



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT  
CIVIL GRAND JURY  
825 FIFTH STREET  
EUREKA, CA 95501  
PHONE: (707) 476-2475  
JOSEPH KRAVITZ, FOREPERSON  
FY 2018-2019

RECEIPT OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT

Date: 6-28-2019

Office/Department/Addressee:

BOS

**RECEIVED**

JUN 28 2019

Clerk  
Board of Supervisors

Report Title:

Like, Home? There's No PLACE

RECEIVED

JUN 28 2019

CAO

Received By

(Printed Name): Ryan Sharp

Received By

(Signature): 

Thank You,  
HCCGJ



GRAND JURY  
COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

825 FIFTH STREET  
EUREKA, CALIFORNIA 95501-1153      PHONE (707) 476-2475

June 28, 2019

Humboldt County Board of Supervisors  
825 5th Street  
Eureka, CA 95501

Re: Enclosed Report: *Like, Home? There's No Place*

Dear Supervisors,

On behalf of the 2018-2019 Grand Jury, I am providing to you the following report:

*Like, Home? There's No Place*

This report is being provided to you in advance of its general release pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, subdivision (f), which provides:

A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. **No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.**

It is very important that you comply with this confidentiality requirement.

The Penal Code also prescribes the obligations of a governing board or elected county official with regard to responding to the grand jury's findings and recommendations. Specifically, if the report contains one or more recommendations directed to you as an elected county official, or to the governing board of which you are a member, you must respond to those recommendations and to the supporting findings, as directed in the report.

The time within which to respond is prescribed by subdivision (c) of Penal Code section 933, which states in relevant part:

No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public

agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. **All such comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury.**

The Penal Code also prescribes the content of your responses. Subdivisions (a) through (c) of Penal Code section 933.05 state:

- (a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to **each grand jury finding**, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
  - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.
  - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed **and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.**
- (b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to **each grand jury recommendation**, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following:
  - (1) The recommendation has been implemented, **with a summary regarding the implemented action.**
  - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, **with a time frame for implementation.**
  - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, **and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion** by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable.

This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

- (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, **with an explanation therefor.**
  
- (c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response to the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Please be aware that your responses will be a matter of public record and widely read by both community members and local media. Therefore, it is important that your responses be as clear and specific as possible. A response that is vague, does not provide a clear explanation of any action that has or will be taken, or that does not include a specific time frame for implementation, is neither helpful nor legally sufficient. Furthermore, if a response does not comply with the applicable provisions of the California Penal Code, you may be directed by the presiding judge to provide an amended response.

**Please send your response addressed to the Honorable Joyce Hinrichs, Presiding Judge, Humboldt County Superior Court, 825 5th Street, Eureka, CA 95501 with a copy to the Civil Grand Jury, within the time period provided in subdivision (c) of Penal Code section 933 (see above).**

The 2018-2019 Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury reports, and the responses to them, will be posted on the Grand Jury's website. We would appreciate receiving an electronic copy, as well as a signed hard copy, of your response. You may email a copy to <grandjury@co.humboldt.ca.us>.

Thank you for your cooperation in providing a meaningful and timely response.

Sincerely,



Joseph Kravitz, Foreperson  
Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury



## LIKE, HOME? THERE'S NO PLACE...

### SUMMARY

In 2016, upon the recommendation of consulting group Focus Strategies, the City of Eureka and Humboldt County jointly resolved to adopt a Housing First approach to tackle homelessness. The underlying principle of Housing First is to place a homeless person into permanent housing as quickly as possible, without preconditions such as sobriety or participation in mental health programs. Once the person is housed, they receive services, such as mental health or substance abuse treatment, to help them remain housed. The system prioritizes serving people who have been homeless for extended periods and have complex disabilities.

The Housing First model is a proven method and can, in the long run, reduce our homeless numbers significantly. However, following the Housing First strategy requires an adequate stock of affordable housing, which Humboldt severely lacks. The recommendations from Focus Strategies rely on the existence of interim housing where people could stay until permanent housing is available, but that is in short supply as well. Emergency shelters exist, but there are far more homeless than available beds and many homeless have constraints preventing them from using shelters. At the rate affordable housing is currently being created, it will be many years until we have enough. Until then, our current and future unsheltered homeless will need somewhere legal to stay, both day and night.

Some advocate short-term solutions that can be rapidly implemented, such as safe parking programs, sanctioned camping areas, and tent cities. Others, including a number of elected officials, are resistant because Focus Strategies recommended against short-term solutions, seen as diverting resources from creating the housing sorely needed to ultimately address homelessness. But does strict adherence to the Focus Strategies recommendation make sense when the housing shortage is so extreme our poorest residents are priced out of the market? Or when hundreds of people are living in their cars, including families with children? While short-term solutions have drawbacks, there are segments of our homeless population that would be best served by implementing one or more of these short-term strategies, closely managed to ensure the well-being of guests and assuage public concerns.

Humboldt County is very fortunate to have several excellent nonprofit service providers offering emergency and short-term shelter for the homeless. Some have existing infrastructure that could be leveraged to serve more homeless if they were given financial or other support. Local government assisting these entities would add shelter beds faster and more affordably than creating new shelter space.

While creating more usable shelter is necessary, speeding up the rate at which affordable housing is generated will go a long way to address our homeless crisis. Local jurisdictions working on their Housing Elements are including creative and forward-thinking solutions to encourage production of affordable housing. Local government should incentivize implementing these solutions.

## GLOSSARY

**Chronically homeless person:** As defined by HUD, an individual with a disabling condition who is either continually homeless for more than a year or has four instances of homelessness totaling at least 12 months in the past three years

**Disabling condition:** As defined by HUD, a diagnosable substance abuse disorder, a serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions

**HUD:** The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

**Income Levels:** HUD calculates an area median family income (MFI) for each metropolitan area and nonmetropolitan county in the U.S., then uses this number to set income limits for HUD's assisted housing programs. The income categories are based on percentages of the area's MFI, subject to variations for household size and other factors:

**Extremely low income:** up to 30% of area MFI, or U.S. Department of Health and Human Services federal poverty guidelines, whichever is greater

**Very low income:** 30% to 50% of area MFI

**Low income:** 50% to 80% of area MFI

**Moderate income:** 80% to 120% of MFI

**Above moderate income:** greater than 120% of MFI

The state creates income levels, based on HUD levels, which are used to assess affordability and eligibility for certain state programs.

## BACKGROUND

A *New York Times* article on Humboldt County's opioid problems brought nationwide attention to our visible homeless crisis:

The [opioid] problem is exacerbated here in Eureka, the county seat, by a sizable homeless population that is growing amid an extreme lack of affordable housing and a changing, weakened economy that relies heavily on tourism....Now those problems are spilling into public view, sparking grievances and anger among the town's residents.

