

**CITY OF OXNARD
COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS
MEETING MINUTES
November 2, 2020**

On Monday, November 2, 2020, at 4:00 p.m. the Meeting of the Commission on Homelessness convened remotely via zoom. Peggy Rivera Chair called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER

- a. Present: David Littell, Mayra Plasencia, Ruby Durias, Peggy Rivera, Yukio Okano
- b. Absent: Rene-Camper Stewart

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

- a. Amir Kazemzadeh- Is one of the owners of the Denny's Restaurant and wanted to say that ever since Project RoomKey went in there without their knowledge or consent, they've had major issues related to homelessness on their property. There's always a homeless person there and usually smoking weed or something. When you ask them to leave they get belligerent and start yelling at their customers. When the police are called they take more than an hour to respond. His major concern is eventually they're going to get one of the customers real upset and there's going to be assault and battery and they are going to be held liable.
- b. Jason Campbell – Also one of the owners of the Denny's, shared a diagram of the site. As Amir said, they are going forward with the Project Homekey after they've already had the project Roomkey. Didn't know if everybody realizes that Denny's is located on the exact same parcel. They are surrounded by what is proposed to be a permanent homeless shelter. It's going to further affect their business more than it already has. At first, we sat back, go thru COVID, they thought they can do their part, help out and put up with a little bit of extra nuisances. Then they realized that this is going forward with being permanent and they're a little bit upset that they haven't been reached out to. It keeps being said that this isn't a City or County project and this is a private sale between CDP and the Vagabond Inn. However, how is it that you are approving over 13 million dollars in funds for the purchase of this property, but you have no involvement? Why are we going thru any of these reviews? Why does it go to the Board of Supervisors if this is just a private sale? What does it have to do with City? Says City should look into the fact that they are sitting in the middle of this parcel surrounded by the homeless shelter, they share the same entrances/exits. How does Mercy House plan on securing this property? They operate a restaurant 24 hours a day and depend on hotel guests staying at the hotel coming to eat the familiar food that they are used to from a Denny's they can get anywhere. He has a lot of questions, like why did City pick this site over any other site that doesn't affect other businesses the way its going to affect them. They just bought this location last year and they planned on being there for a long time. They really like the Oxnard community they got to meet a lot of the regulars. That's how they learned about this nobody reached out to them. Says City is cutting a lot of corners and trying to push things thru using COVID as a scapegoat, as its reason, as an excuse. Says Emilio stated it is City's right not to do the full survey just because it was already being used as Project Roomkey. Says it's an excuse to not do their due diligence.

- c. David Rabin- will come back to this commenter.
- d. Mazi Kazemzadeh – Also one of the owners of the Denny's and also going to talk about the issues they're having with the homeless. Their management is having major issues with handling the homeless with asking them to leave. They had a meeting last month with the County of Ventura. President of Mercy House told them there would be a guard out there. Told them they are taking care of these issues there is no guard. The president of Mercy House told them he met with one of their people and told them that everything is looking great. Mercy House president spoke to the general manager and was told to contact the owners. They have not received any calls from him or anyone else involved with the project. They pay taxes in Oxnard, they have a restaurant, they pay for their permits. City spoke to the Vagabond Inn and decided not to discuss anything with the neighborhood. They are right in the middle of the project and City could have given them a hint that this was coming. He believes that when you communicate with one segment of the community and disregard one segment of the community that is called discrimination in his book.
- e. Larry Schuss – Owner of the property next door south of the Vagabond Inn. They were also not given any notice this year when they decided to operate Project Roomkey. They noticed a twelve-foot fence go up and they were jumping over the fence to get away. They jumped on top of their cars, they bent hoods caused hundreds of dollars to repair and they tried to get someone in charge, no one took responsibility. It's an ongoing situation with the homeless every day. They found a homeless person sleeping in one of the buildings they broke a door. Again, it cost several hundred dollars to repair. They want some assurance that they're not going to be left hanging when the project starts up. He took time to visit a building in Santa Ana that is operated by the same organization. He spoke to a restaurant owner next door and they said it's a constant problem with them opening the windows and yelling obscenities. They have people only eating outside right now because of the State's restriction and they have families out there eating and they're yelling out obscenities, they are hiding in the bushes and shooting up. It's very difficult to operate a business when you are next door to a homeless shelter. When they call the police department it takes them over an hour to respond. The sergeant told them they're overwhelmed.
- f. Gabriel Teran – Resident of the Fremont south neighborhood in the City of Oxnard. His neighborhood has the current shelter in what used to be the national guard armory. Just wanted to take the opportunity to let the commission know that, as the neighborhood chair, they are very appreciative of the work that's happened by the operator, Mercy House. Even with COVID and everything changing for everyone it's been very encouraging to see the operation being run very well. He hopes that this speaks to what the future might hold wherever a new shelter might be held. If it's the same operator giving the operation, that the same thing will happen there as well. It's well managed, there's security 24 hours a day, shelter clients are respectful and good neighbors, the staff are also respectful and good neighbors as well. Wanted to give the Commission his feedback. They continue to run it well, there have been no issues. Any issues before that were very minor. Any encampments popping up or trash accumulating are not attributed to the shelter, just a symptom of a larger challenge that we have as a city. Thanked the Housing Department and this Commission for their support on addressing the homelessness issue and choosing an operator who's done well. Giving people the opportunity to be off of the streets, have a shelter over their heads and move on to the next step of their lives.

