



## **PLACER COUNTY GRAND JURY**

# **Homelessness in Placer County**

## **Developing a Long Term Strategy**

**June 23, 2016**

# Homelessness in Placer County

## Developing a Long Term Strategy

### Summary

Consistent with the recommendation of the 2014-2015 Grand Jury, the 2015-2016 Grand Jury continued to review Placer County's progress in addressing the need for a shelter facility and other services for the homeless.

Placer County does not have a permanent homeless shelter and to this day does not have a stated strategy for resolution of issues related to the need for shelter and other services to reduce homelessness.

In February 2015, the Board of Supervisors approved a temporary conditional use permit and a Site Access Agreement to allow use of an existing structure at the Placer County Government Center as a temporary homeless shelter initially for a 90 day pilot period. In subsequent hearings (8/15/2015, 3/16/2016) the Board of Supervisors extended the permit through March 2017. A solution to the homeless problem in Placer County is not limited to just the question of a temporary or a permanent shelter.

Placer County has conducted a comprehensive effort to obtain input from the public, government agencies, and advocates for the homeless. Multiple public forums have been conducted. A wide range of viewpoints and concerns both pro and con related to the current temporary Dewitt Campus homeless shelter and other services for the homeless have been presented.

Due to the various circumstances affecting the homeless population there is no simple solution to meet all the needs and concerns in Placer County. It is unlikely that any decision related to the location of a homeless shelter will satisfy all concerned.

As stated in the Findings and Recommendations listed below, the Grand Jury believes that the discussion has gone on far too long. It is time for the Placer community and Board of Supervisors to adopt and implement a comprehensive long-term strategy to meet the shelter and service needs of Placer County's homeless citizens.

## Background

In July 2004 the Placer County Board of Supervisors agreed to a ten-year plan to end homelessness<sup>1</sup> in the county. Notwithstanding appreciable attention given toward the ultimate goal of the plan, homelessness still persists. In 2014 the Board of Supervisors and various non-profit organizations began to explore measures to address the homelessness issue. The 2014-2015 Grand Jury launched an investigation of homelessness and the need for a shelter. Their final report recommended that investigation of homelessness should be continued by the next Grand Jury.

Placer County officials and the community continue to search for permanent solutions to meet the needs to the homeless.

## Investigation Methods

- Interviews with various city officials, Placer County Health and Human Services personnel, Volunteers of America employees, and other non-profit organizations
- Attendance at Board of Supervisor and other public meetings
- Reviewed the 2004 *Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Placer County*
- Reviewed various publications and news articles
- Reviewed April 2015 Marbut report entitled *Homelessness In Placer County. Survey Data and Observations*
- Tour of the county temporary homeless shelter on the DeWitt Campus
- Tour of the Gathering Inn in Roseville

## Facts

- In 2014 Placer County government offered no overnight shelter services for the homeless. In the face of impending inclement weather, Right Hand Auburn<sup>2</sup> facilitated the opening of a short-term shelter at St. Theresa Catholic Church in Auburn.

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<sup>1</sup> In July 2004 the Placer Consortium on Homelessness and Affordable Housing (PCOH) presented a *Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Placer County* to the Board of Supervisors. “The *Plan* exceeds the federal challenge to end chronic homelessness for single adults by encompassing families, youth, and others who may be transitionally or chronically homeless.”

<sup>2</sup> Right Hand Auburn is a 501c3 chartable organization consisting of local business, non-profits, and faith-based organizations that have come together to address the needs of the homeless in the Auburn community. ([www.righthandauburn.org](http://www.righthandauburn.org))

- In September, 2014, the Board of Supervisors contracted with Dr. Robert Marbut, of Marbut Consulting, to assess the needs of the homeless population in Placer County. The Marbut report was presented to the Board of Supervisors in April, 2015.
- During 2015 a growing number of homeless individuals in Auburn camped on the DeWitt Campus fields, parking lots, and under buildings and decks seeking shelter.
- June 1, 2015 a temporary homeless shelter was opened at the DeWitt campus for night hours only with a capacity for 47 men and women. This left many individuals without a place for themselves and their belongings during the day.
- Right Hand Auburn contracted with Volunteers of America to oversee the daily operation of the shelter. This is not a permanent long-term housing program. Stays range from a few days to a few months.
- The homeless camps in the DeWitt Campus were removed in August 2015 after the Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance that prohibited camping on county property. Advanced notice was given and assistance was provided in gathering, moving, and disposing of items that had been stored on county property.
- In August 2015, the Board of Supervisors approved an extension of the Temporary Conditional Use Permit until March 2016. This also expanded hours of operation to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Site improvements were authorized to add a night time only overflow facility of 50, expanding total shelter bed capacity to 97. Services were expanded to include employment counseling, assistance in finding permanent housing, medical, mental health, and substance abuse referrals. To remain in the shelter, residents are required to demonstrate progress toward ending their homelessness, follow rules of the shelter, participate in shelter maintenance, and demonstrate positive behavior.
- On March 8, 2016, the Board of Supervisors approved an extension of the conditional use permit for the temporary shelter to March 2017. Additionally, funding was approved at the current level for the months of April and May 2016. At that same meeting, county staff was directed to begin the process of changing zoning to allow emergency shelters to be a conditionally-permitted use within the C3 (Heavy Commercial), IN (Industrial) and INP (Industrial Park) Zoning Districts. Shelters are already allowed in General Commercial (C2), Neighborhood Commercial (C1) and Highway Services (HS) Districts, in addition to the Multi-family Residential (RM) District. The Board of Supervisors stated its intent to work toward a regional solution to homeless issues in Auburn, South Placer and the eastern portion of the county.
- In addition to Placer County, various non-governmental organizations and the city of Auburn are funding the operational costs to keep the shelter open.

