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Pasadena, CA 91107

May 15, 2022

Mayor Victor Gordo
Members of the Pasadena City Council
Pasadena, California
By Email

Re: City Council Meeting 5/16/2022: Agenda Item #15 -- 2022 Homeless Count Results and the City's Approach to Addressing Homelessness

Dear Members of the Pasadena City Council:

A. Introduction

The 2022 Homeless Count Report (“HCR”) raises grave concerns. Our City has made no appreciable progress over the past two years in decreasing the number of persons experiencing homelessness in our City. According to the Housing Department’s mission statement, its core values include “decent, safe, affordable housing as an equal right for all Pasadena residents.” It is impossible to meet that core value because the Department is severely underfunded. And as discussed below, our City’s approach to providing interim housing for our unsheltered is expensive, inefficient and ineffective. Our City can, and must, do better.

B. The 2022 Homeless Count Report Demonstrates our City’s Lack of Progress in Ending Homelessness

According to the 2020 Homeless Count, Pasadena had a total of 527 unhoused people, 294 of which had no shelter at all. According to 2022 Homeless Count, Pasadena had 512 unhoused persons, 280 of which had no shelter at all. The staff report tries to put a positive spin on these new numbers by saying there is a continuing “leveling off” of homelessness in our City. (Staff Report, p. 2.) The HCR notes our homelessness numbers are “holding steady.” (HCR, p. 11.) But the **goal** of our City is to **end** homelessness, not “hold the numbers steady.”

The 2022 homelessness figures show that our City has failed to even make an appreciable dent in the number of persons experiencing homelessness. Moreover, there is a strong likelihood that the “unsheltered” number of 280 is an undercount. As noted in the staff report and HCR, persons are counted as “sheltered” even if they are in a motel for one night using a “voucher” provided under the City’s motel “voucher” program. (Staff Report, pp. 1, 3.) It was raining on the night of the 2022 Homeless Count. Significantly, the HCR notes that of those 45% categorized as sheltered persons, 37% were in emergency shelter and only 8% in transitional housing. (HCR, p. 12.) There is no data showing whether the persons in “emergency shelter”

received one night of shelter from the rain and were back on the street the following night. Counting a person who receives one night of shelter in a year as “sheltered” is misleading and is unhelpful in determining an effective approach to providing for our unhoused neighbors.

Unsheltered persons are extremely vulnerable due to substantial chronic health conditions; undiagnosed and untreated mental illness; substance use disorders; malnutrition, and/or other substantial problems, including threats to their personal safety. (See Pasadena Homeless Count--2020, pp. 23-25; see also, HCR, p. 15.) Interim housing (temporary housing between living on the street and permanent housing) provides personal safety, security for belongings, toilets, showers, laundry facilities, meals, assistance with medical needs (such as onsite nurses who monitor blood pressure), linkage to benefits (such as health insurance, SSI, etc.), etc.

C. Our City has Failed to Provide an Effective Interim Housing Program for our Unsheltered Residents

Our City’s primary method of interim housing is brief stays in motel rooms for a fraction of our unsheltered residents (using federal and state funding **when available**). That program is expensive (\$100/night on average **without any services**), ineffective and inefficient. Once a motel night is over, the money is used up, the room is gone, and the person is back on the street.

According to the staff report, the City has received an influx of new, **one-time** grant funds that have supported the expansion of the motel “voucher” program. “With this infusion of new funding and subsequent expansion of emergency shelter, more of our unhoused residents have been able to sleep inside and take refuge from the streets while moving forward on their path to permanent housing.” (Staff Report, p. 4.)

First of all, the motel “voucher program” is wholly funded by non-city funding, and the funding is not guaranteed. In fact, the Housing Department’s FY2023 budget is more than \$1.3 million **LOWER** than last year due to the end of pandemic-related **grants**. (Proposed FY2023 Housing Budget, p. 5.)

Secondly, the report fails to provide any data showing whether this expensive interim housing model has been successful, justifying simply more of the same and a continuation of the City’s motel “voucher” program. The Department needs to **quantify** “more of our unhoused residents” that were able to sleep inside and “take refuge from the streets.” Further, what was the length of motel stay? One night? Five nights? This missing data is critical because according to Housing Department staff it can take **over one year** to obtain permanent housing. A few nights in a motel during inclement weather, or a night here and there to provide a bed and a shower provides little refuge from life on the streets.

