



## HOMELESSNESS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

At the City we field a variety of questions and concerns regarding homelessness in our community. We have compiled the following list of frequently asked questions (FAQs). For further information, please contact Kelli Kuykendall, Program Specialist, Housing and Community Services, at 707-543-3315 or [kkuykendall@srcity.org](mailto:kkuykendall@srcity.org).

### CITY SERVICES, EFFORTS, AND INVESTMENT

#### **1. What is the City doing to address the growing homeless problem in our community?**

*The City is actively engaged in a range of efforts to prevent and end homelessness in our community. These include better coordination of services among key City departments, regional participation through the [Sonoma County Continuum of Care](#), improving access to services through a Coordinated Entry system, sponsoring a street outreach team, and increasing the availability of shelter and housing options for the unsheltered. The [City Council Homeless Policy Subcommittee](#), described in greater detail below in #7, is currently developing a comprehensive strategy to address homelessness in our community. The City aims to balance improving our system of care to better serve those experiencing or at risk of homelessness and reducing the negative impacts of homelessness on our community. This is a significant challenge requiring a community-wide response.*

#### **2. What sort of financial resources are being put towards the issue?**

*Over the past two years, the City has more than doubled its investment in homeless services with a current budget of approximately \$1.7 million. The City reorganized in 2015 with the intention of focusing on affordable housing and homeless services through the newly formed Housing and Community Services Department. Additional support was allocated to the Homeless Services Program and several programs were introduced or expanded. For more information about programs currently supported by the City see the [Homeless Services](#) page.*

#### **3. Does the City have a homeless shelter within the city limits? If so, has a homeless person ever been turned away from the shelter due to lack of space?**

*The City owns the Samuel L. Jones Hall Homeless Shelter, a 138-bed year-round shelter plus a 50-bed winter shelter program for single adults. The City also provides funding for the operation of the Family Support Center, a 138-bed family shelter. For detailed information about programs currently supported by the City see the [Homeless Services](#) page.*

*Wait times for shelters vary depending on individual or family circumstances and the availability of shelter beds. People seeking shelter should call 2-1-1 or visit [211sonoma.org](http://211sonoma.org), 24/7 for information and referral services.*

There are numerous non-profit and faith-based organizations, and advocacy groups serving the homeless in Santa Rosa and Sonoma County. Annually, the [Sonoma County Task Force for the Homeless](#) compiles a comprehensive [Sonoma County Homeless Resource Guide](#) available online or as a pocket-sized edition. Listings include free and low-cost services to help people struggling with homelessness to find shelter, food, health care, financial assistance, permanent housing, employment, disability services, and more.

#### **4. How do I make a referral to the Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST)?**

The Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST), operated by Catholic Charities and funded by the City, is a street outreach team that actively works in our downtown to engage unsheltered homeless into services and housing. HOST works in collaboration with the Police Department's Downtown Enforcement Team (DET) and other service providers such as Social Advocates for Youth and Buckelew Programs. The City Council funded this pilot effort starting in August 2015 through June 2016, and recently renewed funding for this program for Fiscal Year 2016/2017. HOST also operates Clean Start, a mobile bathroom-shower trailer, at various sites throughout the City.

For referrals call 855-707-4678 (HOST) or [HOST@srcharities.org](mailto:HOST@srcharities.org)

A schedule for the Clean Start Mobile Bathroom-Shower Trailer is available on the City's [Homeless Services](#) page.

#### **5. How are the City and County working together to end homelessness?**

The City and County are collaborating in a variety of ways through participation in the [Sonoma County Continuum of Care \(CoC\)](#). The Sonoma County CoC is a public-private partnership that brings together local government, service providers, and community activists to develop collaborative strategies for reducing homelessness. The Sonoma County Community Development Commission (SCCDC) is the lead agency for the Sonoma County CoC and hosts its planning process. The City, the SCCDC and the City of Petaluma, three HUD entitlement jurisdictions in Sonoma County, jointly fund the CoC and have designated seats on its governing body. The Sonoma County CoC brings in about \$2.9 million annually to Sonoma County to end homelessness. The Sonoma County CoC updated its [10-year Homeless Action Plan](#) in 2014.

#### **6. How does the City measure the success of its efforts, including that of its contractors?**

All City contracts for homeless services include performance measures requiring either monthly or quarterly reports in accordance with a funding agreement. For example, a City-funded shelter program reports how many people were provided shelter and of those that were provided shelter how many exited to housing as a result of the program's assistance. Staff monitor a contractor's progress in achieving its planned goals and outcomes over the course of the funding cycle and work with the contractor to make adjustments accordingly.

The City participates in the Sonoma County Continuum of Care (CoC) which evaluates how our system of care as a whole performs. One way that the CoC monitors system-level performance is through the point-in-time homeless count, which according to the [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#), "helps communities plan services and programs to appropriately address local needs, measure progress in decreasing homelessness, and identify strengths and gaps in a community's current homelessness

assistance system.” Both program-level and system-level performance evaluation allows us to see what’s working and what’s not.

