

February 6, 2018

Dear Humboldt County Board of Supervisors,

In considering a Shelter Crisis it might help to know what Eureka did with its Shelter Crisis Declaration:

In January, 2016, they passed a Shelter Crisis Declaration and ask the community to step forward.

In April 2016 it was amended twice; first to allow sleeping in the City parking lot on West Washington and then to allow the use of the West 3rd and Commercial Street site for Betty Chinn's Blue Angel Village facility.

These were available when the Palco Marsh camp, or what Chief Mills called the "limited enforcement area", was cleared in May.

In June and July the Shelter Crisis Declaration was amended adding two more sleeping sites, utilized on a rotating basis.

In mid-October 2016 an amendment moved the Blue Angel Village to the West Washington parking lot.

On November 3, 2016 City Staff ended the use of rotating sleeping sites.

Is there still a need for something? As flawed as the 2017 Point-in-Time Count was, it documented well over 300 unsheltered people.

I was at the sleeping sites almost daily. Although a place to sleep was better than nothing, I believe a campground would offer a safe haven with a greater sense of stability and normality than rotating sleeping sites. It would address the issue of criminalization of activities associated with homelessness by providing a legal place for people to call home while the work to increase the number of very low housing units moves forward.

A shelter crisis declaration would help. It is a tool in state law allowing you to reduce the County's liability and set aside health, safety and housing regulations.



Janelle Egger  
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## **A legal place to call home for marsh residents**

Thursday, February 25, 2016

By Janelle Egger

The Eureka City Council's March 1 Agenda includes approval of a joint resolution with Humboldt County to move forward with the Focus Strategies' plan to implement the Housing First approach.

Before celebrating, the council should not forget the people living rough in the Palco Marsh. The Focus Strategies' plan quotes an August 2015 federal policy paper, "Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments." The policy paper discusses four key elements for effective action.

The first element is adequate time for planning and implementation. Good to go: Joint resolution to adopt the Focus Strategies' plan and implementation timeline. The second and third elements are collaboration between different sections of the community and intensive, persistent outreach and engagement with people in an encampment. Got it: It's ongoing at the marsh by city and county staff, nonprofits, religious groups and private volunteers.

The fourth element is a focus on providing low-barrier pathways to permanent housing rather than relocating people to other encampments. Here's the glitch: The Housing First approach provides the focus but there is a major landslide across the path for marsh residents. Work on the long-awaited Waterfront Trail is coming faster than permanent housing.

The Focus Strategies' plan quotes the policy paper's recommendation not to relocate people. It also quotes this clear warning: "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 the people who have been sleeping and living in the encampment."

Something needs to happen before the only option is dispersal. The Shelter Crisis petition recommended a countywide stakeholders' group to develop both services and camps throughout the county. There are lots of government, nonprofit and private organizations providing a wide variety of services and the marsh residents have a wide variety of need. The only universally shared need in the marsh is for a legal place to call home. Narrowing the task to relocation could allow something to happen before it's too late.

Eureka's shelter crisis declaration can help reduce the costs of establishing a place with minimal health and safety measures. Council direction is needed so that a dedicated group of people could complete the necessary tasks. There are people who are already (1) reviewing existing staff reports/work, (2) identifying land, and immediate health and safety needs, (3) planning how to meet basic needs (agreements and money) and (4) developing a simple "tenant" agreement.

Eureka Police Chief Andrew Mills has consistently expressed resistance to moving people when there's no legal place to send them. Time is short. On March 1, while moving forward with the Housing First approach, council direction is needed to help marsh residents relocate so the planned work on the Waterfront Trail can

proceed. The Eureka City Council and its staff need support so the vote declaring the shelter crisis is put to use providing marsh residents with a temporary legal place to call home.

*Janelle Egger is a volunteer at the marsh camp, the Fortuna Extreme Weather Shelter and Fortuna distributions by Food for People; a direct donor to those experiencing poverty; a resident of Humboldt County; a payer of Fortuna and Eureka property and sales taxes; and an advocate for open government.*

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