3. INFO/CONSENT

- a. Commissioner Durias made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 2, 2020 meeting as amended, second by Chair Rivera. All approved and the motion passed.

4. REPORTS FROM STAFF

- a. Report from Housing Director

Eight months since this commission last met. Meetings are reestablished to the first Monday of the month and will be virtual. Weekly written update effort has turned into biweekly written updates and if the commission desires will continue to send them.

- Introduced new Homeless Assistance Program Coordinator, Jessica Petrillo

5. OLD BUSINESS

- a. SUBJECT: Update on the Proposed Homeless Solutions Center Development

Emilio Ramirez gave the commission an update on the proposed center located on the northeast corner of 2nd and B Streets. Project proposes to demolish an existing 7,500 square foot single story vacant City owned building that was formerly Code Enforcement Division. The proposal is to construct a new almost 60,000 square foot five story mixed used building on that half acre City owned site. It is within the downtown general zone where the proposed ground floor would be subject to a special use permit to be considered by the Planning Commission in December of this year and would propose to operate a 13,000 square foot Navigation Center in replacement of the Navigation Center that currently exists on K Street. The upper floors would consist of 56 affordable permanent supportive housing units. They range from 541 square feet to 699 square feet. As part of the supportive housing a services and leasing center would be in the second-floor podium courtyard would include BBQ pits, standing areas and community garden. Project includes a public plaza park on the corner of 2nd and B Street. The project is exempt from environmental review pursuant section 15-33-2 as an infill development by the California Environment Quality Act. The proposed developer is Community Development Partners and the proposed operator is Mercy House. The City Council approved an exclusive negotiation agreement in July of this year. Community Development Partners subsequently applied for entitlement consideration to the Community Development Department and that is under review. If the special use permit is approved we expect for Council to consider full and final project approval as well as a disposition agreement of the land as well as a funding commitment for the City's contribution to the development in February of 2021. Community Development Partners is actively preparing to submit applications for the funding as they proposed for assembly of the development financing.

- b. SUBJECT: Navigation Center Operations Update

Jessica Petrillo gave the commission and update on the shelter on K Street. The shelter operated by Mercy House at K Street has been operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They have 110 beds and they have expanded to the second location that is across the street to create more space between sleeping arrangements and more space during the day to respect social distancing guidelines in response to COVID-19. Referral process is under review in order to use all 110 beds at full capacity as much as possible. Meetings have been held to include Mercy House, Salvation Army, 211 and also the Ventura County Continuum of Care. We're coming up with a way where people are entering through the coordinated entry system but in a way that can prioritize based on situation and vulnerability while still having a fair process in order to honor the people that come thru the coordinated entry system. The

planned changes implemented are lessening the amount of time that a bed is held once they've been invited to stay at the shelter, increasing the number of people who are called for an empty bed and inviting from the waitlist based on prioritization by vulnerability. Mercy House is also able to do Rapid Re-Housing services which allows people to sign a social service agreement and access homeless set aside vouchers through the Housing Choice Voucher system and are able to do case management for six months after they've gone into housing. In the last fiscal year, they were able to serve 262 people in the shelter.

c. SUBJECT: Street Outreach Team

Jessica Petrillo reported that the team provides outreach services to the unsheltered homeless population across the City. This includes doing outreach and engagement services, approaching people who appear to be homeless outside, responding to calls from myself or others calling to check on people and also doing a lot of work in partnership with the Oxnard Police Department. In addition, they work with people on a continual basis doing case management support. They have been a one stop shop for people experiencing homelessness. They are able to respond to people's individual needs by doing an upfront needs assessment on what types of services they require and what types of services they need to use to access housing. They are able to navigate people through a bunch of different difficult complicated service paths and work with people to get them into shelter and into housing.

d. SUBJECT: Project HomeKey

Public comment from David Rabin was heard at this time.