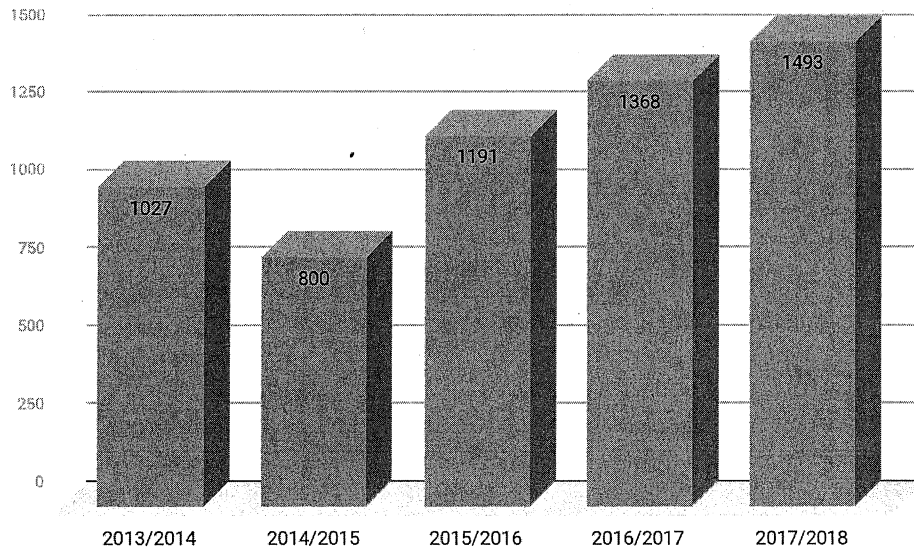
### **Humboldt's Homeless Population**

The number of homeless in Humboldt County is a matter of debate. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires biennial homeless counts for federal homeless fund eligibility. These Point in Time (PIT) counts are widely considered to be low; in addition, the counts exclude people living in motels, jails, or with friends or relatives. In the 2019 PIT count, volunteers reported 653 unsheltered homeless in the greater Eureka area with a total of 1,473 unsheltered homeless countywide.

In a 2018-2019 survey spanning four months, the Eureka Police Department (EPD) counted 190 homeless within Eureka city limits. Members of the department estimate the actual number may be 25-33% higher. One reason EPD's count is lower than the 2019 PIT count for Eureka is the PIT count for Eureka included nearby communities such as Myrtle town and Fields Landing. The EPD contends the 2019 PIT count methodology is inaccurate and encourages overestimating homeless numbers because federal funding depends on it.

The Humboldt County Office of Education uses different criteria for evaluating homelessness. In the 2017-2018 school year, 1,493 of the County's K-12 students were identified as homeless, comprising over 8% of the student population. This number jumps to 1,571 when preschoolers are included. The highest concentration is in Eureka, where an estimated 10-12% of the student population is homeless. In the last five years the number of homeless K-12 students in the County has steadily increased (Figure 1). Although it appears there was a drop in the number of homeless students in the 2014-2015 school year, the count was low because some districts' numbers were not officially reported.

**Figure 1. Numbers of homeless Kindergarten through 12th grade students estimated by the Humboldt County Office of Education to reside in Humboldt County, 2013 to 2018.**



Homeless percentages are similar or even higher for college students. Approximately 11% of College of the Redwoods students lacked housing and 19% of Humboldt State University (HSU) students reported being homeless at some point during the year.

Sources at the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and EPD estimate as many as 80% of Humboldt's homeless are locals. Nearly one quarter of Eureka's homeless were born and reared here; another 38% have lived here for more than five years. The homeless include youth emerging from the foster care system, many of whom are dealing with trauma. Although some residents believe people arriving here to trim cannabis comprise a large

segment of the homeless population, only 5% of those surveyed by EPD said cannabis was their reason for coming here.

For people considered very low income—such as those relying on social security or disability payments—a major cause of homelessness is the extreme shortage of affordable housing. In California, for every 100 of the lowest-earning renter households, only 22 affordable rental units are available. Many of Humboldt’s homeless are employed but simply cannot find affordable housing. In the 2018-2019 EPD survey of 190 homeless, poverty, which includes low wages and lack of affordable housing, was the most cited reason for homelessness. Of the respondents, 39% reported poverty was a factor. Similarly, low income and lack of affordable housing were identified as the two greatest barriers to re-enter housing.

Seniors are a fast-growing segment of the population due in large part to job loss, fixed incomes, and lack of affordable senior housing. Some seniors first became homeless because the death of a spouse or a parent for whom they were caring made housing unaffordable due to a change in economic status. Without housing, the elderly are unable to access services such as Meals-on-Wheels, Visiting Nurses, and other programs. People in the 50-64 year age group are particularly hard hit because they often fall through the cracks of governmental safety nets; Social Security benefits are unavailable until age 62 and benefits for Medicare start at age 65. Those working with the homeless in Humboldt report escalating numbers of seniors becoming homeless for the first time; many are in their 70s and 80s. In Eureka the homeless surveyed by EPD ranged in age from 22 to 76.

### **Focus Strategies and Housing First**

The City of Eureka enlisted the consulting firm Focus Strategies to analyze homelessness in the city and recommend strategies to address it. The *City of Eureka Homelessness Policy Paper* was completed in August 2014. The following year Eureka and the County jointly hired Focus Strategies to expand on its recommendations and develop an implementation plan. This resulted in the *Humboldt County and City of Eureka Joint Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan (Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan)* presented to the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and Eureka City Council (ECC) on January 26, 2016. In March 2016 the BOS and the ECC passed a joint resolution to collaborate on homeless issues and adopt the Housing First model recommended by Focus Strategies; this was a requirement for federal funding from HUD.

The Housing First model prioritizes placement into permanent, affordable housing as rapidly as possible with no preconditions such as sobriety or participation in mental health programs. The intent is to give people stability by housing them and *then* provide such services as mental health or substance abuse treatment to help them remain housed. The *Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan* discouraged pursuing approaches aimed at managing existing problems, such as increasing the frequency of police sweeps, creating a legalized camping area, safe zone or tent city, and establishing more public facilities such as bathrooms and storage.

### **Shelter Crisis Declarations**

On January 19, 2016, one week before Focus Strategies presented its *Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan* to the ECC and the BOS, the ECC declared a “shelter crisis.” Under state

law, a shelter crisis exists when a significant number of people within the jurisdiction of a city, county or other governing body are unable to obtain shelter, resulting in a threat to their health and safety. Declaring a shelter crisis enabled Eureka to designate public facilities for emergency shelter with some immunity from liability for negligence. Eureka also could suspend or temporarily replace certain housing, health, and safety standards. The shelter crisis declaration was motivated by the impending evacuation of the homeless encampment from Palco Marsh to make way for the Waterfront Trail. Although the evacuation was arguably necessary, the *Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan* discouraged such actions, quoting the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness:

‘The forced dispersal of people from encampment settings is not an appropriate solution or strategy, accomplishes nothing toward the goal of linking people to permanent housing opportunities, and can make it more difficult to provide such lasting solutions to people who have been sleeping and living in the encampment.’

Eureka’s shelter crisis declaration initially identified no city property available for any homeless use, including shelters, sanctioned campgrounds, parking areas, tiny homes, etc. The city later designated rotating lots where overnight camping would be allowed after the May 2, 2016, Palco Marsh evacuation. Within months Eureka terminated the overnight camping program, citing increased violent crime, theft, complaints from nearby businesses, and complaints by the homeless and their advocates about the poor living conditions.

Under pressure for several years to declare a shelter crisis for Humboldt County, the BOS took action at its January 9, 2018, meeting. It appointed an ad hoc committee to consider whether to declare a shelter crisis and form a homelessness task force. At the February 6, 2018, BOS meeting, the ad hoc committee returned with draft resolutions to declare a shelter crisis and form a “Citizens Advisory Committee on Affordable Housing Trust Fund Expenditures.” Homeless advocates were quick to point out the draft resolution focused on affordable housing and not homelessness. The ad hoc committee changed the committee name to “Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee,” included a homeless representative on the Committee, and indicated the committee would:

...set criteria for (1) the receipt of funds into the Housing Trust Fund; and (2) the expenditure of funds derived from the Housing Trust Fund; and (3) to make recommendations for expenditures from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund; and (4) make recommendations on homelessness solutions.