- In the Roseville/Rocklin areas of the county, temporary overnight shelter for a limited number of homeless individuals is provided in churches through the Gathering Inn<sup>3</sup>.
- Placer County and the City of Roseville offer to provide housing for homeless families with children using vouchers for federally funded housing subsidies. There is limited affordable housing available to accept these vouchers.
- The three categories of homeless population are:
  - families with children
  - individuals who have lost housing due to economic factors such as unemployment
  - individuals who have lost housing due to cognitive impairment, substance abuse, and mental health treatment needs.

Each of these homeless groups has unique housing and service needs specific to their individual circumstances.

- A one day count<sup>4</sup> in January 2015 indicated 540 homeless in Placer County. According to Placer County Health and Human Services, this count is probably an underestimate.
- Data at the shelter indicates that the vast majority of homeless are long term or life residents of Placer County or immediate area.
- The number of homeless veterans is declining due to increased federal and state resources and the focus on outreach to provide services for them.
- Placer County has been conducting monthly meetings related to planning ways to address the needs of the homeless. Participants have included:
  - county departments
  - cities of Auburn, Lincoln, Rocklin, and Roseville
  - contract providers
  - advocates
  - general public
- There is vocal opposition from local homeowners, businesspeople, and citizens over the location of the shelter at the DeWitt Campus.

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<sup>3</sup> The Gathering Inn is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit that works with 23 churches to serve overnight guests. The Gathering Inn provides a community-based response to people in need in south Placer County by offering hope, dignity and a secure place to rest at night, in addition to a wide range of services that help clients get back on their feet again.

(<http://thegatheringinn.com/index.html>)

<sup>4</sup> Federal Homeless Assistance grants require a biennial point-in-time count and survey of homeless individuals. Each community reports the findings in a report to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

- In addition, there has been concern about the increased presence of parolees and probationers in the DeWitt Campus area associated with county jail releases, county probation and state parole offices, as well as concern about the homeless who do not use the shelter.
- There has also been vocal opposition to locating a homeless shelter any place in the county near residences, schools, hospitals or businesses.
- Forums and meetings are ongoing to allow both citizens and organizations to discuss their concerns.

## Findings

- F1. Placer County has done a good job in soliciting and gathering input from homeless individuals, general public, homeless advocates, city and county governmental agencies.
- F2. This process began in 2004 with the *Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness In Placer County* and continues today without a stated strategy for resolution.
- F3. The counting of the homeless occurs one day every two years. This methodology is inadequate due to the mobility of the homeless, difficulty locating them, and possible duplicate counting of individuals.
- F4. There is insufficient affordable housing available throughout the county.
- F5. Due to the various circumstances affecting the homeless population there is no simple solution to meet all the needs and concerns in Placer County.
- F6. It is unlikely that any decision related to the location of a homeless shelter will satisfy all concerned.

## Conclusion

In 2004 the Placer Consortium on Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee presented a ten-year plan to end homelessness in Placer County to the Board of Supervisors. Placer County has done a good job in soliciting and gathering input on this issue.

As of this writing Placer County provides only a temporary emergency shelter located in the DeWitt Campus. There is a continuing and growing need for services that are accessible to the homeless population throughout the county.

## Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. Placer County adopt and implement a comprehensive long-term strategy to address the needs of the homeless, including shelter, before the close of Fiscal Year 2016-2017.
- R2. Placer County continue to work with the various stakeholders (municipalities, county, private agencies, medical facilities, etc.) to develop a wide range of innovative and proven services addressing the cycle of homelessness.
- R3. Placer County continue to support the public-private partnerships that provide services for the homeless in the County.
- R4. Placer County continue to work with citizens that have concerns about the issues that accompany homeless individuals.

## Request For Responses

	<u>Recommendations Requiring Response</u>	<u>Response Due Date</u>
<b>Mr. Jeff Brown</b> Director, Health and Human Services 3091 County Center Drive #290 Auburn, CA 95603	<b>R1 – R4</b>	<b>August 31, 2016</b>
<b>Mr. David Boesch</b> Placer County CEO 175 Fulweiler Ave Auburn, CA 95603	<b>R1 – R4</b>	<b>August 31, 2016</b>

### Copies sent to:

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