David Rabin – Asked if the commission was able to view his photographs. Holds investment in the business located at 1205 N. Oxnard Blvd. Which is south of the Vagabond Hotel. Wanted the commission to see what they had to deal with pictures of approximately four arrests that were made over a period of three months. Once the hotel converted to the COVID assistance center for the unfortunate parties that had to be housed there. Most of his discussion was centered around those pictures. Including temporary fencing that was installed by the center so people couldn't climb the 6-foot fence. A temporary fence was erected that are 16-feet wide and they put them vertical. They fell onto Mr. Rabin's property fence and allowed people when they did climb to fall onto cars. So, besides property damage his main concern was the liability if any of these parties had become hurt in this witnessed jumping episode. Fortunately, the private security detail did a good job they had been photographed and video on Mr. Rabin's property over four times to catch them and taking people off the property. As well as the Police Department that came on site three times. The people that came on to the property unfortunately were people with mental illness. It's very concerning for the safety of people due to the occurrences. Says they were never notified by any party involved. They've spent a tremendous amount of money to acquire and restore their business and now believes it was all done in vain. He's extremely upset with the process, it's detrimental to what they tried to build and they must get assistance. They are not clear how this transaction took place or is taking place. Doesn't understand the rush to deploy these funds. They along with other surrounding neighbors oppose this project going forward.

Emilio gave the commission an update on Project Homekey. On July 16, 2020 the state of California issued a notice of funding availability that included a short application and response period for the use of federal CARES Act funding seeking to acquire motels for the long-term conversion into permanent supportive housing for the short-term use of non-congregational shelter use. Various cities within the county coordinated to procure a development and operations partner seeking to respond to that NOFA. Community

Development Partners and Mercy House were selected from that procurement. After extensive search throughout the county and multiple offers to acquire various properties, the Vagabond Hotel ownership responded to the offer to acquire that property in acceptance of that offer. Thus, an application was submitted by the County of Ventura together with Community Development Partners in response to that notice of funding availability issued in July. The county of Ventura also subsequently approved an allocation of funding from its CARES Act funding that it received from the federal government. So, both the federal and the state were posing to use CARES Act funding for this purpose. The City did not receive that form of CARES Act allocations. We've had two virtual community meetings to discuss the proposal where the first one was a local area neighborhood and the second one with local area businesses. The second one was organized by a local business owner who participated in the first virtual meeting. The Vagabond is a seventy-bed hotel that is proposed to be acquired in response to the Project HomeKey NOFA and the allocation of reservation of funds that the State of California has approved. The Project HomeKey condition requires that the Vagabond be acquired by the end of the year and that it be placed into service within a 90-day period thereafter with an interim use as a non-congregational shelter but for eventual conversion to permanent supportive housing within 24 months of acquisition of that site. Currently under the H-voucher system project RoomKey continues to operate throughout the County but also at the Vagabond Hotel and it is under operation of Project Roomkey with 60 units, case management and meal service. Community Development Partners continues to work to close escrow on the acquisition of the hotel before the end of the year.

e. **SUBJECT: Halaco Encampment Response**

Jessica Petrillo gave the commission an update on the response effort to address the encampment. Working through a coordinated plan to connect encampment response for this site near Ormond Beach previously owned by Halaco. A budget of about \$200,000 from the CARES Act available for this effort. Key features of the plan include engaging and building rapport with the people inhabiting the encampment. They've gone out to the site three times and it is hard to estimate how many people there are out there. It's probably about 60-75 perhaps 100. Just judging by the encampment sites people that they've been able to engage with, but sometimes there are multiple people who are staying in each of the encampment areas. The key features of the plan are to engage with the people who are staying there, build rapport with them, to assess service and housing needs of the people who are out there, connect people with services, shelter and long-term or permanent housing and to eventually abate and clear the encampment area. This is a coordinated plan, there are many partners that have been involved in this planning and involved with the encampment response, within the City of Oxnard across departments include Public Works, Code Compliance, Police and the Housing Department. Ventura County is a major organizer and partner in this. Whole person care, backpack medicine and public health and their homeless service programs who come out to the encampment for the response dates. And also, Community based service providers such as Salvation Army, Rescue Mission and Turning Point. There's been three site visits and plans to go every other week through the end of the year. The focus in the first few visits were meant to build rapport and talking to people saying hello and trying to find out what types of services they need and what type of housing or shelter they would be interested in and what they need in order to get there. A contact list with names of people living out there was built, what housing shelter they're interested in. Services are offered on site, that includes connection to social workers and outreach staff, also access to medical services and support thru Ventura County's Backpack Medicine. One stop service that include practical assistance such as showers, port-a-potty and hygiene equipment. Ongoing services can include connection to a street outreach worker, access to the coordinated entry system, assistance with housing search, lease signing and move-in. In the coming weeks funds for transitional

rental assistance that can include placement in hotels and housing in the private market. Hopes to engage as many people as possible before having to do the clean up and abatement of the property. Halaco was a metal recycling plant that has hazardous metals on site. It is not safe to walk through let alone to sleep in.