The amended resolutions to declare a shelter crisis and form an 11-member Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee were approved unanimously by the BOS on February 27, 2018. The shelter crisis declaration did not specify any County property for use and the BOS has yet to do so.

Considering the shelter crisis declarations and stated commitment to the Housing First model by the City of Eureka and Humboldt County, the Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) decided to investigate how local government might supplement its Housing First efforts with short term solutions for sheltering the homeless.



## **METHODOLOGY**

In preparation for this report, the Grand Jury:

- Attended or reviewed videos of meetings of the Board of Supervisors, Eureka City Council, Humboldt County Planning Commission, and Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee
- Reviewed Board of Supervisors and Eureka City Council meeting minutes, agendas, and attachments thereto
- Attended City of Eureka and County public forums regarding housing and homelessness
- Attended community events regarding homelessness sponsored by non-governmental entities
- Reviewed online and printed articles relating to homelessness and housing
- Reviewed government reports relating to homelessness and housing
- Conducted over three dozen interviews, including with members of the Board of Supervisors and Eureka City Council, County employees at the Department of Health and Human Services and the Planning Department, employees of the City of Eureka, members of the Humboldt Housing and Homeless Coalition, members of the Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee, members of law enforcement for the City of Eureka and County, service providers for the homeless, a business owner, a property manager, a clergy member, former and current Humboldt County Office of Education personnel, and people who are currently or formerly homeless
- Toured facilities of several homeless service providers
- Reviewed Resolution Nos. 18-14 and 18-73 of the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors regarding the Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee
- Analyzed Department of Housing and Urban Development Point in Time count data

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Affordable Housing Shortage**

To succeed, Housing First requires a sufficient stock of affordable housing. While the County has money to help many people pay rent and deposits, there is not enough affordable housing to accommodate everyone in need. Rents in Humboldt are disproportionately high compared to incomes, and the average rent is affordable only to those at or above the top of the moderate income range. The Housing Choice Voucher Program (formerly Section 8 program) in California is a HUD-funded program to assist low-income families pay rent and find housing. In Humboldt, the waiting list for those receiving Housing Choice vouchers is years long. A shortage in moderate income housing is increasing competition for housing in the low income range, allowing landlords to be more selective about tenants.

The Housing Element component of the County's General Plan identifies existing and projected housing needs and includes goals and implementation measures for unincorporated areas. State law requires the Housing Element be updated periodically and the County's new Housing Element is due in August 2019. The Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) identifies the number of units by income category and region the County must accommodate in the Housing Element. There is no obligation to develop properties, but the County is required to have enough

land zoned to meet projected housing needs. Except for moderate income housing, the County fell short of meeting its 2014 RHNA goals for unincorporated areas (Table 1). Cities within Humboldt County are also failing to meet their RHNA housing goals.

**Table 1. Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) for Unincorporated Portions of Humboldt County and Number of Building Permits Issued from 2014 through 2018.**

Income Level of Recipients	RHNA Set in 2014	Permits Issued	Unmet RHNA
Very Low	212	36	176
Low	135	61	74
Moderate	146	205	0
Above Moderate	366	203	163

To meet anticipated housing demands through 2027, an additional 3,390 housing units must be generated (Table 2). Meeting the anticipated low income and very low income housing needs through 2027 alone requires building an average of 170 units annually.

**Table 2. Final 2019 Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) Levels Targeted for Various Income Categories for Communities in Humboldt County.**

Jurisdiction	Very Low Income Allocation	Low Income Allocation	Moderate Income Allocation	Above Moderate Allocation	Proposed Total RHNA Allocation
Arcata	142	95	111	262	<b>610</b>
Blue Lake	7	4	5	7	<b>23</b>
Eureka	231	147	172	402	<b>952</b>
Ferndale	9	5	6	13	<b>33</b>
Fortuna	73	46	51	120	<b>290</b>
Rio Dell	12	8	9	22	<b>51</b>
Trinidad	4	4	3	7	<b>18</b>
Unincorporated Areas	351	223	256	583	<b>1413</b>
<b>RHNA Targets</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>613</b>	<b>1416</b>	<b>3390</b>

Since Housing First was adopted in 2016 several housing projects for low income and at-risk populations have been completed or are underway (Table 3). Because low income housing is not

profitable, government funds and subsidies are usually necessary to entice developers to build such projects.

**Table 3. Projects for Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Clients, Veterans, Seniors, and Low Income Recipients since Housing First was Adopted in 2016.**

Project	Target Population	Status
The Lodge at Eureka	50 units low income senior housing 15 units permanent supportive housing	Completed February 2017
108 4th St.	25 units for chronically homeless veterans 25 units permanent supportive housing	Construction begun
Danco Rio Dell Rigby project	26 units for DHHS clients enrolled in Partnership Health Plan	Construction to start in late spring or early summer
Danco Samoa project	80 family units (20 for difficult to house families)	Planning stage
Danco 7th & Myrtle	36 units of senior affordable housing	Planning/financing stage
Mycroft House	10 family units for Arcata House Partnership clients	Construction begun
Blue Victorian	7 single occupancy units	Planning stages
Arcata Mobile Home Park	5 units of permanent supportive housing	Granted funding in April 2019

While the County and cities are making progress in generating new housing, the rate at which housing is created would need to increase substantially to meet RHNA goals. In short, there is not enough affordable housing for the people that live here and it can't be created quickly enough to meet demand. Until enough affordable housing exists, our current and future homeless will need somewhere legal to stay.

### Existing Shelters

In Humboldt, the following organizations provide year-round emergency shelter beds.

**Table 4. Year-round Emergency Shelters in Humboldt County.**

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Units/Beds</b>	<b>Details</b>
Betty's House Family Shelter	32 beds for up to 8 families	Maximum stay six months; referrals from CalWORKS and Child Welfare Services; prioritizes single fathers, two parent families, and families with teenagers
Betty's House Medical Respite	10 adult beds	Maximum stay 21 days; guests referred through St. Joseph Hospital
Betty Chinn's Blue Angel Village	40 adult beds	Accepts dogs; guests can stay up to 90 days; units are converted shipping containers with shared restrooms; guests cannot be actively using drugs or alcohol
Arcata House Partnership	16 beds for men 4 beds for women 33 beds for families	Guests can stay up to 90 days; 70+ long waiting list
Eureka Rescue Mission	120 adult-only beds 5 units for women with children (25 beds)	Expansion of the men's shelter is underway
Redwood Community Action Agency (RCAA) Youth Service Bureau (YSB)	5 youth beds (ages 12-18)	Youths can stay up to three weeks
North Coast Veterans Resource Center	15 beds for veterans	Veterans can get treatment for mental health and substance abuse issues

### **Day Centers**

Day centers provide a safe, legal place for homeless people to be and to connect with essential services. They often allow pets and provide lockers, showers, restrooms, food, water, phone charging stations, and mail service. Navigation centers are comparable to day centers, but often include overnight shelter as well. There are two Eureka sites where homeless can go during the day, but storage for possessions is limited at both and neither accepts pets. Betty's Day Center offers services for the homeless such as vocational training, access to phones and computers, parenting classes, daycare, and afterschool programs. The day use area in Eureka Rescue

Mission (the Mission) is available only for male visitors. At the Mission guests can use showers, have clothes laundered, and store limited amounts of possessions while there. Throughout the County, libraries have become de facto day centers for the homeless who have nowhere else to go.

