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SONJA K. BERNDT

Pasadena, CA 91107 2020 APR 20 AM 8:30

Sonja.berndt19@gmail.com CITY CLERK
CITY OF PASADENA

April 19, 2020

Mayor Terry Tornek
Vice Mayor Tyron Hampton
Members of the Pasadena City Council
Pasadena, CA
(By email to publiccomment@cityofpasadena.net)

Re: April 20, 2020 City Council Meeting Agenda Item #25(d) – Pasadena’s COVID-19 Response Measures for People Experiencing Homelessness

Dear Mayor Tornek, Vice Mayor Hampton, and Councilmembers:

This letter is a follow up to my letter to you dated April 8, 2020, and I ask that it be made part of the April 20, 2020 meeting record. In that letter, I expressed concern as an advocate for our homeless neighbors that *Pasadena Now* reported that nearly 40 FEMA trailers had arrived in the Rose Bowl parking lot amid the coronavirus emergency but, according to City Manager Steve Mermell, “[n]o particular use has been determined and they are currently empty.”

I have also reviewed Mr. Mermell’s response to another Pasadena resident who inquired about the FEMA trailers, where Mr. Mermell stated as follows:

[O]ur Housing Department has been working to move vulnerable homeless individuals into area hotels. These accommodations are preferable to trailers. This effort is ongoing and we have taken several other actions to support this segment of our community such as, bringing in portable showers and placing handwashing stations throughout the City. . . .

As it relates to the trailers at the Rose Bowl. The thought is they would be used either to house first responders who are on quarantine (many don’t want to go home and risk their families) or COVID patients with nowhere else to go. While this could include homeless individuals it would not be a location for homeless per se. . . . I can assure you, however, that not a day goes by where we are not discussing how to best protect all members of our community.

I commend our City's efforts in finding 41 motel/hotel rooms for some of our most vulnerable neighbors who were *sheltered* at Union Station. (See Department of Housing report "Pasadena's COVID-19 Response Measures for People Experiencing Homelessness.") Also, the City's efforts in moving "approximately 75 people who are homeless in Pasadena" into motels is very commendable.¹ (*Ibid.*) The purpose of this letter is to urge "*And the City needs to focus on moving many more of our most vulnerable unsheltered neighbors into shelter without any further delay.*"

Barbara Ferrer, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, reported last Thursday that there were 33 cases of coronavirus infections among the homeless population and most of them involved people *who lived on the streets, rather than in shelters*. (*LA Times*, 4/17/2020, "Skid Row Mission Relocates Dozens.") I am not aware whether the FEMA trailers are still sitting vacant while over 300 of our unsheltered neighbors sleep on Pasadena's streets each night. While Mr. Mermell notes that homeless persons *could* be housed in the trailers *if they contract COVID-19*, is it the City's position that unsheltered persons have to contract the virus first before obtaining shelter in the trailers?

Significantly, after the State *purchased* many hundreds of trailers from FEMA, Governor Newsom made the following statements in addressing California's efforts to protect our most vulnerable residents:

California is deploying massive resources to get these vulnerable [homeless] residents safely into shelter, removing regulatory barriers and securing trailers and hotels to provide *immediate* housing options for *those most at risk*. . . . Helping these residents is critical to protecting public health, flattening the curve and slowing the spread of COVID-19.

(<https://www.gov.ca.gov> 3/18/2020 Press Release, emphasis added.)

The State purchased the trailers and deployed at least 40 trailers to Pasadena as part of its massive effort *to get homeless residents safely into shelter*. According to Governor Newsom's website, the trailers "serve the same function as the hotels and complement the efforts of Project Roomkey," that is, *shelter for those experiencing homelessness*. (<https://www.gov.ca.gov> 4/3/2020 Press Release.)

¹ It is unclear to me if the rooms provided to the 41 residents previously housed at Union Station are included in the approximately 75 homeless persons transferred into motel rooms.

Using the trailers now to shelter our homeless neighbors not only provides immediate and necessary shelter, but also may demonstrate that the trailers can meet a longer-term goal: temporary shelter for our homeless neighbors while our City awaits the completion of permanent supportive housing.

As you are aware, Project Roomkey is a joint effort of FEMA and the State to provide hotel/motel rooms with wraparound services in order to protect our homeless population throughout California during the pandemic. On April 18, 2020, Governor Newsom announced that nearly 11,000 rooms had been secured under this program and over 4,000 of those rooms are now occupied. In response to a question about delays in procuring these rooms, the Governor acknowledged that there are “complexities” and “nuances” that counties and cities need to work through. Is Pasadena having difficulty in moving our unsheltered neighbors into shelter under Project Roomkey? If so, the answer should not be to wait until these rooms become available. Our unsheltered neighbors need shelter *now*. They are our most vulnerable residents.

On April 17, 2020, Mayor Garcetti announced several critical initiatives being implemented *immediately* in Los Angeles to address the severe impact COVID-19 has on the unsheltered. These include the following:

- COVID-19 testing for the most vulnerable unsheltered persons;
- Sheltering of the most vulnerable unsheltered persons in the trailers provided by the State; *and*
- Continued negotiations for more hotel/motel rooms under the Project Roomkey initiative.

