

DESIGN
SIGN
WEEK
SAC

MAY 11–17, 2019

Tickets
on sale now!

See the schedule +
buy your tickets at
designweek.sac.com

@designweek.sac



No shelter from the critics

Sacramento mayor defends
\$40 million shelter plan
as the first step toward
permanent housing

BY DYLAN SVOBODA

With critics forming on two fronts, Mayor Darrell Steinberg's homeless shelter plan is off and running.

On March 26, the Sacramento City Council authorized staff to move forward with a 100-bed Sprung shelter on a Cal Expo-owned lot on Ethan Way. This month, Steinberg hopes to approve three additional sites: one adjacent to Highway 99 between X Street and Broadway, another on a Caltrans-owned parking lot near the Florin light-rail station and a yet-to-be-announced one in Councilman Steve Hansen's district, which covers downtown, Midtown and Land Park.

With foot-dragging from some on the council, some local homeless residents and advocates are also questioning the transitional triage shelter strategy.

Tracie Rice-Bailey, who lives in her car, would like to see the city repeal its anti-camping ordinance and sanction self-governed homeless encampments akin to those in Portland and Oakland.

"Why can't we just be left alone here?" Rice-Bailey asked as she stood in front of a few dozen tents near North B and Ahern streets. "Open a parking lot for us to camp in, somewhere to sleep in our cars. Give us a Porta Potty and a shower. I'm not getting kenneled into a shelter and I'm not alone."

Reluctant council members have cited the shelters' high operating costs paired with a lack of permanent housing.

At the March 26 meeting, Councilman Larry Carr expressed concerns regarding costs—citing the city's \$400,000 per month bill for the North Sacramento triage shelter—and a desire to diversify strategies through rent relief, transportation assistance and job training. Under the mayor's recommended plan, the city would spend \$40.5 million of public and private funds to create 781 shelter beds for two years.

While encouraged by the investment, Cathleen Williams of the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee says too little of the money goes toward the problem the city is ultimately trying to solve: Giving homeless folks a place to live.

PHOTO BY DYLAN SVOBODA



A dozen demonstrators took to the corner of North B and Ahern streets on March 6 to protest Mayor Darrell Steinberg's shelter plan.

"Twenty million dollars a year is insane when it's only going to help a few hundred people, and we're not even talking about permanent or affordable housing," Williams said. "Shelters play an important role, but it's hard for me to get behind a plan that provides millions to police officers and not a single home. ... We welcome the shelters, but one strategy won't solve homelessness."

It isn't intended to do so, says the mayor's spokeswoman.

Mary Lynne Vellinga said Steinberg wants to use the shelters as an entry point, where people can get off the street in the short term and receive services and, eventually, permanent housing, that will keep them indoors long term.

"We are not talking about a bed and food; we are talking about wrap-around services, everything from obtaining the IDs needed to rent an apartment and get a job to health care and mental health services," Vellinga wrote in an email. "Shelter guests also receive assistance finding permanent housing. Baked into our shelter plan is the assumption that we will provide up to six months of rental assistance for people moving into permanent housing."

Bob Erlenbusch of the Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness is supportive of the mayor's plan, calling it a part of a long-term strategy—one more complicated than simply finding a roof for several thousand homeless individuals.

"Even if Bill Gates gave the mayor a billion dollars tomorrow, we wouldn't have housing in place for another five or six years, given how long it takes to get permits and construct," Erlenbusch said. "To me, [the mayor's plan] is a harm-reduction strategy. Bring people in where they're safe, they have their pets, partners and stuff. And then try to get them into a tight housing market. It's a two-step process." □

WEB EXTRA

To read more state and local responses to homelessness, an extended version is available at sacblog.newsreview.com