We do have some data on program results of the motel “voucher” program. According to the December 8, 2021 Housing Department staff report to the ED Tech Committee, the City expended \$2.2 million to fund motel-based shelter services. (12/8/2021 Staff Report, p. 5.) With these federal, state and county funds, for 2019, 2020, and 2021 (January through June) it “served” a total of 390 persons in motels (de-duplicated). (*Id.* at p. 3.) Sadly, **less than 20%** of the participants served exited a shelter program to permanent housing over this two-and-one-half

year period. (*Ibid.*) The report notes that 38% exited to other shelter programs without explaining why these participants could not continue to be sheltered with vouchers. And it failed to explain what happened to the other 42%. (*Ibid.*)

Significantly, Housing Department staff described life on the street to the ED Tech Committee last December in this way: “It’s very unsafe on the street. People don’t sleep much.” (12/8/2021 Mtg., timestamp 1:16:00.) Since life on the street in our City is “very unsafe,” why are we not treating this as an emergency public safety and public health crisis? Why are we not seriously considering, creating, and funding proven alternative interim housing models to protect our most vulnerable residents?

At its December 8, 2021 meeting, the ED Tech Committee tasked Housing staff to get specific information on the number of motel nights provided for our unsheltered folks and a cost comparison of the motel “voucher” program and alternative models of interim housing. Chairperson Hampton agreed to agendize the subject of the tiny-home interim housing model stating it was an important discussion. (12/8/21 ED Tech Mtg., timestamp 1:02:00.) The information still has not been presented and the subject of tiny homes still has not been agendized.

The staff report attempts to defend the lack of an effective interim housing strategy with the statement “Meeting the shelter needs of people experiencing homelessness hinges on the continued focus of the creation of permanent housing opportunities as much as it does on the expansion of shelter resources. ... While increasing permanent housing remains a top priority, the City is committed to creating and funding a continuum of programs that meet the immediate and long-term needs of our unhoused residents.” (Staff Report, p. 6.)

The evidence of the City’s “commitment” to funding the **immediate** needs of our unhoused residents is as follows: In the adopted FY2022 budget, the Housing Department allocated ZERO General Fund dollars for interim housing. Moreover, of its entire FY2022 adopted budget, the Housing Department allocated just 2% for interim housing. Respectfully, this evidence explains why the lack of interim housing is a substantial hole in our City’s approach to homelessness.

What will our City and specifically our Housing Department devote to interim housing for FY2023? We cannot tell from the Housing Department’s FY2023 budget narrative. However, the narrative notes “Although Pasadena continues to receive one-time increases in funding from the State, a reliable source of ongoing funding is needed to support high priority needs such as . . . increasing shelter capacity.” (FY2023 Housing Department Budget, p. 6.) What this suggests to me is that our City’s approach to interim housing is (1) if we get money from non-city sources, we will provide motel vouchers for some of our unsheltered residents; and (2) when the money runs out, our unsheltered residents will be back on the street.

D. Our City Must Pursue Alternative Interim Housing Models to Alleviate the Suffering of Our Unsheltered Residents

There are alternatives to our expensive and ineffective motel “voucher” program. Tiny home shelter villages and re-purposed motels are being established in many Southern California cities and are successfully transitioning unhoused residents to permanent housing. They are cost-effective, allow re-use of sleeping quarters as clients receive permanent housing, and provide efficient case management services on site.

But first, the subject of tiny homes must be agendaized at the ED Tech Committee as promised months ago. And at that meeting, we need experienced service providers like Hope of the Valley, which has operated numerous tiny home communities and is intimately familiar with the cost, services offered, and program results.

The City must appropriate more General Fund dollars if we are to have any hope of ending homelessness in our City. Additionally, the City has \$20 million coming this month in American Rescue Plan Act funding from the federal government. With some of those funds, our City could alleviate the suffering of many of our unsheltered folks by creating a tiny home community or re-purposed motel so they are truly safe and have onsite access to services that will significantly help them transition to permanent housing and wellness.

