

EL DORADO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
SHERIFF JOHN D'AGOSTINI

public comments  
4-14-20  
#25

MEMORANDUM

TO: CAO Don Ashton  
FROM: John D'Agostini, Sheriff~Coroner~Public Administrator  
SUBJECT: Armory for the Homeless  
DATE: 04-13-2020



This memo serves as comment to the topic of the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and the Placerville City Council reviewing plans to pursue the creation of a homeless shelter at the Armory located on adjoining property to the El Dorado County Fairgrounds. Supervisor Hidahl, along with prior administration from Hangtown Haven and with board members from the Nomadic shelters group, have been leading this movement and using the COVID-19 pandemic as a platform to push their agenda forward. In the past year this group has proposed several facilities to include the vacant juvenile hall, the vacant Sheriff's Office building and the EDC fairgrounds Armory.

Our Sheriff's Office's Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) has addressed the topic of the Housing First initiative for the homeless with this group on many occasions. HOT strongly opposes this type of shelter only program as it doesn't address the specific needs of the homeless population in El Dorado County. The Housing First concept is something that is being pushed at the state level and takes nothing into account for the unique needs of the homeless within any given county or cityhood. Over the past three years, HOT has been successful in assessing the specific needs of our homeless population and has developed a proven method for what works as a lasting solution to end each individual's cycle of homelessness. Housing First is not a viable solution for our homeless population as it does not address the underlying issues of the homeless individual. Additionally, this system of Housing First has proven to be a failed system state wide and specifically, has already failed locally with the implementation of Hangtown Haven.

Some of the primary concerns with Housing First programs are the management aspects and oversight issues. The structure behind Housing First and ventures of this nature are poor at best, and leave the entire system destined for failure. The Housing First concept also supersedes what HOT has developed and implemented as a solution for El Dorado County homeless and would deter from our ongoing efforts. Specifically, this type of program eliminates the incentive for a homeless individual to address their underlying issues of substance abuse and/or mental health issues.

HOT and I support bringing a different model and ideology to El Dorado County as a multi-faceted approach to addressing the homeless and sheltering situations. HOT has researched multiple models and has identified a facility in San Antonio called the Restoration Center that would adequately address all of the needs of El Dorado County's homeless population. This type of facility allows homeless individuals to participate in treatment programs and transitional housing and ensures long term success with counseling and ongoing support throughout the process.

The efforts of this special interest group appear to be unrelated to COVID-19 issues that the county is currently facing. These efforts are in direct violation of the Governor's directive for sheltering in place and limiting government to essential functions only. This board item is not an emergent or essential issue and is directly limiting the public's ability to comment or oppose. With all of these considerations, this appears to be a mechanism to push a political and personal agenda without opposition.

It is important to understand the stark differences between larger, more densely populated counties and cities and the unique circumstances of El Dorado County. In cities and counties such as San Francisco and Los Angeles, it is not uncommon to see encampments of nearly 300 homeless people in one area. This type of living condition would directly contribute to the spread of an infectious disease such as COVID-19. In El Dorado County, it is uncommon to see an encampment of more than 10 people and the individual camps are naturally spread out to align with social distancing advice. These differences imply a varying approach as to what would be the best course of action to appropriately prevent the spread of COVID-19. In larger counties, it should be deemed best practice to break up these large groups of individuals and find a different sheltering solution, while in El Dorado County, it is more appropriate to allow individuals to shelter in place if possible. If we are to remove homeless from their current situation and place them in a shelter, we could potentially create a situation that increases their risk of infection.

The Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) along with Marshall Hospital; Martin Entwistle, VP of Population Health, Shaunda Crane, Director of Care Coordination for Vulnerable Populations and many County Volunteers have come together to create the COVID-19 Homeless Community Response Team. Working in collaboration with the Office of Emergency Services' Emergency Operations Center (EOC) we are identifying vulnerable individuals throughout the county and educating them on best practices in addition to offering assistance to them to improve the overall safety of the community from this virus.

The goal of this group is to assist the homeless in minimizing contact with the same expectation as the rest of the community. Our collaborative group will be continuing to provide ongoing medical assessments throughout the pandemic in a proactive effort to minimize the spread of COVID-19 amongst the homeless population and the community. As at-risk or symptomatic individuals are identified, efforts will be made to provide proper medical attention to include suitable shelter and monitoring until they are medically cleared for repopulation.

Attached is a news link regarding the Homeless and shelters:

*SAN FRANCISCO — Seventy people at San Francisco's largest homeless shelter have tested positive for the coronavirus, Mayor London Breed said on Friday.*

It is HOT's recommendation that this item be postponed/removed until a time that HOT and the community is able to address the Board directly and have their voice heard.

**THIS ITEM NEEDS TO BE AGREED UPON BOTH BY CITY AND COUNTY TO HAVE THE ARMORY REMOVED FROM THE JOINT POLICY STATEMENT ON HOMELESSNESS PURPOSE - April 14, 2020**

Action 1: Authorize staff of both jurisdictions to immediately evaluate the feasibility of the property at 100 Placerville Drive, known as the Placerville Armory as a Transitional Housing Navigation Center in order temporarily house and provide resources to the homeless. In addition to an evaluation of the actual property and structure, the evaluation of this facility should include consideration for the provision of resources to assist the homeless including:

A. Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Services

B. Mental Health Counseling

C. Temporary Housing

D. Identification of Permanent Housing

E. Employment Counseling

F. Meals

G. Other Related Services

All the above listed items are already being provided through HOT, HHS and the COC. This would be a redundant, time consuming, costly provision of services. Additionally, this ideology conflicts with HOT's working model, mission and vision.

In speaking with fairgrounds personnel, they were advised following the tour of the Armory (Tuesday), that the cost of the Armory to be upgraded was too expensive. This facility was also deemed unanimously non-conducive by medical personnel for sheltering purposes of the vulnerable, unsheltered homeless population. Political agendas should be set aside for the time being and the focus should be shifted to ensuring the overall health of the community.

Further, the fairgrounds hosts numerous youth events, year round (as observed in the letter written by Fairgrounds), this also includes the El Dorado County Explorer Program that has been training at the fairgrounds after hours (1700-2030). All youth programs held in this facility will be impacted by a homeless shelter located at the Armory. Since HOT has been working in cooperation with the City of Placerville, the fairgrounds has seen a dramatic reduction in homeless activity, crime and nuisance to their grounds. I was advised that calls for service to the Placerville Police Department have been reduced and overall reduction in homeless activity by approximately 75% (based on stats from fairgrounds management). If the Armory is approved as a transient shelter, this will dramatically affect the fairgrounds, surrounding businesses, Placerville PD (calls for service) and the youth programs that rely on this facility.

I would like to reinforce that this decision should be upheld by both the County and City to NOT have a shelter, specifically the Armory, as a transient shelter.

This memo is a collaborative effort by all members of the Homeless Outreach Team who have been working in the field, contacting homeless individuals and successfully breaking the cycle of homelessness for the past three years.

Thank you