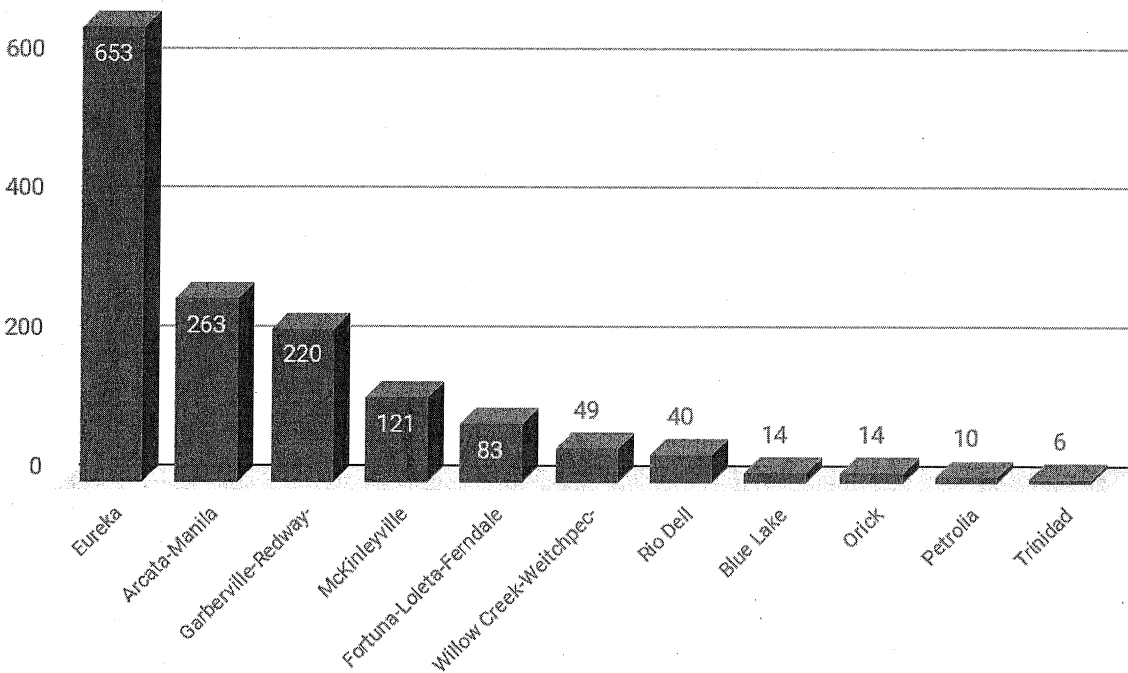
In 2017, the City of Eureka and Betty Kwan Chinn Homeless Foundation explored opening a pilot day use center at the former Runeberg Hall. The program would have provided lunch, indoor space for dogs and belongings, and an entry point for homeless services. After neighborhood outcry, the City decided to abandon the pilot project.

The draft Housing Element proposed by the Humboldt County Planning and Building Department applies to unincorporated areas of Humboldt County. In the draft, emergency shelters, day centers, and navigation centers would be principally permitted uses on sites mapped for emergency shelters.

### Humboldt's Unsheltered Homeless

The County's estimated 1,473 unsheltered homeless are concentrated in Eureka but there are significant pockets of homeless in several areas (Figure 2):

**Figure 2. Comparisons of estimated numbers of homeless persons in select Humboldt County communities.**





Given the number of people without shelter, it would seem that demand for shelter far exceeds supply. However, the Mission is rarely at capacity and there is little need to use St. Vincent de Paul for overflow. There are several explanations for this apparent discrepancy.

Misperceptions prevent some homeless from staying at the Mission. Contrary to popular belief, attending a religious service is no longer mandatory. Those who do not wish to attend can stay in the Mission's day use area during services. Also, the shelter's website currently states guests must be sober and a breathalyzer will be used. However, the Mission is flexible about this policy if a guest is not disruptive.

Some homeless with mental illnesses prefer to not use shelters; others have ongoing substance abuse problems. Both issues are endemic in Humboldt's homeless population. In the 2017 PIT count, 72% of unsheltered adults in Humboldt reported a serious mental illness and 84% reported a substance use disorder. Similarly, in Eureka, 57% of the homeless adults the EPD surveyed reported a mental health disorder and 70% acknowledged substance abuse issues. People unable to live in close quarters with others also often elect to stay outdoors. Others avoid shelters because of harsh experiences they've had or heard about.

The population needing shelter in Humboldt is not aligned with shelter availability. Over half the County's homeless live outside of Eureka yet only the Mission has open beds. Approximately 30% of the County's unsheltered homeless are female and over one third of the homeless families identified in the 2017 PIT count were unsheltered. Despite these significant populations, women and families have limited options, in part because the Mission does not accept 12-17 year old boys. The Mission also cannot accept unaccompanied youth, thus the five beds at Youth Services Bureau (YSB) are their only emergency shelter option.

Even when appropriate shelter beds are available and nearby, many homeless still cannot use them. The most common limitations are the "three Ps": pets, partners, and possessions. Many homeless have dogs for companionship, warmth, and protection. They see pets as family and separation is simply not an option. Only Blue Angel Village permits dogs. Opposite sex couples without children, another common demographic, also have very little shelter where they can stay together. Further, the Mission has limited space for bulky items and shopping carts, so personal possessions must be left outside, making them subject to the elements, theft or confiscation by law enforcement.

### **Short-Term Solutions**

To address the immediate needs of Humboldt's unsheltered homeless, local service providers and advocates have proposed alternatives to conventional shelters. These include safe parking programs, sanctioned camping areas, and tiny home villages. The goal is to quickly help people stay in a safer, more sanitary environment without the risk of being arrested or cited. Focus Strategies recommended against solutions such as sanctioned camps because they divert resources from creating affordable housing and implementing Housing First. That said, cities and counties have found it necessary to create temporary shelter despite their commitment to Housing First. For example, Las Vegas and Los Angeles, both of which embraced Housing First, also implemented temporary solutions such as giant tents and sanctioned camping.

### Benefits of Short-Term Solutions

Sanctioned camping areas and similar programs can give the homeless some level of stability by providing a place to keep their possessions safe and dry while they get their lives together. It is easier to provide much-needed mental health and other services when the homeless live in concentrated areas and are not scattered throughout the County. When the Palco Marsh encampment existed, the County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) was able to provide service fairs on a regular basis in the year leading up to the forced dispersal. After Palco Marsh was evacuated, the homeless in Eureka scattered to various locations throughout the County, making many people more difficult to locate and assist.

Short-term shelter alternatives can provide safety if participants are screened and supervision exists. These alternatives are quicker and cheaper to implement than constructing new shelters, though ongoing costs can be comparable. Well-run programs usually include sanitation facilities and dumpsters, which reduce the impact of homelessness on the environment and help combat the spread of disease. In a recent hepatitis A outbreak in San Diego, 20 people died and nearly 600 people were infected. The majority of those contracting the disease were homeless and/or illicit drug users. The spread of the disease among the homeless was linked to poor sanitation, a lack of hygiene facilities, and not being vaccinated. Public health officials in Seattle reported outbreaks of other diseases among the city's large unsheltered homeless population, mostly due to poor hygiene and sanitation. In 2018, a flea-borne typhus outbreak struck the homeless in downtown Los Angeles. As *Kaiser Health News* reported, "[i]nfectious diseases — some that ravaged populations in the Middle Ages — are resurging in California and around the country, and are hitting homeless populations especially hard."

