



JOEL ANDERSON
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: **October 19, 2021**

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: COMPASSIONATE EMERGENCY SOLUTIONS AND PATHWAYS TO HOUSING FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN EAST COUNTY (DISTRICT: 2)

OVERVIEW

The high cost of living, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, and our failure to produce enough housing for our population have significantly harmed all San Diego County communities. ² District 2 is home to some of the lowest income communities in the County, including Lemon Grove, El Cajon and Campo, all with a median household income of under \$55,000, far below the County median income of \$95,100. These conditions have resulted in a 79% increase in first-time homeless individuals in 2021 who need behavioral health services, sheltering, and long-term solutions in order to regain stability.

East County has the largest number of people experiencing homelessness in San Diego County outside of the City of San Diego. Although specific data is hard to come by, over 4,350 East County residents received services to prevent or end their homelessness over one year, from June 1, 2020, to May 31, 2021. This included more than 1,850 families with children. Immediate and sustained help for people experiencing homelessness is a crucial component of revitalization and the renewal of safe, thriving communities for all. There is no city government to provide emergency sheltering or related support services to homeless individuals in the unincorporated areas. Although the County is the default agency to address homelessness in these areas, historically, few resources have been deployed in unincorporated communities.

Recently, the County has taken several important steps to establish trauma-informed outreach to those living on the streets, coordinating efforts with cities and regional organizations, expanding and funding supportive services. These efforts are substantial, but more is needed to uniquely and adequately support the residents of East County. There are currently no shelters in the unincorporated areas of District 2 and there is only one privately run emergency shelter for the homeless within the 2,000 square miles of District 2. In order to get individuals connected to resources and off the streets, establishing emergency sheltering solutions is crucial.

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The current tool that the County utilizes to temporarily get individuals in East County off the street is the Regional Hotel Assistance Program. While it has had some success, unfortunately there are limited hotels participating in the program, and few in East County. In addition, this program is operated with a “scattered-site” model, where the County has no ability to provide on-site centralized services such as security, case management, meals, and behavioral and medical care. Without comprehensive services and case management, some participants end up back on the streets.

Shelters with wrap-around services where individuals don’t have to travel to get the care they need will fill current gaps in our homeless response system. Shelters serve as a place of initial and short-term placement, in transition to the County’s Local Rental Subsidy Program and other longer-term solutions. Action today initiates first steps in identifying appropriate locations for emergency shelters, safe parking, and services to address individuals’ and the communities’ needs.

Action would also ensure there is flexible funding to support outreach workers in their efforts. A flexible funding source is necessary to support core needs that other public funding sources do not cover, such as: emergency night stays at nearby hotels, clothing, medicine, hygiene items, health care, storage, security deposits, transportation, auto repairs, and immediate payments for items that individuals may need from a convenience store. Currently, County outreach teams don’t have a funding mechanism for these costs, so it is critical that a funding source is established to strengthen successful contact with homeless individuals on the spot and remove barriers to obtaining shelter and housing. The funding should be an incentive for individuals to engage with case management and contingent on them working with outreach workers on a housing plan.

RECOMMENDATION(S) SUPERVISOR JOEL ANDERSON

1. Find that the proposed actions are not a project pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines sections 15060(c)(3) and 15378 and are exempt from CEQA pursuant to Guidelines section 15061(b)(3) because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the proposed actions may have a significant effect on the environment.
2. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer, while Zoning Ordinance amendments are being developed, to work with the developers and community partners to identify properties, buildings and concepts for low-barrier emergency shelters, safe lots and associated services in East County, preferably in the unincorporated area, and return to the Board within 120 days with identified locations, funding and an implementation plan.
3. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to evaluate current resources and gaps and develop a program with flexible funding to address barriers to housing stability and report back on effectiveness annually.
4. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to create a plan to enhance outreach and case management direct services including robust data collection and analysis in East County and return to the Board in 120 days.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

