

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Like, Home? There's No Place

Report Date: 6/28/19

Response by: Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

FINDINGS

- 1. The county agrees with the findings numbered F1, F3, F4, F8, F10 and F12.
- 2. The county partially agrees with the findings numbered F2 and F9.
- 3. The county disagrees with the findings numbered F5 and F6.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Recommendation numbered R8 has been implemented.
- 2. Recommendation numbered R6 is in the process of being implemented.
- 3. Recommendations numbered R2 and R4 require analysis.
- 4. Recommendations numbered R5, R7 and R9 will not be implemented.

Date: _____ Signed: _____

Number of pages attached: _____



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT
COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
MANAGEMENT & BUDGET TEAM

825 5th Street, Suite 111, Eureka, CA 95501-1153
Telephone (707) 445-7266 cao@co.humboldt.ca.us

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
FROM: AMY S. NILSEN, COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO 2018-19 GRAND JURY REPORT "LIKE, HOME? THERE'S NO PLACE"
DATE: 10/1/2019

In the Grand Jury Report, Like, Home? There's No Place, the Grand Jury has requested that your Board respond to Findings 1 through 9 and Recommendations 1 through 10. I am proposing the following response as detailed below.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: *Existing shelters have restrictions that prevent use by significant segments of the homeless population.*

Response: Agree

Existing shelters include the Eureka Rescue Mission (ERM), Arcata House Partnership's (AHP) Adult Shelter and Family Shelter, Betty Chinn's Blue Angel Village and Betty Chinn's House Family Shelter. Access to Betty's House is limited to families referred by the county through CalWORKS and Child Welfare Services. Requirements listed on ERM website include sobriety, photo identification, and specifically excludes children between the ages of 13 and 17. Both ERM and AHP Adult Shelter ban persons that have been disruptive in previous stays. In general, shelters frequently exclude persons with serious mental illness or substance use disorders, registered sex offenders are excluded, none allow pets and each limits the number of possessions allowable per person. Currently, both Betty's Village and AHP Adult Shelter have active wait lists as they are usually at capacity.

Finding 2: *The Housing First emphasis on creating affordable permanent housing does not address the problem of an immediate need for shelter while waiting for permanent housing to become available.*

Response: Partially agree

Housing First programs are critical to providing effective flow through local shelters. When individuals are able to exit shelters as quickly as possible with the assistance of Housing First-oriented permanent housing programs, the shelters are able to effectively provide shelter to more people on an annual basis. Humboldt County is in need of expanded Housing First-program capacity so that more people can move out of the shelters. When shelter capacity is expanded without expanding permanent housing capacity populations at shelters tend to increase, causing bottlenecks in service delivery. Every increase in permanent housing capacity reduces the pressure on shelters by reducing the total number of people needing immediate shelter.

Finding 3: *The number of individuals and families who are currently homeless far exceeds the number of available permanent affordable housing units.*

Response: Agree

The 2019 Point-in-Time (PIT) count found 1,704 people to be homeless in the county. The Grand Jury Report did not define the term “available permanent affordable units,” however according to data obtained from the Urban Institute, there are just 30 adequate, affordable, available units per 100 extremely low-income renter households in Humboldt County. The Urban Institute uses the term “available” in a way that may be much broader than what the Grand Jury intended. This definition states an available unit as those that are currently affordable to, and that is either vacant or is occupied by, an extremely low-income renter household. In the county, if a household is not currently receiving some kind of federal housing assistance from either Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the number of adequate, available affordable units for extremely low income renter households drops to 17, and a household that meets criteria for inclusion in the PIT count is never in receipt of federal housing assistance. To make matters even worse, households that are homeless are not renter households. Of those 17 adequate, available, affordable units that have no USDA or HUD assistance per 100 extremely low-income renter households, the vast majority of them are occupied by an extremely low-income renter household at any given moment and are not vacant.

Finding 4: *The production rate of affordable housing units is insufficient to meet the needs of the County's residents and homeless.*

Response: Agree

The Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) and Housing Element requirements mandates California cities and counties to track their progress toward meeting their RHNA. The county and its seven cities have not met the goals set by RHNA for persons at 80% Area Median Income or below. The only local jurisdiction that met any of the RHNA goals was the City of Arcata which exceeded the goal for moderate income unit permits.

Finding 5: *The county and City of Eureka's failure to hold regular meetings of their inter-government Leadership Group has resulted in a lack of collaboration between them regarding homelessness.*

Response: Disagree

The city and the county continue to collaborate on projects related to housing, including MIST, The Lodge, a potential day center site and a new project at 7th Street and Myrtle Ave. At times, there has been a gap in the meeting series which reflects scheduling challenges relating to the need for collaboration within the Homeless Leadership Group. These scheduling challenges also result from ongoing projects occurring outside the group, but concern members of the Homeless Leadership Group. The Homeless Leadership Group met in May, June, July and August of 2019.

Finding 6: *The Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee is hampered by the dual objectives of addressing the shortage of permanent affordable housing and short-term sheltering needs.*

Response: Disagree

There is no inherent conflict in addressing both needs. The county has observed this challenge, within DHHS, in needing to have short-term safe space available for vulnerable clients while also needing permanent housing for clients who can be connected with Permanent Supportive Housing monies and case management. DHHS' efforts in both areas are informed by the entire spectrum of need and the resulting deepened understanding of the many elements contributing to housing and homelessness issues throughout Humboldt and California. As stated in the response to F2, meeting the dual objectives of addressing the shortage of permanent affordable housing and short-term sheltering needs can provide complimentary solutions to the sheltering needs of county residents.

Finding 7: *The Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee lacks sufficient funds to accomplish its goals and there is no ongoing funding source.*

Response: Partially Agree

The duties described in Resolution 18-73, page 2, sections B and G, note the committee is responsible for recommending to the Board ongoing funding sources that could support this committee. These duties outline federal, state, local government and private funding sources. To date, no recommendations have been made. The HTFHSC is working with the Department of Health & Humans Services to submit a supplemental budget request to the Board of Supervisors in the amount of \$500,000. However, this request would need to be made from the General Fund and there are many competing demands for General Fund dollars. No other funding sources have been identified by the HTFHSC.

Finding 8: *Existing day centers are insufficient to meet the needs of the Humboldt County homeless population.*

Response: Agree

There are currently no day centers in the County that provide a safe, legal place homeless people to be that also provides services geared toward helping people exit homelessness. The Arcata House Annex and the Betty Chinn Day Center provide valuable services to persons experiencing homelessness, but they do not provide a safe, legal place for those people to be day in and day out. The Eureka Rescue Mission's day use area is only open to male visitors without children and provides minimal services.

Finding 9: *Safe parking programs would address an immediate need for the hundreds of people living in their vehicles in Humboldt County.*

Response: Partially Agree

Safe parking programs offer some advantages compared to other options, such as not enforcing camping ordinances, in that they typically provide bathrooms, showers, trash pickup and security. However, those services would require increased funding that could divert funds from other programs targeting low income and homeless housing services.

Finding 10: *The Grand Jury commends the City of Arcata for evaluating a safe parking program for families.*

Response: Agree

The county also commends the City of Arcata for evaluating a safe parking program for families. Families need better access to the multiple resources available for children and families in the county.

Finding 12: *The Grand Jury commends the work of our many excellent and dedicated nonprofit homeless service agencies in the face of the County's challenging homeless problem.*

Response: Agree

The county also commends the work of local nonprofit homeless service agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: *The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors approve revisions to the Housing Element that provide shelter solutions and affordable housing. (F1, F3, F4)*

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

A presentation on the Planning Commission-recommended 2019 Housing Element was delivered at the August 20, 2019 Board of Supervisors meeting. The Board was presented with amendments that further the draft reviewed by the Grand Jury. Specifically, it increased the number of implementation measures aimed towards improving response to documented housing needs to include 46 measures that aim to provide for shelter solutions and affordable housing. This includes Implementation Measure H-IM77, "Support and Create Partnerships with State and Federally Recognized Indian Tribes" which commits the County to work with State and Federally recognized Indian tribes and their respective housing authorities, to develop housing affordable to low income households, among others.

The Board moved to approve the Housing Element with minor revisions at the August 20, 2019 meeting.

Recommendation 2: The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct DHHS or the Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee to work with existing shelters to reduce barriers, such as accommodating significant others, pets, and personal storage. This should be completed by September 4, 2019.

Response: This recommendation needs further analysis.

Through DHHS, the county has current contracts with Betty's House Family Shelter, the Arcata House Partnership Adult Shelter and the Redwood Community Action Agency's Parents and Children in Transition (RCAA PACT) program. Betty's House and RCAA PACT are under contract with DHHS to provide shelter, transitional housing and services to families referred by DHHS through CalWORKS and Child Welfare Services. AHP Adult Shelter is under contract to provide emergency shelter to adults without children. Setting new directives to these organizations would redefine the terms and conditions of these agreements. It is unknown whether this would result in positive changes or a loss of services to individuals in need. Further analysis is necessary to evaluate how much additional funding could be required for contract partners to meet new requirements and to determine alternate funding sources, if needed. The county, including DHHS and the Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee (HTFHSC), are unable to direct policy at other shelters in the county or organizations, such as the Eureka Rescue Mission and Blue Angel Village.