Advocates for short-term solutions claim that providing shelter reduces other expenses for services relating to the unsheltered homeless, such as emergency room costs. Also, providing shelter is more cost-effective than citing the homeless for so-called quality of life offenses: sleeping on public property, public consumption of alcohol, obstructing sidewalks, and public urination. Because of ordinances relating to their homelessness, people who are homeless spend proportionately more time in jail than the general population. One source at EPD estimated a quarter of the department's time is spent on issues stemming from homelessness. From November 15, 2017 to March 4, 2019, EPD fielded 7,747 transient-related calls for service, taking an average of 22 minutes each; this resulted in use of over 2,840 officer-hours for just this issue.

### Drawbacks of Short-term Solutions

Short-term shelter solutions have drawbacks as well. The ultimate solution to homelessness is access to stable, affordable housing with the necessary services. Short-term solutions may address an immediate need, but alone have little impact on reducing homelessness. For temporary shelters to be effective, guests eventually must be able to find a permanent home. As long as Humboldt's affordable housing crisis exists, solutions intended to be short-term could become long-term. Once a temporary solution is established, it may not draw the intended population, and forcing people to leave can be difficult.

Operational and long-term costs for short-term solutions may be substantial. To be successful, short-term solutions must be well managed; ongoing expenses include sanitation, garbage collection, and security. Some shelter structures, such as sheds, wagons, and the like, do not hold up well over time and may require significant repairs. Temporary solutions may not be ADA-compliant, ruling out federal and possibly other funding. Further, conditions may be unsafe or unsanitary. Solutions such as plastic sheds are considered substandard housing and may lack electricity, heat, or sufficient ventilation. Criminal activity is often cited as a major issue in sanctioned camping areas. According to the EPD, the rotating sanctioned sleeping areas created after the dispersal from Palco Marsh were highly compressed and became magnets for crime.

### NIMBYism and Finding Locations

NIMBYism is an acronym for those not wanting an impact they consider unpleasant near their property (Not-In-My-Back-Yard-ism). Finding a location for short-term shelter alternatives such as sanctioned camps or safe parking programs may be the biggest obstacle to implementation. From the homeless user's perspective, a location must be close to social services, mental health services, public transportation, food kitchens, medical facilities, shopping, and employment opportunities. On the other hand, the community wants shelters and camps to be invisible and far away from residences, schools, and businesses. Nearly every interviewee with whom we spoke about short-term solutions mentioned NIMBYism as a barrier. To address NIMBYism experts recommend:

- Having a strategy, including a media strategy, and being well-prepared
- Identifying and mobilizing advocates for the project before beginning
- Educating the community, seeking its input, and correcting misinformation
- Meeting prospective opponents one-on-one or in small groups or canvassing door-to-door
- Avoiding mass meetings, which can anger participants and turn confrontational
- Addressing legitimate community concerns
- Explaining how property will be managed and holding open houses to showcase previous projects
- Having municipalities monitor projects from approval to post-occupancy

Shelters such as the Blue Angel Village and the Mission make efforts to be good neighbors and keep their surrounding area clean. While some neighbors were initially apprehensive about placing the Blue Angel Village in its present location, the impact on the immediate community has been minimal.

Searches by Eureka and the County revealed no buildings or land suitable for short-term sheltering purposes. None of the County's properties were deemed appropriate. Many lacked infrastructure or were too far from services; others were not ADA-compliant. Some industrial areas which might accept homeless shelters were in zones requiring Coastal Commission permission.

### Sanctioned camping areas

Sanctioned camping areas for the homeless are appearing throughout the U.S., in cities such as San Jose, Seattle, San Diego, Tulsa, Nashville, San Antonio, Austin, Santa Cruz, Modesto, and Portland. These areas generally provide toilets, handwashing stations, and dumpsters. Some also offer showers and storage. On-site staff screen and register campers and provide security. Unlike most shelters, campers can stay with partners and pets.

While living conditions are not ideal, cities often consider these sanctioned camping areas to be a stop-gap measure until better options are available. As one homeless advocate stated, "If you don't have enough shelter or housing, and you make being homeless illegal, you're essentially dooming people to suffer, if not die." Detractors of sanctioned camps note the camps may end up becoming permanent, and it can be difficult to get some people to move on. Crime and unsanitary conditions are not uncommon in unsupervised camps. This was Eureka's experience with offering rotating sleeping sites after the Palco Marsh encampment was dispersed, and the program was discontinued within months. Numerous interviewees emphasized that this solution requires management to succeed.

### Safe Parking Programs

Safe parking programs aim to provide a secure, reliable, and legal place for people to sleep in their cars at night. Many programs coordinate with service providers to assist clients in finding permanent housing and other services. The programs use church, nonprofit, city, county, or private lots, and provide portable restrooms and trash facilities. The lots typically open by 7:00 p.m. and require guests to leave by 7:00 a.m. Participants must have a current vehicle registration, evidence of ownership, car insurance, and a valid driver's license. The entity managing the lot, usually a nonprofit, reviews applications and screens guests, assigns spaces, and often monitors the site at night. In some programs, users take turns supervising the lots.

Communities such as Santa Barbara, Sonoma, San Diego, and Los Angeles have implemented safe parking programs. Locally, the City of Arcata is developing a safe parking program targeting homeless families with children. At a program in San Diego, about 35 to 40 percent of residents transitioned to housing within three to eight months of arrival. Many homeless service providers with whom the Grand Jury spoke believed safe parking programs would benefit the County because they can be quickly implemented and address an existing and significant unmet need. Hundreds of people currently are living in cars throughout the County. Families often choose to live in cars over shelters to stay together and for privacy and safety. A safe parking program would better suit that demographic than more family-friendly shelter space they might not use.

The draft Housing Element includes provisions pertaining to safe parking programs. One policy requires amending zoning regulations to allow safe parking as a form of emergency shelter. A Safe Parking Pilot Program to be funded by the County is one of the implementation measures in the draft.

### Micro or Tiny Home Villages

“Tiny home” frequently refers to small self-contained housing with a kitchen and bath. In the context of homelessness solutions “tiny homes” often means a cluster of detached bedrooms with shared kitchen and sanitation facilities. Seattle, San Jose, Reno, Chico, Portland, Eugene, Denver, and other cities are tackling homelessness with villages of detached bedroom tiny homes. Some are self-managed, with community members sharing in chores and security. Often tenants are charged a small amount for rent to cover operational expenses. Construction costs for the detached bedroom tiny homes range from \$2,000-\$3,500.

Proponents argue these structures are weatherproof, lockable, stronger, and more permanent than tents. Guests can keep their belongings dry and leave them without fear of theft. Minimal rents let residents save money to transition to permanent housing. Tiny home villages commonly accept couples and pets, serving demographics with extremely limited shelter options in our County. Detractors claim tiny homes are a lower standard of housing. One critic referred to the trend as an “alarming shift in urban planning that could pave the way for the creation of shantytowns.”

### **Removing Barriers to Using Existing Shelters**

#### Pets

Over half the 112 homeless people the EPD surveyed prior to the Palco Marsh evacuation owned dogs. Yet dog owners have no overnight shelter option in the County. This is not surprising, since shelters are often crowded and introducing a pet can be challenging. Pets present potential sanitation and noise issues and other guests may be afraid of animals or allergic to them.