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East County has the largest number of people experiencing homelessness in San Diego County outside of the City of San Diego. ¹ It is estimated that over 4,350 East County residents received services to prevent or end their homelessness from June 1, 2020, to May 31, 2021, including approximately 1,850 families with children. Further, according to the Regional Task Force on Homelessness, there was a countywide spike in 2020 of San Diegans 55 years and older using emergency shelters, with 36 percent of these individuals reporting a physical disability and almost 25 percent reporting a substance use disorder. To address the varied needs of East County residents at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, it is imperative to ensure the availability of adequate types of shelter and housing, case management, supportive services, and dedicated flexible funding sources. Feedback from individuals at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, impacted residents, and community partners will be critical to the successful development of compassionate emergency solutions and pathways to housing for people experiencing homelessness in East County. A robust data analysis to identify the populations in East County that encounter the most barriers to stable and affordable housing will support efforts to advance equity and should include (but is not limited to) datasets by age, veteran status, race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Aligning, expanding, or providing new services, programming, shelters and/or housing to address the gaps identified through a robust data-analysis will maximize the opportunity for equitable outcomes amongst all East County residents and allow for future and ongoing evaluation.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with today's actions. Today's actions may result in future fiscal impacts based on recommendations resulting from today's action. Any such recommendations would need to be considered and approved by the Board.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

Enhanced street outreach and the developing of emergency sheltering options for homeless individuals will help to support businesses by ensuring that there are safe and clean venues for patrons and residents of the community.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Based on data collected by Housing and Community Development Services, starting prior to the pandemic, the County launched an effort that reached over 800 unsheltered people participating in the County's Regional Hotel Assistance Program. According to staff, most of these individuals were from unincorporated East County. This is indicative of the already high population of homeless individuals that have been receiving services before the pandemic. ³In 2019, the San Diego Regional Housing Task Force reported 2,326 first-time homeless individuals and the first quarter of 2020 saw a huge spike in first-time homeless, driving the number of individuals to 4,152 for 2020, a 79 percent increase. ¹According to the Regional Task Force on Homeless there was also a spike in 2020 of San Diegans 55 years and older using emergency shelters. 36 percent of these individuals reported a physical disability and almost 25 percent reported a substance use disorder, reinforcing the need for supportive services.

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As we continue to search for ways to add permanent supportive and affordable housing, we must also create more avenues for immediate relief. East County communities need efficient and sustained emergency sheltering solutions to set individuals on a path to independence, employment and stability.

On April 6th, 2021 this Board called for accelerating work on amending the County Zoning Ordinance to increase access to emergency shelter options. The County is expanding the definition of emergency shelters to include day shelters, safe camping and parking facilities, and will allow more flexibility in site selection for County owned or operated emergency shelters. County staff has also spent significant time engaging the community and developed a framework based on extensive community input, for identifying emergency sheltering options. Today's item calls for the CAO to leverage that work, identify suitable locations, and develop an action plan to enable emergency sheltering and provide appropriate social and health services in unincorporated East County. The communities I represent are looking for the County to provide leadership on regional solutions. Therefore, I request County staff to return in 120 days with data-driven and well-vetted recommendations.

I. Low Barrier Emergency Shelter and Supportive Services in Unincorporated East County

Although all municipalities are taking steps to provide outreach and social services to residents, my district has limited emergency options available for individuals experiencing homelessness.³The 2020 Point in Time Count (PITC) found 7,658 homeless people countywide. Outside of the City of San Diego, El Cajon reported the most homeless individuals in the entire region. Spring Valley reported the most unsheltered individuals of the unincorporated area in District 2. The latest PITC report found that 38,023 people across the region received some form of housing and services, ranging from homelessness prevention to permanent supportive housing, the most ever recorded in the county. While these numbers are substantial, it is evident to all leaders in my district that there are far more homeless individuals than the data illustrates. Regional data has been difficult to accurately capture. The most comprehensive data is provided by the annual Point-in-Time Count which only provides a snapshot of the crisis. The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is an additional reporting system which is intended to serve as a local information technology system used to collect data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and persons at risk of homelessness. This system needs significant coordination and improvements. The usage of HMIS varies by jurisdiction and data is available by project codes only, not by geographic location or region. Addition of East County direct services staff who will become regular utilizers of HMIS will improve the quality of data and these staff will follow consistent practices of entering data into HMIS which will lead to a more accurate view of the state of homelessness in East County as well as other regions in the County.

I ask my colleagues to support this effort to offer much-needed relief by approving this critical step to identify and fund extended emergency solutions and social services in the unincorporated communities of East County. Concepts could include shared housing, augmented Board and Care, or individual spaces including tiny homes, pallet structures, storage units and cabins. They could also include small structures or properly designed, pre-manufactured homes that fit within the community's character. Staff is encouraged to partner with the private sector, community stakeholders and developers to vet concepts. These layouts would ideally provide quality, aesthetically pleasing options, respecting both the dignity of the person experiencing homelessness

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and the character of the community in which they live. The space at any East County shelter site will be reserved to provide help to individuals coming from within the community.

