



All districts on deck

Sacramento mayor looks to outflank NIMBYs by drafting entire city into homelessness response

BY DYLAN SVOBODA

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg is hoping to outflank an old adversary in a bid to expand homeless shelter capacity—NIMBYs.

Steinberg recently asked his eight City Council colleagues to identify locations in their districts that could accommodate at least 100 shelter beds. The goal is to broaden the response to a growing homelessness crisis rather than burden any one part of the city.

Councilman Larry Carr, who represents South Sacramento, said that's fair. "No one district is responsible for the homeless crisis," he said. "At the same time, we're all affected by it. It's in all of our neighborhoods."

The eight sites would include at least three low-barrier shelters that Steinberg wants to open on city-owned property by the end of 2019, with possible locations discussed in the coming months. An overnight survey estimated that countywide homelessness rose 30 percent in two years, to more than 3,600 people in 2017, with most residing in the city.

Currently, the city operates just one triage shelter, which opened a year ago in North Sacramento and was supposed to close at the end of March. On December 18, the council agreed to extend the city's lease on the shelter on Railroad Drive for a fourth time, this time through April. But that shelter's capacity will soon be halved to as little as 100 beds. Christie Holderegger, a spokesperson for Volunteers of America, which runs the shelter, said the city ordered the reduction due to financial constraints and Steinberg's 100-bed-per-district call. Holderegger stressed that guests aren't being forced to leave; the shelter has just stopped accepting new residents.

Carr said homeless shelters are typically the purview of the county, which made its own modest moves this month. Addressing the state's No Place Like Home program requirements, the Board of Supervisors on December 12 approved a plan to build on the existing scattered site shelter model, which houses folks in small residential shelters, and to collaborate with the city for at least one permanent triage shelter.



Homeless encampments are scattered along American River Parkway just a quarter-mile from the city's Railroad Drive triage shelter.
PHOTO BY DYLAN SVOBODA

No Place Like Home was born out of Proposition 2, approved by voters in November to authorize the state to distribute \$2 billion in bonds to counties for the development of permanent supportive housing for those experiencing mental illness. The bonds would be repaid through the Mental Health Services Act, the 2004 "millionaires tax" introduced by then-Assemblyman Steinberg.

At the board meeting, Supervisor Don Nottoli expressed preliminary support for First Step Communities' tiny home approach, which provides residents with sleeping cabins and an on-site community center and health clinic. First Step executive director Stephen Watters said tiny homes offer flexibility.

"If the community wanted to cater to veterans or domestic violence victims only, help and care can be customized for that specific group," Watters told SN&R. "Also, we often think that the optimal community size is about 100, but it can be built for 30 to 50 just as easy."

The city anticipates \$7.7 million in state funding following its emergency shelter crisis declaration in November, with most of the money to be spent on shelter, said Emily Halcon, the city's homeless services coordinator.

Currently, the mayor's office is considering the "sprung structure" model, which are portable, tent-like structures that can house as many as 200 people at a time. But Mary Lynne Vellinga, the mayor's communications director, noted that each district could accomplish its 100-bed goal through scattered-site shelters like the county.

Finding shelter locations that residents won't oppose has proven tricky. Steinberg pulled back on his proposal to open a permanent shelter on Evergreen Street near the Royal Oaks light-rail station after North Sacramento Councilman Allen Warren and some local residents pushed back.

One of those residents is Jane Macauley, who lives in Woodlake and said she was doubtful that the other districts would share North Sacramento's burden.

"If you really want to do something, you can find a place for these shelters," Macauley said. "I don't see them making this plan happen." □

FACES

New Year's Eve Party

PRE-SALE
TICKETS
AT FACES.NET

Buffet • Balloon Drop • 5K in prizes
Giveaways • Guest DJ's

SACRAMENTO, CA • RENO, NV