Recommendation 3: The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors provide an ongoing funding source for the Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee. This should be completed by November 1, 2019. (F7)

Response: This recommendation will be implemented as resources allow, and possibly at such time the HTFHSC makes a funding recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

As stated in the response to Finding 7, one of the essential duties of HTFHSC, as outlined in Resolution 18-73, is to make recommendations for ongoing funding sources, which include reviewing state and federal, as well as private funding sources. At this time, no recommendation has been made.

Related to this, Pacific Gas & Electric in 2017 donated seven construction trailers to the Betty Kwan Chinn Homeless Foundation (BKCHF) to be used for low-income housing. Since that time, BKCHF has been seeking a lot to place the trailers, and has communicated with the City of Eureka and the county to further understand regulatory processes around using the trailers for housing. On Jan. 23, 2018 the Board approved allocating \$100,000 from the General Fund as a contribution to the City of Eureka to assist with this project. This funding has been “rolled forward,” or saved, in the fiscal year 2019-20 budget and will continue to be rolled forward until there is an appropriate project to be funded.

Recommendation 4: *The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors expand the role of the Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee to more fully include recommending non brick and mortar projects for immediate sheltering needs. This should be completed by September 4, 2019. (F2, F6, F7)*

Response: This recommendation needs further analysis.

The Housing Trust Fund and HTFHSC potential ability to recommend non brick and mortar projects for immediate sheltering needs is dependent on having sufficient funds available and having a dedicated source of ongoing revenue to meet the State’s Local Housing Trust Fund (LHTF) matching requirements. If this requirement is not met, the county and HTFHSC would need to consider alternate avenues for funding projects. Projects that are eligible for the LHTF program include rental housing projects, homeownership projects, transitional housing and emergency shelters, as those terms are defined in Health & Safety Code § 50801 and all fall under “brick and mortar.”

Recommendation 5: *The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors update the resolution creating the Humboldt Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee to clarify its responsibilities are to address both affordable housing and immediate sheltering projects. This should be completed by September 4, 2019. (F6)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

Resolution 18-73, Section 2, states that the HTFHSC is responsible for ensuring “that housing fund monies are used to assist the county in meeting its affordable housing goals with an emphasis on ‘bricks and mortar’ projects.” In addition, the commission’s duties, outlined in Section 3, include ongoing review of federal, state, local government, and private funding sources for affordable housing and homelessness solutions. This includes making recommendations to the Board for funding “potential shelter crisis projects.” In addition, the Board has not received a report from the HTFHSC requesting revision of the resolution.

Recommendation 6: *The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors and Eureka City Council work together to identify locations for a homeless day center program. This should be completed by November 1, 2019. (F8)*

Response: This recommendation is in the process of being implemented.

On behalf of the county, DHHS is reviewing sites for a potential day center and has been in communication with the Board, County Administrative Office, and the City of Eureka about potential next steps.

Recommendation 7: *The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors and Eureka City Council work together to identify locations for and implement supervised safe parking programs. This should be completed by December 1, 2019. (F9)*

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis.

Safe parking programs offer some advantages compared to other options, such as not enforcing camping ordinances, in that they typically provide bathrooms, showers, trash pickup and security. However, those services would require increased funding that could divert funds from other programs targeting low income and homeless housing services. Further analysis is required to evaluate the merits and feasibility of this recommendation.

Recommendation 8: *The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors and Eureka City Council Leadership Group resume meeting at least monthly to address homelessness and other shared issues. This should be completed by October 1, 2019. (F5)*

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

County staff and Eureka City Council Leadership Group has held continued meetings in 2019, most recently in May, June, July, and August.

Recommendation 9: *The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Health and Human Services to allocate a portion of flexible funds for homeless solutions to the Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee to provide shelter services for homeless populations not presently being served. This should be completed by December 2, 2019. (F7)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not feasible.

Currently, DHHS has no available flexible funding that can be allocated to the HTFHSC for homelessness solutions due to DHHS primarily being funded by the state and federal governments.

If DHHS had any such funds it would be appropriate for both DHHS and the HTFHSC to make recommendations to the Board about how to spend these funds.

Recommendation 10: *The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors and Eureka City Council direct staff to develop plans to provide financial incentives to build Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) for homeless or very low-income residents. This should be completed by September 4, 2019. (F3, F4)*

Response: This recommendation is currently being implemented on an augmented timeline.

On August 20, 2019, the Board approved the Planning Commission-recommended 2019 Housing Element which incentivizes construction of ADUs as a primary goal and provides financial assistance, such as waived permitting fees, beginning December 31, 2020. The Planning Commission's recommendations included a number of essential measures that have implementation dates preceding that of ADU incentivization. These dates can be found in the approved 2019 Housing Element. The Board also has no authority to direct city staff.