



City of Arts & Innovation

# News Release

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Dec. 18, 2019

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## **Riverside City Council Takes Significant Step Forward To Address Homelessness**

*Actions include 20 cabin-style shelters fundraised by faith community; buying space for 40 more beds in an existing shelter; and providing rental assistance to help homeless people into apartments*

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – The Riverside City Council voted early Wednesday (12/18) morning to expand shelter options to get homeless individuals off the streets, with some efforts starting as soon as next month.

The decision is designed to ensure that shelter beds go to Riverside residents and that once residents are ready to leave the shelter, they can be placed in appropriate housing. It capped several hours of testimony from the public about the need to address homelessness and a robust discussion among Council members about the proper way to proceed.

“We have taken an important step forward in the ongoing effort to provide shelter for our neighbors without homes,” Mayor Rusty Bailey said. “With the right mix of compassion and accountability, we can help people who want to achieve self-sufficiency while still maintaining order in the public realm.”

The Council heard six options and chose three, including:

\* buying 20 cabin-style shelters, which are small, one-room structures with locking doors where a homeless person can live on the campus of the existing Path of Life Emergency Shelter on Hulen Place, with 24/7 supportive services. This option allows the city to pilot a new approach to shelter, one that is aimed at serving those who may be resistant to group shelter settings, such as couples, pet owners and those with severe PTSD. Support services will include job placement, substance abuse and behavioral health counseling. The option also includes the provision of housing, security, restrooms, and lighting. The Council approved this option after the Office of the Mayor stated that there are commitments from the local faith community to fundraise for the structures and to support key services, such as showers. The City will pay as much as \$1.3 million in the pilot year to operate and maintain the cabin-type shelter village, which is targeted to open by March.

\* contracting the use of 40 more beds in the existing emergency shelter, where the City previously has had access to only 15 beds. This move will more than triple the number of beds that Riverside’s

outreach workers, police officers and Homeless Solutions team members can use to place Riverside residents. This solution is expected to cost \$324,000 for six months and be available as soon as next month.

\* providing Tenant-Based Rental Assistance to place at least 40 homeless individuals or families into secure housing. The program calls for helping homeless individuals with security deposits and rent and is designed to close the gap that occurs when homeless individuals are forced to leave the shelter, but have not saved up enough money to cover the costs associated with housing. This option also includes supportive services to address issues that may have prevented a person from obtaining housing in the past. With a cost of \$740,000 per year, this option will be launched next month.

Mayor Bailey will become executive director of Path of Life once he leaves office. Despite the fact that he does not have a vote, he recused himself from the discussion and left the Council dais to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. He recently spent several nights sleeping in a Pallet Shelter on the grounds of the Hulen campus to demonstrate the effectiveness of cabin-style shelters and to better understand what homeless people are experiencing.

Options that were discussed but not approved included purchasing 20 wooden “tuff sheds”; building a 125-bed tent structure at the existing shelter; and adding 125 emergency shelter beds at the former National Guard Armory at Fairmount Park. Council members expressed concerns that the tuff sheds would not be durable, that the tent structure would take too long and use too much available land, and that the Armory idea would have an impact on Fairmount Park.

The vote comes shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal of a court decision involving Boise, Idaho. That means that cities across the U.S. cannot enforce anti-camping laws unless there is a shelter bed where the person who is camping can spend the night. It also comes after months of discussion about how to proceed with what has become a complex problem throughout California.

“Just as there is no one specific reason why people experience homelessness, there also is no one best solution to getting people off the streets,” Mayor Pro Tem Andy Melendrez said. “So I am pleased that we are progressing with a multi-faceted approach that can start making a difference in the New Year.”

The vote was 6-1 with Councilmember Erin Edwards voting no. She agreed Riverside is in a shelter crisis but said she wanted a more regional approach in order to house as many people as possible. She also said she was concerned the city could sacrifice sustainability for speed on a critical decision.

“It is clear that every person on the dais and every member of city staff is firmly dedicated to doing everything we reasonably can to address our shelter crisis,” Edwards said. “While I do not believe that the mix of options presented in the final motion was the best we could do, I am committed to building upon last night's decision to address homelessness in our city.”