f. SUBJECT: COVID Coordinated Response

Emilio offered an update on the past eight months as it relates to COVID-19. Very early stages of forming a response in February of 2020. Headed by the City Manager and the Fire Chief. There were discussions whether to close service and discussions as to how to prepare to be ready to provide response. Lots of moving pieces as everything progressed. Everyone was directed to stop all meetings. Received advice regarding the homeless shelter to allow social distancing during sleep and isolation. Moved into the community center to offer that extra space. Capacity did not expand, the shelter remained at 110 beds. That operation was put in place and continues to be in place until further notice.

g. SUBJECT: Safe Park Program

Jessica Petrillo reported back with research done to explore the idea of a Safe Park Program and its feasibility in the City of Oxnard. Work was done by a committee composed of commissioners and housing staff in 2018. There are a few reasons why this is being looked that. Nearly a quarter of the county's homeless population is sleeping in their car according to the 2020 VC Point in time Count. The Oxnard Police Department estimates there are at least 80 RV's that are occupied by people who are experiencing homelessness. Homeless people living out of their vehicles run the risks of getting parking tickets, break ins and living in unsanitary conditions. Housed community members can also be impacted by vehicles that are illegally parked and unsanitary conditions that happen, such as RV's illegally dumping septic tanks. To assess the feasibility, she reviewed work done by the committee and other programs including in Ventura operated by Salvation Army, Santa Barbara operated by New Beginnings. The main hurdles across the board are liability, sanitation and security. Criteria needed to be in place: reduce harms for all, transitional with a safe path to permanent housing, and it needs to be cost effective. It cannot cost more than actually housing somebody. There are three options that may work. First would be to have a large parking lot with dump services or connection to sanitation workers that are able to do RV dumping. Private lots that are able to rent or donate their lot to the City. The clear path to housing would be to have case management available. The limitation is that it could be expensive when it comes to installing a sanitation station which could cost about \$400,000. Second option would be to follow up to the plan the committee did. Reach out to local churches, three had agreed, but it was still costly. The expectation was for the City to foot the bill. The budgeted costs were about what a one-bedroom rental per vehicle. Churches would have to be reached out to once again to see if they are still willing to participate. Last option is to re-engage churches as well as business similar to option two, but approaching them to donate use of lots, port-a-potties and services.

h. SUBJECT: Vocational Training Program

Jessica Petrillo has been meeting with Ventura County Workforce to plan a pilot for a vocational program for people who were previously homeless. If successful a pilot program for people currently experiencing homeless may be explored as well. The goals are to combining housing and supportive services to enter the workforce and increase housing stability. Housing to homelessness comes with challenges, such as: learning once again on how to be a tenant, managing mental health and substance addiction issues, trauma and going through greater stability through employment. Proposal is for an 18-month pilot program for five to ten tenants who were previously homeless. The cohort would work with the

Workforce Development Board to enroll in their program and develop the types of employment that they would like to pursue.

i. SUBJECT: Oxnard Housing Authority

Jessica Petrillo 60 homeless set aside vouchers. 39 people housed, 9 people are searching, 2 of those 9 have requested to port out. Three people are actively going through the application process with the Housing Authority. Intake form has been sent out to the remaining people on the waitlist. Responses are due by the end of this week. After this if there are still vouchers left the waitlist will be reopened. An application for a new allocation of main stream vouchers was submitted, if approved will add to this effort.

j. SUBJECT: CARES Act CDBG and ESG Funding

Emilio gave an update on funding received. Two 1.5 million-dollar allocations for CDBG1 and CDBG 2. ESG 1 was \$760,00 and ESG 2 was 4.4 million dollars. Went to Council on October 6 to present the proposed plan for those items.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. SUBJECT: Faith Based Community Fund strong.

Emilio presented the opportunity to support or contribute to Faith Based Community Fund. The group created a fund that will be used for provision of homeless services when they are not eligible for public service or cannot be moved fast enough. Emilio to send additional information to the commissioners via email on how to support and donate.

7. ADJOURNMENT

6:30 PM