

February 10, 2016

Dear Colleagues,

The Housing and Community Services Department would like to provide you with some background on homelessness in Sonoma County, an update on City-sponsored homeless service programs, and address concerns regarding the City's response to homelessness in our downtown.

January 2015 Homeless Point-In-Time Count

The most recent count found 3,107 homeless persons in Sonoma County on a given night, 67% (2,070) of whom were unsheltered. Of the 1,856 homeless persons in Santa Rosa, 65% (1,204) were unsheltered. Eighty-six percent (86%) of the homeless population indicated their last permanent residence was in Sonoma County. The 2016 count was conducted on January 29, 2016, the results of which will be available this summer.

In 2015 City contracts for homeless services doubled from \$700,000 to \$1.4 million

Core Programs – existing City-sponsored programs operated by Catholic Charities prior to 2015 and continuing, approximately \$700,000

- Samuel L. Jones Hall Homeless Shelter, 138-bed year round shelter
- Family Support Center, 138-bed family shelter
- Homeless Services Center, multi-service day center

New Efforts – increased services and funding in 2015 of approximately \$700,000

- Winter shelter bed program at Samuel L. Jones Hall Homeless Shelter provides an additional 50 beds between November and March.
- Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) program, operated by Catholic Charities, is a street outreach team that actively works in our downtown to engage unsheltered homeless into services with the ultimate goal of placing them into housing. HOST will soon launch a mobile bathroom-shower trailer which will serve as an outreach tool to further engage homeless persons in our community into services.
- HCA Family Fund, operated by Community Action Partnership of Sonoma County. The City provides funds for the administration of this program which leverages \$300,000 annually from a private donor to provide assistance with rent and mortgage payments, and security deposits.
- Community Homeless Assistance Pilot Program (CHAPP) which allows property owners to provide safe parking, portable toilets, and temporary shelter during the winter months. CHAPP participants include Catholic Charities' safe parking program and Redwood Gospel Mission's nomadic shelter program.

Strategy – the City is evaluating ways to better coordinate efforts with several key departments, and regionally with homeless service providers and our colleagues at the County of Sonoma. Improvements to the homeless services system alone cannot overcome the affordable housing crisis, which is the greatest barrier to housing the homeless. To that end, the City is working on a comprehensive strategy to create a range of affordable and market rate housing opportunities.

HOST and Santa Rosa Police Department's Downtown Enforcement Team (DET)

HOST and DET are coordinating efforts to address homelessness 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 additional 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 on public or private property without permission, or other activity that is prohibited or illegal. It is important to remember that camping must be established by the use of camping equipment. The majority of the time when Police come across people that are camping they are given an opportunity to comply and encouraged to seek services such as HOST or other community resources. 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. Following this notification and outreach effort, abandoned belongings that are not of value are disposed of.

Resources

- For questions about the City's homeless services programs, please contact Kelli Kuykendall, Program Specialist, Housing and Community Services, at 543-3315 or kkuykendall@srcity.org.
- To make a referral to the HOST program, please call 1-855-707-HOST (4678) or HOST@srcharities.org.
- If you know a homeless person in need of services, please have them call 2-1-1 for 24 hour information, referral, and intake.
- Homeless Resource Guides (English/Spanish) are available at the Housing and Community Services Department in the City Hall Annex or through the Sonoma County Task Force for the Homeless: <http://sonomacountyhomeless.org/sonoma-county-homeless-resource-guide/>.