#### **7. What is the role of the City Council Homeless Policy Subcommittee?**

In January 2016, recognizing the importance of this issue to the City and the broader community, Mayor Sawyer announced his appointment of Council Member Olivares (Chair), Vice Mayor Schwedhelm, and Council Member Combs to a Council Subcommittee on Homelessness. The [Homeless Policy Subcommittee](#) considers a variety of issues related to homelessness and its effects on the Santa Rosa Community. Meetings are held on the third Monday of each month at 9 a.m. in the Council Chambers at 100 Santa Rosa Avenue. You can sign up to receive Homeless Policy Subcommittee updates by visiting the Subcommittee [webpage](#).

The subject of developing a comprehensive strategy is currently under consideration with the Subcommittee. This strategy supports an evidenced-based “Housing First” model which prioritizes providing permanent housing as primary strategy for ending homelessness ([National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)). The Subcommittee is also currently preparing recommendations as part of Council’s recent action declaring a homeless emergency in Santa Rosa, described in greater detail below in #8.

#### **8. What does the City hope to achieve by declaring a local homelessness emergency?**

On August 9, the City Council formally declared a local homeless emergency in Santa Rosa. This move should give the City additional flexibility to address the homeless crisis. Furthermore, Council is hopeful that this action will rally community support for shared-based long-term solutions. More specifically, the declaration of a homeless emergency in Santa Rosa has three distinct features:

I.) Declaration of Shelter Crisis: A declaration of shelter crisis will make it easier to waive certain health and safety and zoning rules if the City decides to use public property to create additional shelter for the homeless.

II.) Declaration of Local Emergency: In declaring a local emergency, the City Council has proclaimed that the level of homelessness in Santa Rosa constitutes a local emergency, along the same lines as safety issues that could be created by a natural disaster. This step allows the City of Santa Rosa to potentially lift zoning or public safety restrictions on private property owners – such as churches or private property owners – seeking to serve the homeless.

III.) Request for Gubernatorial State of Emergency Proclamation: By writing a letter to Governor Jerry Brown requesting that he declare a state of emergency on homelessness in California, the City Council wishes to shed light on this issue not only locally, but also statewide. Furthermore, the City Council hopes this action will potentially open the door for state funding to help tackle this community health and safety concern.

The [Homeless Policy Subcommittee](#) is currently preparing recommendations in three areas – adoption of a comprehensive strategic plan, Community Homeless Assistance Program (CHAP) guidelines, and an Emergency Declaration Work Plan. These include the potential use of City facilities for shelter and private facilities for safe parking, safe camping, the placement and maintenance of portable toilets including access to existing bathroom facilities, the provision of temporary overnight shelter, and storage for personal belongings under an expanded CHAP. The intent of CHAP is to foster community solutions

through cross sector collaborations with the goal of reducing the impacts of homelessness on the community and to better serve persons experiencing homelessness.

## **CAMPING, LOITERING, PANHANDLING, AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

### **9. If camping is prohibited within City limits why are people camping in our downtown and parks, along our creeks, and in other areas of the city?**

Merely resting or sleeping is not illegal. It is important to remember that camping must be established by the use of camping equipment. The majority of time when Police come across people that are camping, they are given an opportunity to comply and encouraged to seek services such as those offered by the Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) or other community services. In the case of an established encampment, the individual or group is given a 72-hour notice to remove their belongings, provided with community resource and referral information, and contacted by HOST. The City's ultimate goal is to connect those living on the streets or in encampments with services, shelter, and housing rather than moving them along to other areas.

### **10. If people are camping illegally citywide then why won't the City allow designated areas for camping, commonly referred to as sanctioned campgrounds?**

The City is investing in housing solutions such as rapid rehousing which aims to move people from homelessness into permanent housing like the [Palms](#), a former motel on Santa Rosa Avenue which was converted to a permanent supportive housing community for chronically homeless persons in early 2016. That said, the City also recognizes there is a more immediate crisis that must be addressed and is currently developing a work plan as part of Council's recent action declaring a homeless emergency in Santa Rosa. An option under consideration as a potential interim solution is a safe camping program which, if permitted, would be required to coordinate services with the Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) and participate in the Coordinated Entry system, key elements of the "Housing First" approach.