Recognizing the number of homeless who are unsheltered because of loyalty to their pets, shelters increasingly are trying to accommodate them. At shelters accepting pets, animals may reside in a crate alongside their human partner or in kennels in designated locations such as basements and covered outdoor areas. Some offer play areas for owners and their pets. Shelters accepting dogs may require owners to sign an agreement taking responsibility for their dog; they often expect that dogs have all appropriate vaccinations, as well as have behaviors compatible with shelter requirements and comfort of other guests. At one Sacramento shelter, new animals receive flea treatments, shots, and muzzles if needed. Other shelters have paired with local animal-advocacy groups and veterinary clinics to provide spay-neuter and veterinary services for dogs staying at the shelter. One Nevada-based nonprofit offers free kennels to homeless shelters that will accept pets. The California Legislature presently is considering a bill providing \$5,000,000 in grants to homeless shelters to provide shelter, care, and veterinary services to guests' pets.

#### Partners

In the EPD 2018-2019 Homeless Survey, 31 of 189 respondents reported being married or in a long term relationship. Local shelters give childless opposite sex couples no option but to split up, assuming space is even available for both. Naturally, many homeless couples opt to stay in tents or cars so they can be together with some semblance of privacy.



## Possessions

A secure location to store belongings lets homeless people pursue work, seek services, use overnight shelter, and avoid violating ordinances relating to possessions. They need not worry about items getting stolen, ruined by the elements, or confiscated by the police if deemed abandoned or unsanitary. Due to overwhelming demand at Dignity, a successful storage provider in San Diego, the City Council approved an additional storage center last year. When guests enter Dignity's facility, items are screened and placed in tubs which are stored by staff. To limit impact on neighbors, clients must have a referral, cannot line up around the facility, and may not use alcohol or drugs on site. Security guards patrol the vicinity and discourage loitering. Police presence was increased as were the number of cleanups in the area by San Diego's Environmental Services Department.

Denver's experience with storage units demonstrates the importance of controlling access. In a 2017 pilot program the city provided ten 4 foot by 6 foot cabinets for homeless to store their possessions. Within a year Denver terminated the program because people were living in the cabinets. There were also unsubstantiated allegations of narcotics sales and prostitution.

## **Expanding Existing Models**

One option to address the immediate need for shelter is to expand existing programs which are proven and have infrastructure in place. Many interviewees spoke highly of the Mission, Betty Kwan Chinn's Blue Angel Village and family shelter, Arcata House Partnership (AHP), and the Youth Services Bureau (YSB). As of October 2018, a little more than two years after opening, Blue Angel Village had taken in 510 clients. Of these, 242 people found jobs and 229 located permanent housing. Last year AHP assisted 30 people in its family shelter and 22 people in its adult shelter to move to permanent housing. Also, the YSB's success rate in finding permanent housing for homeless youth is about 80% due to aftercare and case management.

## Eureka Rescue Mission (The Mission)

The Mission's annual costs of about \$1,250,000 are covered through donations and proceeds from its thrift store. The Mission does not seek funds from the County or the City of Eureka, although both have provided goods for the Mission to use. The Mission's water and sewage bills from the City of Eureka are substantial because of the shelter's public showers and laundry services, and the Mission could use assistance with these costs. With additional funding, the organization could expand its thrift store and replace more cots with beds. The Mission is currently remodeling the men's shelter but needs money for the next phase of work on the far smaller women and children's shelter, which is not ADA compliant.

Because dog ownership prevents a large segment of Eureka's homeless population from using the Mission, the shelter has considered accepting dogs. However, liability and insurance concerns must be addressed for the Mission to change its no-pet policy and funds would be needed for kennels. The Mission's limited space for belongings deters some who would otherwise use the shelter, so providing a storage option at a nearby location could increase shelter usage.

### Arcata House Partnership (AHP)

Like many agencies serving the homeless, AHP has difficulty finding staff willing to work with this population for very low pay. It's not unusual for shelter employees themselves to qualify for programs such as CalFresh and MediCal. While AHP operates an extreme weather shelter accommodating 18 people, on some nights of extreme weather, AHP has been unable to open the shelter due to lack of staff. There is no ongoing funding source for shelter and extreme weather shelter staff. More staff to attend to clients would increase guest turnover and the number of people AHP can assist.

AHP's overhead includes \$297,000 for the adult shelter and \$10,000 for the extreme weather shelter. The shelters are funded largely by grants, donations, and fundraisers. Other than providing \$100,000 on one occasion when AHP's government support was cut, the County provides no regular financial support for AHP's shelters. In April 2019, AHP was awarded \$477,400 for purchase and renovation of an adjacent building for a 15-bed women's emergency shelter and \$192,500 to maintain current emergency shelter staff and hire additional staff.

### Betty Kwan Chinn Homeless Foundation

The County provides some funding for the day center program and shelter services for families referred to the Betty Kwan Chinn Homeless Foundation by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Eureka's annual contribution of \$75,000 from the Housing Successor Fund covers approximately half the Blue Angel Village's operational costs and donations pay the remainder. The budget is tight, and the organization currently needs money to provide a central heating system.

In 2017 PG&E donated 11 large construction office trailers to the Betty Kwan Chinn Homeless Foundation to use as transitional housing. The planned Betty Kwan Chinn's Community Housing project would allow tenants to stay up to two years and establish a positive rental history. After a search of county-owned vacant parcels revealed no suitable property for the trailers, the BOS instead committed \$100,000 to Eureka for water and sewage connections for the ultimate location. The location for the trailers in Eureka is in limbo due to neighbors' objections and Coastal Commission concerns. Meanwhile, the trailers have been at the foot of Hilfiker Street for many months and face deterioration from exposure to the elements.

### Redwood Community Action Agency/Youth Services Bureau (RCAA/YSB)

The RCAA's personnel costs are significant and more staff is needed. There is a demand for more youth shelter and transitional housing; locating suitable buildings and sites is difficult. A licensed group home also is needed to serve YSB clients. RCAA recently was awarded \$106,852 for expansion of the Community Housing Program to provide five new beds, heating in existing shelters, transportation resources, and assistance in acquiring permanent housing.

### **Repurpose Existing Structures for Shelter**

County leadership and employees have repeatedly voiced the concern that ADA compliance prevents most county facilities from being designated for use as shelter crisis sites. Searches in 2017 for suitable county and private properties for a 24/7 winter shelter proved fruitless. With

the Mission rarely at capacity, another shelter in Eureka may not draw many clients unless it is low barrier. However, sizeable homeless populations in the McKinleyville, Garberville-Redway, and Fortuna areas have no shelter options and Arcata's only shelter has a long waiting list.

## Funding

A variety of funding sources is available to address homelessness in Humboldt County (Table 5).

