has changed for residents of The Hill. Government programs have allowed many homeless individuals to purchase cars, vans, or to live in local low cost hotels. It is estimated that the high functioning homeless have been able to get off the Hill; the ones who remain in the camp community on the Hill may not be as capable, but they are reinforcing their encampment. The Upper Room continues to provide meals to all these people.

Although South Lake Tahoe obtained a grant to purchase several hotels and is currently housing its homeless population, the western slope has still not been able to accommodate all the homeless here.

GOVERNMENT and NON GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

Government efforts

In November 2020, the Mountain Democrat reported on County's 5-year plan to combat homelessness, despite complications from COVID-19. The federal government, through HUD, funds county Continuum of Care organizations to help community organizations band together to address the homeless problem. Monthly meetings of these groups help organize PIT (Point-In-Time) counts and dissemination of grant application information from the federal and state levels. So far, through our CoC, several organizations have won awards, including a grant/loan for construction of a low cost housing project by Mercy Housing, and a contract with Volunteers of America to operate a transitional housing project. In June 2021, the county Sheriff proposed a "managed homeless camp" to be built next to the county jail. This plan was approved by both the County and the City of Placerville boards of Supervisors; however, our CoC advised that no federal funds (ARPA) could be used to house people in tents, so either the plan would have to be amended or abandoned.

That plan would have taken months to implement, and no amended proposal has been advanced that would meet with federal guidelines. CoC has publicized two additional state grants, one competitive and one non-competitive, but Housing El Dorado doesn't have the proven track record required to qualify.

Non-Government Efforts

In 2012, a concerned group of citizens secured land, a conditional use permit from the city, and funding to support a temporary managed camp which they called "Hangtown Haven." 11 Potential residents were screened and selected for positive behaviors; through group efforts they learned to cooperate and support each others' recovery. Unfortunately, the feeling of support was not unanimous throughout the larger community. Complaints led to Hangtown Haven losing its permit and everyone was dispersed. Since the dissolution of "Hangtown Haven" in 2012, the interfaith community has been providing winter lodging through a program called "Nomadic Shelter." The principle of Nomadic Shelter is that the homeless individuals participating would be shuttled each night to a specific church to sleep in a room made available for the purpose. Volunteers supervised and made sure that any incidents were addressed and the room was completely restored by 7 am, when the sheltered had to vacate. Last year, Housing El Dorado created Project Pathways, which took place at only one church, Green Valley. A detailed program was written to manage any situation that might arise. The most individuals ever housed in a night was 20.

Housing El Dorado and the Interfaith Council have been meeting regularly for the past few weeks to brainstorm alternatives. We have been seeking vacant warehouses, church properties, and other vacant land and properties in efforts to put together managed tent camping with hygiene and navigation services for our homeless population. If all this fails, our fallback is nomadic shelter once again, which just postpones finding a sustainable long-term solution.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

I am proposing to create a 7 day/24 hour site to to protect the people that remain homeless from the elements, help stabilize them, and help them get access to supportive services. With support from Volunteers of America or a similar parent organization, and with collaboration from other allied organizations, I am seeking support to develop an emergency shelter with navigation (mental health, medical health, job and housing readiness, administrative needs) in the Diamond Springs Industrial Park. The specific site is zoned "Light Commercial" and is 4000+ square feet, and I am asking for the approval of the appropriate overlay to allow its use as an emergency shelter. It would allow development of social enterprise in half the square footage for those served to begin working

to support themselves and the organization. Using the guidelines developed by the Pathways Project, we can insure that the site will be effectively managed.

This site meets many of the needs articulated by the City Manager in his July 2021 memo to the County.

- It could be zoned to allow an emergency shelter without requiring a conditional use permit if it is sufficiently distanced from the neighboring properties
- It is convenient to Missouri Flat Rd transportation and shopping.
- It offers convenient access to the 50 corridor.
- Water and Power infrastructure is already in place for this property.
- Management will be provided by trained staff and volunteers with a coordinated policy, rules and regulations
- Navigation services will be provided by a licensed social worker, along with the County Department of Mental Health, Marshall Medical Center, and El Dorado County Clinics.
- HED has insurance and can raise funds to equip and maintain the property in proper order.

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***** "Inspiration comes to us slowly and quietly... Prime it with a little solitude."