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## Gift draws flak

**Council accepts funding for officer amid criticism of police**

**For the members of the Chico City Council, accepting a private \$500,000 donation to hire another police officer for three years seemed a no-brainer.**

At Tuesday's (Jan. 15) regular meeting, Mayor Randall Stone reminded attendees that Chico is feeling the impacts of being in a federal disaster zone. One of them is the strain on public safety.

"We already know we have the extra 15- to 20,000 people, so this is an absolutely necessary element ... we need to bring on an extra officer, probably more," he said.

Stone was responding to a number of speakers who encouraged the council to either redirect or reject the donation, decrying the police department's conduct and recent killings of those suffering from mental illness.

Some advocated that the money be directed toward expanding the operating hours of the mobile crisis unit, a county operation staffed with mental health workers only during business hours. Ultimately, the panel unanimously accepted the donation, but not before Chief Mike O'Brien became the target of that criticism.

While making her argument against funding an additional officer, Erica Traverso, a regular attendee, brought up the wrongful death lawsuits against the city for the police killings of Desmond Phillips and Tyler Rushing, as well as the recent \$950,000 city settlement granted to Mindy Losee for the shooting death of her daughter Breanne Sharpe at the hands of police (see "Together in tragedy," Newslines, Sept. 21, 2017).

Phillips was 25 when he was shot and killed during a mental health episode in his home in 2017. That same year, Tyler Rushing, 34, was killed by a security guard

and police officers downtown. Sharpe, 19, was shot and killed by police inside a stolen car in 2013.

"[Chief O'Brien] refuses to get his officers the proper implicit bias training and [crisis intervention training] needed to lessen this violence," Traverso said. "Until he [retires], I don't believe any new officers should be funded."

**Criticism by her and a few other speakers prompted council members to defend O'Brien's character.**

Councilwoman Ann Schwab said O'Brien "does not promote violence in his officers" and "is a fair man who believes in community policing."

"I think he'd probably be the first to tell you we need a lot more in our community," she said. "We do need mental health responses, but we also need cops that can run out and protect us when they're needed."

Stone added that he knows O'Brien "to be an honorable and decent man."

But the advocates for the victims of police killings weren't finished. They took to the dais again during the business from the floor portion of the meeting. "The emotional outpouring and defense of the police chief is a misdirection from the issues he is being called out for," Rain Scher said.

North Valley Community Foundation (NVCF) submitted the money, separate from its Camp Fire relief fund, on behalf of a private donor it chose not to identify. Jovanni Tricerri, the nonprofit's director for Response & Recovery, told the CN&R that NVCF will bring another \$500,000 donation from the same



### HOME AT LAST

After being cut in two in the fall of 2016, one of Chico's historic homes, believed to be the last in the area of the Gothic revival style, made a slow, steady journey from West Fifth Street to Humboldt Avenue. There, it has been reassembled to preserve its historical character from when it was originally built in 1883, under the stewardship of contractor Joe Card and owners Josh and Scott Hubbard. "If we would have lost it, we would have lost a part of what makes this place so special," Scott (not pictured) told the CN&R. Chico Heritage Association President Paul Lieberum, pictured with Josh, right, at the entryway of the finished cottage this week, said it is a "fantastic example of historic preservation done well."

PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA