



PLACER COUNTY GRAND JURY

Temporary Emergency Homeless Shelter

June 26, 2015

Temporary Emergency Homeless Shelter

Summary

The homeless situation in Placer County has been under review since 2004 by the Board of Supervisors (BOS). In 2004 the Placer Consortium on Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee presented to the BOS a ten-year plan to end homelessness in Placer County. As of December of 2014, there was no temporary emergency homeless shelter in Auburn. Faced with the prospect of people living out in the open during a cold and wet winter, immediate action for a shelter, even if temporary, appeared in order. A number of citizens stepped forward with offers of resources and a proposal to repurpose two buildings on the DeWitt Center Campus as a temporary shelter. These buildings, which had recently been used to house minimum-security prisoners, appeared to be a ready solution to provide temporary shelter for the homeless.

When the issue appeared to stall before the BOS in December 2014, the Grand Jury decided to investigate. During the course of the investigation, the BOS held a special meeting in which they requested an expedited review and analysis by County staff. At the time of this writing, the BOS has given approval for a temporary shelter at the DeWitt Center with a conditional use permit for ninety (90) days. The need for a permanent solution remains.

Background

In September 2014, the BOS commissioned a study to identify the needs of the homeless in Placer County. The study, expected in March 2015, would not come in time to help the homeless people. In December 2014, the homeless were camped in the fields and parking lot adjacent to the DeWitt Government Center in North Auburn.

As of this writing, numerous homeless people are camped in the DeWitt Center fields, parking lots, and under buildings. During December 2014, a month with record rainfall, the homeless had no choice but to huddle together under the awnings and decks of the DeWitt buildings in a vain attempt to stay dry.

The Grand Jury became aware of widespread community sentiment to address this urgent need. One group, Right Hand Auburn, working in conjunction with Volunteers of America, came forward with

a proposal to operate a shelter in a recently vacated barracks on the DeWitt government campus. The building in question had been used to house minimum security inmates and appeared relatively well equipped to handle the basic needs of the homeless. Concerned citizens attempted to get the BOS to consider the matter at their December meeting. Initially, the issue did not appear on the January 2015 BOS agenda and the Grand Jury moved to investigate the homeless shelter issue. Ultimately, the BOS called a special meeting for January 22, 2015, to address this issue.

Investigation Methods

- Interviews
- On-site visits
- Attendance at Board of Supervisor meetings
- Reviewed the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Placer County, dated 2004
- Reviewed various news articles dating from September 2014 in the Auburn Journal and Sacramento Bee

Facts

- In 2004 the Placer Consortium on Homeless and Affordable Housing committee presented a ten-year plan to the Board of Supervisors to end homelessness in Placer County. The plan covered the years 2004-2014.
- As of the December of 2014, there was no county sponsored permanent location dedicated to sheltering the homeless in Auburn.
- In September 2014 the Placer County Board of Supervisors allocated \$50,000 to fund a study of the county's homeless needs by consultant Robert Marbut. The results of the study were presented to the Board of Supervisors on April 7, 2015.
- As of the end of 2014, Right Hand Auburn was supporting approximately 80 homeless people in the Auburn area. A number of homeless were encamped in the field and parking lot at the DeWitt government campus, many of whom were taking shelter under the awnings and steps of the buildings there to avoid the weather.
- According to the Marbut study, there are 540 homeless people in Placer County.

- At the December 9, 2014 BOS meeting many citizens voiced the need for a homeless shelter. Citing concern for adhering to the Brown Act¹, the BOS could not take action on this matter because it was not on the published agenda.
- On December 11, 2014, Placer County worked with the American Red Cross and The Gathering Inn, to open space at the Gold Country and Placer County Fairgrounds as emergency shelter from a single large storm. In addition, the day time operating hours for the Welcome Center at the DeWitt Center were extended, and the Placer County Animal Shelter was made available as a place to shelter pets during the storm.
- Two organizations, Right Hand Auburn, Inc. and Volunteers of America offered resources and experience to administer a temporary emergency homeless shelter.
- There are two buildings (303A and 303B) known as the “Barracks” on the Dewitt campus. One is totally empty and the other partially empty. They were formerly used for minimum security inmates until the relocation of the inmates to the Santucci Justice Center in May of 2014.
- There are county services located on the Dewitt campus such as “The Welcome Center” (a day program for homeless), Health and Human Services and the medical clinic that are currently utilized by homeless citizens.
- The BOS held a special meeting to address the issue on January 22, 2015. Under consideration was the proposed use of the Barracks as a temporary emergency shelter. At the meeting, the BOS directed staff to set a public hearing for February 3, 2015 to “consider the issuance of a temporary use permit for buildings 303A and 303B” (Barracks).
- On February 3, 2015 the BOS approved a temporary conditional use permit for use of the Barracks as a temporary, emergency shelter.
- On February 24, 2015, the BOS authorized the Chairman to complete a site access agreement with Right Hand Auburn, Inc. for the operation of a temporary homeless shelter.

¹ Ralph M. Brown Act, California Government Code § 54950-54963

Findings

The Grand Jury found that:

- F1. In December 2014, the homeless people camping at the DeWitt campus in harsh weather conditions represented an urgent, unmet need for temporary shelter.
- F2. The Barracks seemed to be in acceptable condition and relatively simple to convert to a temporary emergency shelter for homeless individuals.
- F3. In January and February 2015, the BOS began to address the issue by calling a special meeting and a public hearing.
- F4. The need for a permanent solution to the homeless situation continues.

Conclusion

In ten years of attempting to address the homeless situation, Placer County has not produced a permanent solution to this compelling issue. In September 2014, the BOS commissioned a study to identify the needs of the homeless in Placer County. The results of the study were presented to the Board of Supervisors on April 7, 2015. However, in December 2014, the homeless population needed immediate shelter due to inclement weather. At the time of this writing, the BOS gave approval for a temporary shelter on the DeWitt campus with a temporary conditional use permit for ninety (90) days. The need for a permanent solution remains.

Through the good work of Right Hand Auburn, Volunteers of America and others, it appears that tangible work on a temporary housing solution for the homeless has begun. The Grand Jury commends these organizations for stepping up to assist our homeless citizens by providing a safe, warm place to stay. The Grand Jury acknowledges the BOS for their actions on this matter and, in particular, the county staff for their expedited efforts.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. An evaluation of the use of the DeWitt Barracks as emergency homeless housing should be conducted at the end of the 90-day period for the conditional-use permit, and on a recurring schedule thereafter.
- R2. The BOS and county staff should promptly review Marbut Consulting's final report to determine its impact on the need for a temporary emergency shelter. In addition, the BOS should monitor the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan referred to in the final report.
- R3. The 2015-2016 Grand Jury continue to monitor the BOS progress on implementing a more permanent solution to the homeless issue in Placer County.

Request for Responses:

	<u>Recommendations Requiring Response</u>	<u>Response Due Date</u>
Mr. David Boesch Placer County CEO 175 Fulweiler Ave. Auburn, CA 95603	R1, R2	August 24, 2015
Placer County Board of Supervisors 175 Fulweiler Ave. Auburn, CA 95603	R1, R2	September 22, 2015

Copies Sent to:

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