I urge the Council to authorize the City to start using the trailers to house our most vulnerable unhoused residents *now* just as the City of Los Angeles is doing, and to approve funding for that effort. Further, I urge the City to provide COVID-19 testing for all of our homeless neighbors. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/

Sonja K. Berndt, Esq. (Ret.)

Cc: Mark Jomsky, City Clerk
William Huang, Director of Housing

Martinez, Ruben

Subject: FW: Housing issues. Homeless folk

-----Original Message-----

From: Peter Hartgens <pch.knowledge@icloud.com>

Sent: Monday, April 20, 2020 11:46 AM

To: Jomsky, Mark <mjomsky@cityofpasadena.net>

Subject: Housing issues. Homeless folk

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Honorable Mayor on city council members.

I am asking you on behalf of the homeless population in this time of the pandemic to find housing for homeless people as in motels and hotels and other facilities to keep them safe and sound at this time. Please do as much as you can. Do you have succeeded in doing some very good work with housing and homelessness let us not drop the ball at this time. I know you have a lot of responsibility on your shoulders at this time. And blessings to you in accomplishing your work ahead on all fronts

Sincerely,
Peter C Hartgens OFM, MSW

Sent from my iPad

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2020 APR 20 AM 11:47

CITY CLERK
CITY OF PASADENA

April 20, 2020

To: Pasadena Mayor, Councilmembers, and Staff

Re: April 20, 2020 City Council Meeting Agenda Item 25d - Pasadena's COVID-19 Response Measures for People Experiencing Homelessness

Dear Mayor, Councilmembers, and Staff,

I am writing today to thank you, and the city of Pasadena, for taking strides to support Pasadena's unhoused population as well as the thousands of Pasadena renters who are on the brink of falling into homelessness. As you will hear from the Housing Department, Pasadena's staff have accomplished great work.

I am also writing to encourage you to be creative and assertive in your leadership to prevent the growth of homelessness during COVID-19. We all know that with this pandemic, the world we live in is more precarious for everyone, especially for the unhoused and those at risk of falling into homelessness.

There are a few policy areas I wish the City to consider and improve upon:

Strengthen the Tenant Eviction Moratorium

Last week, the County passed an eviction moratorium that goes above and beyond what other cities, including Pasadena, have passed.

Today, Monday, April 20, the city of Alhambra is voting to overturn their local eviction moratorium in favor to adopt the County's. I ask Pasadena to do the same.

Statistics from the yearly homeless counts show us that the majority of people who are homeless in LA County today attribute it to financial reasons, and the major contributing factor is not being able to afford housing. Please consider updating Pasadena's moratorium to include language included in the County's ordinance:

- Allow tenants to provide and require landlords to accept a self-certification of a tenant's inability to pay rent and provide notice to the landlord to that effect.
- Prohibit rent increases for residential units from 3/4/20 to 5/31/20, unless extended further; prohibit new pass-throughs, charging interest and/or late fees; and bar later collection of interest and late fees incurred during this period
- Encourage landlords and tenants to agree on a payment plans for partial rent payments
- Extend the repayment period from six to twelve months

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Item 25 d

- Prohibit eviction based on unauthorized occupants, pets or other Covid19-related nuisance
- Prohibit landlords, and those acting on their behalf, from harassing or intimidating tenants for acts or omissions expressly permitted under the Executive Order

Project Roomkey and Trailers - Short-Term and Long-Term Planning

I appreciate that Union Station Homeless Services began placing many of its clients into motel and hotel rooms weeks before the governor announced Project Roomkey. However, considering the State has provided Pasadena additional funding and resources, I ask Pasadena to do more than it initially planned.

- Work with LAHSA and the Governor's office to find more motels and hotels to participate in Project Roomkey
- Work to create permanent housing opportunities from the short-term increase in resources. We ideally want to help people transition from motel rooms into permanent homes, rather than abandoning them back on the streets after the pandemic passes. Since Pasadena passed its Motel Conversion Ordinance, it has yet to convert a motel. Hotel vacancy rates are at an all-time low and, these hard times present themselves with a silver lining. Please work with motel owners to convert a motel into permanent supportive housing. In order for hotels to be used for permanent supportive housing, hotels will most likely need to go under reconstruction. The sooner you act on establishing a purchasing agreement with a motel, the sooner construction can begin.
- Utilize the trailers. Pasadena currently has access to 40 state owned trailers. I ask that Pasadena find uses for these trailers immediately. I also ask Pasadena to consider asking the State to use these trailers indefinitely to create housing for the homeless.
- There are many other creative solutions to homelessness that the City can act on. This includes creating a Safe Parking site where a parking lot can be converted into a safe place, governed by rules and staffed with security, for individuals and families to sleep overnight.

Thank you for your time. And, I am happy to assist Pasadena in its efforts to achieve any of the above goals.

Best,

Teresa Eilers

Organizer, Everyone In Campaign (United Way of Greater Los Angeles)

teresa@everyoneinla.org

626-375-1190