**Table 5. Select federal and state funds available to address homelessness.**

Program	Details	Grant Amount
HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) Program	Awards funding annually based on a competitive process; awards for organizations operating housing and services for homeless persons and to organizations that represent a Continuum of Care	\$861,315 (mostly for permanent supportive housing)
HUD Emergency Solutions Grant	Funds may be used for outreach, emergency shelters, homelessness prevention, rapid re-housing assistance, the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and administrative activities	Approximately \$130,000
Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP)	Flexible grants to address immediate homelessness needs; grants can be used for emergency shelters, rehabilitating structures, emergency housing vouchers, camping and parking spaces, providing temporary shelter, rental assistance and more	\$2,565,245.24 awarded to county and allocated in April 2019
The California Emergency Solutions and Housing Program (CESH)	Five-year grants for five primary activities: housing relocation and stabilization services (includes rental assistance), operating subsidies for permanent housing, flexible housing subsidy funds, operating support for emergency housing interventions, and systems support for homelessness services and housing delivery systems	\$931,026 for housing subsidy funds, support for emergency housing interventions, and administration
Homeless Mentally Ill Outreach and Treatment (HMIOT)	One-time funding for county activities targeting individuals with serious mental illness who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	\$200,000 in 2018
No Place Like Home Program (NPLH)	Loans to counties for development of permanent supportive housing for persons needing mental health services who are homeless, chronically homeless, or at risk of chronic homelessness	County will receive over \$1,000,000 in 2019
Mental Health Services Act	Funding, personnel and other resources to support county mental health programs	Estimated \$9,000,000 for

(MHSA)		2018-19
California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)	Temporary financial assistance and employment focused services to low-income families with minor children	varies

The HUD funds require a Continuum of Care (CoC) which provides and coordinates outreach, emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing services. Humboldt Housing and Homeless Coalition (HHHC), the County's CoC, evaluates proposed plans to determine the community's current needs and generally determines where the CoC money goes. The County administers the funds and conducts the HHHC meetings.

In recent years, consistent with the Housing First model, HUD's homelessness programs have concentrated on permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless with a disabling condition. Across the U.S., HUD's focus affects about 35% of those experiencing homelessness. The emphasis on permanent supportive housing has been at the expense of emergency and transitional shelter, which serves the remaining 65%.

In Humboldt, 41% of the homeless population is chronically homeless. The County's chronic homeless rate is among the highest in the country; in 2017 it was seven times the national average. Given the number of chronically homeless, DHHS targets those with serious mental illness, with the goal of moving them into permanent supportive housing. DHHS also provides various types of housing assistance to certain subgroups of the homeless population, such as families in CalWorks, HIV/AIDS patients, people applying for SSI who are too disabled to work, homeless seniors with mental illness, and others.

Much of the funding DHHS uses for homeless clients is available because the clients suffer from mental illness. Although there is much information that a large percentage of homeless already suffer from mental health issues, there is ample evidence that homelessness not only exacerbates mental health issues but in many cases causes them as well. More than one interviewee said if preventive measures are not put in place, the unserved segments of the homeless population would soon fall into the groups DHHS currently serves.

### **Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee**

Formed by the BOS, the Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee (HTFHSC) began meeting in June 2018; as of May 2019 it had yet to make any project recommendations. Progress is hampered by a split in the group about whether short-term solutions should be considered, versus strict adherence to traditional bricks and mortar structures to implement Housing First principles. The draft *Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee Policies & Procedures Manual* proposes funding for both, but must be approved by the BOS. Interviews with BOS and HTFHSC members portrayed conflicting views about the committee's role and the type of solutions it can recommend for funding. The resolution forming the HTFHSC states criteria for receipt and use of fund monies "shall ensure

that housing fund monies are used to assist the county in meeting its affordable housing goals with an emphasis on ‘bricks and mortar’ projects.”

The trust fund presently has no funds and no ongoing funding source. Sale of a county property will seed the fund but expected proceeds are well under \$400,000. Significantly more would be needed to help finance any affordable housing projects. The draft Housing Element references trust fund sources and requires the County to support the HTFHSC and its programs “to develop shelter and conserve and develop housing affordable to low- and very low-income households” and to “seek funding to provide an initial funding level of \$500,000.” State and federal grants, local financial institutions, local jurisdictions, sale of surplus county property, the General Fund, private foundations, and individuals were identified as possible funding sources. However, state and federal funding sources for the trust fund appear limited.

### **Generate Affordable Housing More Quickly**

Another means of addressing homelessness more quickly is to encourage the creation of affordable housing by individual property owners.

#### Accessory Dwelling Units & Tiny Houses

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is an attached or detached residence on the same lot as a single family residence. These ADUs are independent dwellings with sleeping, cooking, and sanitation facilities. Since 2014, when the Housing Element was last updated, California housing laws were changed to make it easier for people to build ADUs. Now ADUs are principally permitted in areas zoned for single-family or multi-family homes. Typically, if a use is principally permitted it does not require a permit from the planning department, though construction of structures still requires a building permit. A provision in the draft Housing Element reflects this change.

To encourage homeowners to build ADUs and rent them to formerly homeless tenants, Los Angeles County loans homeowners up to \$75,000 to build an ADU in their yard or \$50,000 to revamp an existing structure to host a homeless person or family. The loan principal is reduced each year a formerly homeless person rents the unit and the loan is forgiven after ten years. At that point, the homeowners can do what they want with the unit. In response to Portland’s homeless crisis, Multnomah County launched a homeless ADU pilot program in 2018. In a similar vein, last year the County of Santa Cruz launched two pilot programs to offer loans to property owners who agree to charge affordable rents.

Counties such as San Diego, Sonoma, Santa Cruz, and Marin are waiving certain permit fees to encourage ADU construction. The city of Encinitas provides free, permit-ready building plans for ADUs. Using pre-approved design plans could save residents \$8,000 to \$14,000 in design fees, and combined with ADU fee waivers of \$2,000 to \$4,000, homeowners have upfront savings of \$10,000 to \$18,000. The cost to the city was \$32,000 for eight complete building plans. The Palo Alto City Council recently decided to provide ADU templates for approvable projects and create a program to link homeowners with architects specializing in ADUs.

The Humboldt County Planning Department currently offers free pre-approved plans for residences. The County’s draft Housing Element encourages a greater variety of housing types



and accessory dwelling units in different configurations, such as non-moveable tiny houses and garage conversions. The draft Housing Element also mentions a pilot program to provide financial assistance to income eligible homeowners to build ADUs, relax development standards for ADUs, and work with the California Coastal Commission to waive permit requirements for ADUs in specific areas.

Some municipalities are changing regulations to allow tiny houses on wheels as secondary units on residential properties. Because they are considered akin to RVs, tiny houses for permanent living can generally be located only in mobile home or special occupancy parks. Provisions in the draft Housing Element allow for moveable tiny houses outside of parks in unincorporated areas of the County. Like standard homes, the tiny houses would be subject to zoning, building, and health and safety regulations.

The draft Housing Element includes a provision for amending zoning regulations to allow a grouping of three or more tiny houses to be treated as a multifamily dwelling, and thus legally permitted in zones allowing multifamily residences. Detached bedrooms with shared sanitation and cooking facilities would also constitute a tiny house village legally permitted in all zones that allow multifamily dwellings. Local cities also must update their Housing Elements and some are contemplating changes similar to those the County may adopt.

#### Rehabilitation of Existing Properties

In the *Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan* Focus Strategies advised:

Acquisition and rehabilitation of existing motels and other rental properties for conversion to affordable housing is another option to consider, particularly those that have not been kept in good condition and are considered nuisances by neighbors.

The conversion and use of motels and hotels into single room occupancy (SRO) units is promoted in the draft Housing Element. One provision allows waiving plan and zone density standards for SRO units consistent with public health and safety, and subsidizing permit fees for hotel and motel conversions. The draft Housing Element also includes provisions requiring the County to evaluate SRO zoning, review land use regulations for SROs in similar jurisdictions, and possibly recommend amendments to the County's SRO regulations.