E. Conclusion

The 2022 Homeless Count should set off alarm bells and spur this Council to action. Our most vulnerable residents need your help. Please provide the funding for an effective interim housing program. Thank you for your time and consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,

/s/

Sonja K. Berndt
Pasadena

Cc: William Huang, Housing Department Director
correspondence@cityofpasadena.net

McMillan, Acquanette (Netta)

From: Erika Foy
Sent: Monday, May 16, 2022 10:48 AM
To: PublicComment-AutoResponse; Jomsky, Mark
Subject: Agenda Item 15
Attachments: 70-year-old Metro.pdf

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Dear Mayor and Council- I wanted to give a big thank you to the PORT team and especially Tony Zee for all the work they do with the homeless and helping those in need. I believe the PORT program is making a dent in our homeless numbers and the overall care of the unhoused/unsheltered individuals. I would hope the city would work to provide more funding for the team. I personally have seen the great work they do. My hope is that you all have time to meet with Tony and understand the impact PORT is having on our city.

On another note, I did want to make sure the LA Times article from this morning's paper was made public for this meeting. Violent crimes have risen 81% for the first two months of this year on METRO. The agency is "wrestling with a surge in homelessness on its system as riders return to commuting." I hope this council can inquire how mental health concerns and safety on the METRO can be improved as we work to increase the availability of housing and shelter for our most needy residents. While the efforts to procure housing is surely needed, we cannot ignore the safety concerns of violent crime such as the unprovoked attack as we saw this month in Pasadena. How can we help provide necessary housing and resource needs for our homeless while also making sure our streets and transit remain safe? I do like the idea of having public safety officials present at METRO stations.

I think it is concerning we are developing new specific plans around transit yet, we have serious issues of safety on this front. The homeless issue is the challenge of our time here in LA, and while creating more housing and shelter, my hope is we don't ignore the mental health and drug use aspect that is affecting the safety of our transit system and streets. What can we do as a city to ensure safe streets and transit as we grow in size with our reliance on METRO? Our newest housing plans will only work if safety on METRO is addressed and analyzed to ensure those who rely on transit can use it without having an issue. I do understand this is a very complicated problem and many people are working to help solve the issues at hand. The efforts to stop people from becoming homeless needs to be front and center, but we cannot ignore the consequences of now having the complications of homelessness (undiagnosed and untreated mental health illness, substance abuse disorders, untreated physical health conditions, and malnutrition) affect the safety of our city and residents. How can we prevent unsheltered/unhoused mentally ill individuals from causing health and safety concerns for others as we work to solve the housing crisis? It does seem like a gigantic problem to solve, but one that must be tackled as we move to grow as a city. I appreciate the efforts you have made and those efforts you will work towards this coming year. Thank you, Erika Foy

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... into a crowd, killing one to a request for comment.

70-year-old Metro passenger set ablaze

BY RACHEL URANGA

A woman who appeared to be homeless set a 70-year-old Metro rail passenger on fire in an unprovoked attack in Pasadena this month, officials said.

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department responded to an assault call on the L, or Gold, Line train at Lake Avenue around 10:55 pm May 7. The unidentified woman had said something to the passenger and he ignored it, said Ramon Montenegro, a spokesman for the sheriff's Transit Services Bureau.

She then squirted the man with a flammable liquid and set him on fire with a lighter. Other passengers rushed to help, using their jackets or whatever they had on him to snuff out the flames, Montenegro said.

The two did not appear to know each other. The suspect was arrested, and the victim was transported to a hospital. He was in serious but stable condition and expected to survive.

The incident is one of a string of cases in which

homeless individuals have attacked Metro riders or workers.

Violent crimes jumped 81% for the first two months of this year on the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's bus and rail system. The agency has been wrestling with a surge of homelessness on its system as riders return to commuting. At Union Station, workers say homeless people grappling with mental illness regularly scream insults and threats and have assaulted them.

"This unprovoked attack is shocking," said Los Angeles County supervisor and Metro director Kathryn Barger, who represents the area. "It speaks to the need to have public safety officials on-site at Metro stations."

The agency contracts with the sheriff, the Los Angeles Police Department and the Long Beach Police Department to patrol the system. The Metro board recently authorized extending their contract for up to a year to allow time to develop a new process for selecting an agency or agencies to handle security.

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