Safe parking lots are another important and immediate solution for those who are typically transitionally homeless and have nowhere to sleep but in their cars. These designated spaces are managed by a social service provider that presents individuals and families with a safe place to park overnight while they transition to permanent housing. The County does not currently operate or partner with any safe lots in the unincorporated area. Organizations such as Jewish Family Services and Dreams For Change have been successful and exemplary regional partners for implementing these safe parking programs. As County staff develops and brings forward Zoning Ordinance amendments that will enhance flexibility for emergency housing options, I am requesting concurrent development of a safe lot program in East County that will effectively serve the district.

Finally, a critical component of emergency shelters is a broad array of associated services to meet the needs of the people they serve. This includes services and treatment related to substances and mental health. The program structure of emergency shelters in East County should also include other wrap-around services such as physical healthcare, counseling, peer support, transportation, legal services, long-term housing navigation and employment training.

II. Flexible Funding for Just-in-Time Support

When outreach workers have built trust and a person has decided that they will accept an opportunity to get into available emergency housing, immediate options and support are crucial to success. There are gaps in current funding streams that allow staff to make small payments that reduce an individual's barriers to access housing. To empower County staff and enhance outreach efforts, a flexible funding mechanism associated with outreach is needed to support core needs such as emergency night stays, clothing, medicine, hygiene items, storage, and immediate payments at grocery and convenience stores. These funds could also be used to pay for expenses, such as security deposits, rental payments, moving expenses, fees to obtain identification documents, transportation, auto repairs and health care expenses. The County's outreach teams don't have a funding source to use on these necessities, so it is critical that one is established to strengthen successful contact with homeless individuals on the spot. Sufficient fiscal controls and tracking of expenditures would be a requirement in the establishment to ensure that money is being appropriately spent on necessary costs. The individual would have to be engaged with outreach and case management staff and working with them on a housing plan to access these funds.

III. Collaboration with Cities and Providers

On May 10, 2021, I notified the East County city managers that I support the County doing its part to provide options in the unincorporated areas of East County. Through the ongoing process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), East County cities have stepped forward to coordinate with the County to collectively fund services and shelters and to support affordable housing and future permanent supportive options. In light of this action, I stand firmly behind my commitment to partner with my colleagues and our various providers in the community, to address the crisis we are facing. It is critical to build consensus and to collaborate on homeless solutions that will impact the community at large.

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While affordable and permanent supportive housing development is necessary for addressing the long-term success of individuals experiencing homelessness, there is more that needs to take place to implement immediate sheltering options. They are a critical component that is currently missing in East County. Today’s actions will facilitate the County’s first steps to immediately prioritize homelessness and the behavioral health needs of the struggling populations in the communities and cities located in my district.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Section 15060©(3) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines provides that activities identified in Section 15378 of the CEQA Guidelines are not subject to CEQA review. Section 15378 provides that administrative activities of governments that will not result in a direct or indirect physical change in the environment are exempt from CEQA review. The proposed action is administrative in nature as it authorizes staff to provide service-related supports. Therefore, the proposed action is not subject to CEQA review. In addition, it can also be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment by merely authorizing staff to increase homeless outreach and housing navigation and coordinate with cities and homeless service providers.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today’s proposed actions support the Building Better Health, Living Safely and Sustainable Environments/Thriving initiatives in the County of San Diego’s 2020-2025 Strategic Plan by increasing the availability of services for people experiencing homelessness in the unincorporated areas.

Respectfully submitted,



JOEL ANDERSON
Supervisor, Second District

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A - Letter to East County Cities

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¹Regional Taskforce on the Homeless (2021). Community Analysis Dashboards.
<https://www.rtfhsd.org/reports-data/>

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²San Diego County (2021). Income Limits AMI Chart.

<https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/sdhcd/rental-assistance/income-limits-ami/>

³Regional Taskforce on the Homeless (2020). Homelessness Crisis Response System Report.

<https://www.rtfhsd.org/wp-content/uploads/RTFH-2020-Homeless-Response-System-Report.pdf>