**Catholic Charities operates a Safe Parking program. For more information, call or drop by the Homeless Services Center, 600 Morgan Street, which is open Monday through Friday from 6am to 11:30am (707-525-0226).**

### **11. Where in each neighborhood of the city are homeless people able to 1) legally store, possess, and use significant amounts of belongings and 2) locate 24-hour access to facilities such as restrooms, showers, cooking, etc.?**

- 1) There is not currently a facility within the city for the homeless to store their belongings. There are no restrictions around possessing or using significant amounts of belongings unless they were to obstruct a sidewalk or access to a business, for example.
- 2) 24-hour access to such facilities is challenging for those experiencing homelessness. There are a number of facilities available during the day, such as the Homeless Services Center or City facilities. Catholic Charities' Safe Parking program, an overnight program, provides access to portable restrooms for its participants. The Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) also operates Clean Start, a mobile bathroom-shower trailer program. The trailer is currently operating from 10am to 1pm on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at the Roseland Village, and Thursdays at Doyle

Community Park. This schedule is subject to change. The Clean Start schedule is also available on the City's [Homeless Services](#) page.

Annually the [Sonoma County Task Force for the Homeless](#) compiles a comprehensive [Sonoma County Homeless Resource Guide](#) available online or as a pocket-sized edition. Listings include free and low-cost services to help people struggling with homelessness to find shelter, food, health care, financial assistance, permanent housing, employment, disability services, and more.

**12. Why are the homeless allowed to “hang out” all day in our parks and in our downtown?**

*Being homeless is not a crime. Homeless people enjoy the same rights as everyone and are allowed to be in public areas. Merely resting, sleeping, or standing in a particular area is not illegal. The activity becomes unlawful if illegal behavior or actions are taken. For example, possession of an open container of alcohol, public urination or defecation, lying or sitting as to obstruct, aggressive panhandling, camping, or other activity that is prohibited or illegal. If you observe these or other illegal behaviors, please call the Police Department’s non-emergency line at (707) 528-5222 which is available 24/7. When you see criminal activity, please call 911.*

**13. What is the City doing to discourage panhandling, loitering, urinating or defecating in public places, and other unwanted activities?**

*The [Homeless Policy Subcommittee](#) is currently in the process of developing a comprehensive strategy to address homelessness in our community. A component of this strategy seeks to increase the accountability of those that are refusing services such as those offered by the Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) and engaging in undesirable activities. The Santa Rosa Homeless Collective, a steering committee comprised of representatives from the public and private sector, has a working group dedicated to the subject of accountability. This working group includes stakeholder representation from the City Council, District Attorney’s office, homeless advocates and service providers, the business community, mental health professionals and law enforcement.*

*Beginning July 2016, the Downtown Enforcement Team (DET) was expanded to six officers and a dedicated Sergeant for the team, providing for expanded coverage and presence in the downtown. DET works closely with HOST to coordinate efforts in the downtown.*

*With regards to panhandling, the Chamber of Commerce and Catholic Charities have approached the City to use parking meters as a means to raise awareness about homelessness and to give people the option of making a donation to programs that help the homeless instead of giving money to panhandlers. IPS, the company the City has contracted with for new parking meters, has a philanthropic program where they donate new credit card enabled parking meters to be used to collect donations. The City is open to this idea and is awaiting a proposal from the Chamber of Commerce.*

## **GENERAL COMMENTS, CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS**

**14. If the City is investing more in programs that serve the homeless why are we seeing more homeless? Are the City’s efforts attracting more homeless?**

*As the County seat, people are attracted to Santa Rosa for a variety of reasons not simply for homeless services. Homelessness is a complex issue with many contributing factors. The removal of encampments*

along the Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) line and along our creeks and waterways, as a result of increased State water quality regulations, has pushed those living in these areas into public view, contributing, at least in part, to the increase in visibility of homelessness. Sonoma County is also one of the nation's least affordable housing markets: 67% those surveyed as part of the [2016 Sonoma County Point-In-Time Census and Survey](#) reported affordable rent as the primary obstacle for obtaining permanent housing. Despite seeing more homeless, data from the 2016 report actually show that:

- Homelessness is trending downward in Sonoma County from a high of 4,539 persons in 2011 followed by 4,280 in 2013, 3,107 in 2015, and 2,906 in 2016.
- Our homeless population is overwhelmingly local: 82% lived in Sonoma County prior to becoming homeless.

**15. What is the City doing to improve access to services for persons with behavioral health and substance use needs?**

The Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) makes service referrals and coordinates street outreach with a number of service providers, including Social Advocates for Youth and Buckelew Programs, a provider of behavioral health services. HOST makes referrals to the Orenda Center, a program of Center Point Drug Abuse Alternatives Center (DAAC), for alcohol and other drug detoxification services, or to the Salvation Army's Adult Rehabilitation Center at Lytton Springs, for example. HOST and the Police Department's Downtown Enforcement Team (DET) are also working with the Mobile Support Team to better coordinate services in the downtown. The Mobile Support Team, a program of Sonoma County Department of Health Services Behavioral Health Division, is staffed by behavioral health professionals who provide field based support to law enforcement officers responding to a behavioral health crisis. A behavioral health representative also accompanies HOST in the field on a regular basis.