#### **Focus Strategies Recommendations**

Four key strategies for reducing homelessness were offered in the *Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan*.

1. Adopt a Housing First Approach Countywide

In 2016 the City of Eureka and the County entered into a joint resolution to adopt a Housing First approach to homelessness. Although the importance of Eureka and the County working together is emphasized in the *Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan*, several interviewees reported there currently is no real cooperation between Eureka and the County. For a while, an inter-government Leadership Group met monthly but the group has not convened since last year, in part because key members are too busy to attend.

Employees and leadership of the City of Eureka repeatedly expressed frustration with the County's level of assistance and involvement with respect to homelessness. The County receives all funding for homelessness and Eureka must accept what the County gives it, creating tension between the two. As the county seat, Eureka bears the brunt of the homeless population but lacks independent funding and resources. The City of Eureka has no department dedicated to dealing with homeless issues, other than staff on the EPD's Community Safety Enhancement Team (CSET).

## 2. Strengthen and Re-Orient MIST to Focus on Housing Solutions

The DHHS has a Mobile Intervention and Services Team (MIST) which does ride-alongs with EPD aimed at connecting chronically homeless people with services for substance abuse, mental illness, and housing. The team prioritizes individuals who have frequent contact with police and emergency services. Since June 2015 the County has provided Measure Z funding to pay for an EPD police officer working with the MIST team and part-time EPD staff to address homelessness efforts in the city. In EPD's recent survey of 190 homeless people in Eureka, 16% of the respondents reported using MIST program services. MIST personnel receive specialized training in dealing with this population, especially with respect to mental health issues. MIST services have expanded and the team now works with the Arcata Police Department and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office.

## 3. Create Direct and Low Barrier Pathways to Housing

### a. Housing Market Analysis

Based on its analysis of Humboldt's rental market, Focus Strategies estimated 259 units which could house homeless are available annually – most are market rate rentals. The firm concluded the County had adequate stock to house about two-thirds of the County's 844 unsheltered homeless within one year, assuming shared living situations. A three-year scenario would avoid families doubling up and give roommates private bedrooms. Critics of the *Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan* noted Focus Strategies did not survey landlords to see how many of the identified rental units were low-income or whether they would rent to formerly homeless tenants who might have mental illness or addiction issues. Further, shared housing may not work when mental illness or substance abuse is present.

Focus Strategies recommended rental subsidies with supportive services available to help transition homeless people into rental properties. Rental subsidies are available, but largely useless given the lack of affordable housing. Vacancy rates have decreased since Focus Strategies presented the *Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan*, so affordable units are even harder to find.

### b. Housing Interventions Needed

Focus Strategies recommended adopting four approaches to attack homelessness: rapid rehousing, shelter diversion, interim housing, and permanent supportive housing. Rapid rehousing programs help individuals and families quickly return to permanent housing by

providing them case management to help locate rentals, financial assistance, and help with landlord negotiations. The approach is generally found to be successful in helping individuals and families exit homelessness. Shelter diversion programs are designed to target people most likely to enter homelessness and provide assistance either to preserve their existing housing situation or to help them move directly to more stable housing without an intervening shelter stay. Both shelter diversion and rapid rehousing are taking place now, through efforts of both the County and nonprofit service providers.

Emergency shelter and interim housing are short-term places for homeless people to stay, have basic needs met, and receive support to obtain housing. According to Focus Strategies:

Interim housing should provide a level of support similar to emergency shelters, with a focus on meeting basic daily needs (food, clothing) and assisting residents to find and secure housing as quickly as possible...Lengths of stay in Interim Housing are usually no more than 120 days.

The Multiple Assistance Center (MAC) once served this role but was converted to an addiction treatment center after Focus Strategies presented its 2016 report. Unfortunately, the consulting firm's recommendation relied heavily upon utilizing the MAC for interim housing. Arcata House Partnership's emergency shelters, the Blue Angel Village, and Betty's House Family Shelter and Respite are akin to interim housing but are usually full.

Residents in permanent supportive housing receive long-term rental subsidies or permanent affordable units, coupled with intensive on-site support services. This more intensive and expensive intervention is intended for individuals with severe mental illness and/or substance abuse issues, and long histories of homelessness. Since Housing First was adopted, The Lodge in Eureka was completed, providing 15 units of permanent supportive housing. Several projects underway will add more permanent supportive housing (Table 3).

#### c. Landlord Outreach and Engagement/Housing Search

While the County has hundreds of thousands of dollars available to help homeless individuals with rent and security deposits, there are virtually no properties available for people to use. To find properties, Focus Strategies recommended landlord marketing campaigns, landlord incentive funds to pay for damages, tenant training programs, and trained Housing Specialists. The County has successfully placed homeless clients in existing housing and DHHS's Housing Support Services Team actively seeks property managers and landlords who will accept homeless tenants with financial assistance.

#### d. Intensive Services to Support Housing Stability

The *Homeless Strategy and Implementation Plan* emphasizes that simply placing formerly homeless in housing is not enough; services are necessary to keep the chronically homeless housed. These services are available and proven to be quite successful when people take advantage of them. However, the formerly homeless cannot be forced to accept mental health, substance abuse or other assistance, and some people who were housed have returned to the

street. Again, these efforts are frustrated by the lack of affordable housing as supportive services are available *if* people are housed.

#### 4. Use Data Systems to Track Progress

Focus Strategies recommended use of the countywide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to track the successes and shortcomings of these programs. The County is using the HMIS system and administers the database on behalf of the HHHC. Usage by other agencies working with the homeless is sporadic and needs improvement for the HMIS to provide meaningful data.

### FINDINGS

- F1. Existing shelters have restrictions that prevent use by significant segments of the homeless population. DHHS
- F2. 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. DHHS
- F3. The number of individuals and families who are currently homeless far exceeds the number of available permanent affordable housing units. DHHS
- F4. The production rate of affordable housing units is insufficient to meet the needs of the County's residents and homeless. DHHS/Planning
- F5. 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. DHHS
- F6. 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. DHHS/CAO
- F7. The Housing Trust Fund and Homelessness Solutions Committee lacks sufficient funds to accomplish its goals and there is no ongoing funding source. CAO
- F8. Existing day centers are insufficient to meet the needs of the Humboldt County homeless population. DHHS
- F9. Safe parking programs would address an immediate need for the hundreds of people living in their vehicles in Humboldt County. DHHS
- F10. The Grand Jury commends the City of Arcata for evaluating a safe parking program for families. DHHS



F11. The Grand Jury commends the work of the County and City of Eureka planning departments in drafting Housing Elements that are creative, forward-thinking, and reflective of the community's values and input.

Planning

F12. 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.

DHHS

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

R1. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors approve revisions to the Housing Element that provide for shelter solutions and affordable housing. (F1, F3, F4)

Planning

R2. 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. (F1)

DHHS

R3. 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)

CAO

R4. 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)

CAO/DHHS

R5. 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)

CAO/DHHS/  
Planning

R6. 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)

DHHS

R7. 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)

DHHS

R8. 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)

DHHS

R9. 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

DHHS

provide shelter services for homeless populations not presently being served. This should be completed by December 2, 2019. (F7)

R10. 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)

Planning

## REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

Board of Supervisors (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9), (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10)

Eureka City Council (F3, F4, F5, F8, F9), (R6, R7, R8, R10)

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Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.