CORRESPONDENCE

SONJA K. BERNDT
Pasadena, CA

June 8, 2025

Mayor Victor Gordo
Members of the Pasadena City Council
Pasadena, CA
(By Email)
(By Email correspondence@cityofpasadena.net)

Re: City Council Meeting June 9, 2025, Agenda Item #16: Homelessness in Pasadena-Results of the 2024 Annual and 2025 Point In Time Counts

Dear Mayor Gordo and Members of the City Council:

I am a long-time resident of Pasadena and an advocate for the unhoused residents of our City. This letter is to express my deep concerns regarding the results of the 2024 Annual Count and 2025 Point In Time Count of those experiencing homelessness in our City. The results show that the homelessness crisis in our City is getting worse and that substantially more City-generated funding is urgently needed to address it.

A. The Annual and Point In Time Counts are Likely Undercounts of Persons Experiencing Homelessness in Our City

As noted in the June 9, 2025 staff report, the City does an "Annual Count of all individuals who experienced homelessness over the course of a calendar year and a Point In Time Count of people who experienced homelessness on a single night." The staff report notes that the **2024 Annual Count** is only an estimate and *does not include those who do not engage with any Pasadena-based programs supporting persons experiencing homelessness over the course of a calendar year*.

The **2025 Point In Time (PIT) Count** was conducted on February 19 and February 20, 2025, after a month-long postponement due to the Eaton Fire. It is a virtual certainty that the *unsheltered* count is an undercount. This is because the City's Bad Weather Shelter was open on the night of the Count even though the criteria for opening the shelter were not met that night. All those in the Bad Weather Shelter on the night of the PIT Count, were counted as "sheltered" even though that may have been the only night they were sheltered over the past year. Likewise, if a person who had been unsheltered for months or even years received a motel voucher on the night of the PIT Count, that person would be counted as "sheltered."

Additionally, the staff report notes that "resources for fire-impacted households such as FEMA transitional sheltering assistance, Airbnb stays, and hotel stays through Los Angeles County's 211 were still readily accessible" on the night of the PIT Count. If Pasadena residents who lost their homes in the fire were sheltered outside Pasadena on the night of the PIT Count, they would not have been included in the Pasadena Count.

B. The Results of the Counts Reveal Very Worrisome Trends

The worrisome trends in our City's homelessness crisis that are revealed in the results of the Annual and PIT Counts are obvious. Total unhoused persons in the PIT Count went up 4% to 581. Even more worrisome, the number of unsheltered folks in the PIT Count went up by 7% to 342. The unsheltered folks are the people we see suffering on the streets of our City every day. A staff member of the Housing Department has previously described life on the streets as "very unsafe."

According to the Annual Count, more people are falling into homelessness and racial disparities persist. Additionally, 79% reported a serious medical or mental health condition or disability. Tragically, those living on our streets are highly unlikely to have adequate health care. But housing them with case management services could substantially alleviate their medical and mental health issues.

C. Though Critical Funding for Our Unhoused is Now Seriously Jeopardized, that Problem is Not Addressed in the City's Proposed FY2026 Operating Budget

The staff report notes the following:

> Additionally, proposed cuts to federal funding, which comprises 76% of the Housing Department's proposed Fiscal Year (FY)2026 budget, present significant challenges [to] the City's ability to maintain its robust response to the growing challenges related to homelessness in Pasadena.

The City's response to challenges related to homelessness has been far from "robust." Year after year, the Housing Department receives *de minimus* General Fund appropriations while the Pasadena Police Department (PPD) receives a grossly disproportionate level of General Fund appropriations. Critical services for our unhoused and especially our unsheltered residents are vastly underfunded because our Housing Department receives only "crumbs" from City-generated sources to serve our most vulnerable residents. In fact, for FY2026, the Housing Department proposes that only $2.6 million (2.4%) of its total appropriations be received from the General Fund while the Police Department proposes to receive $111.3 million (91.7%) of its total appropriations from the General Fund.

For years, the City has imprudently relied on federal funding to fund programs for its unhoused residents to an extreme extent. But the federal government is going to

drastically reduce that funding, possibly as early as this October. The Council was advised that the federal government will no longer fund the Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) program, which currently provides rental assistance for 87 very low-income households. The Council already approved entering into a contract with the County for $867,473 (the FY2026 Measure A "Local Solutions Fund" allotment) to continue the same level of rental assistance for roughly 35 of the households in the EHV program but there is no funding for the other households. While the staff report states the "boost" in Measure A resources "has the potential to strengthen the City's response to homelessness and help bridge critical funding gaps caused by federal cuts," the critical "pot" of Measure A Local Solutions Fund money will not be available for our unhoused residents.

A second "pot" of Measure A funding, known as Measure A Continuum of Care funds, will not provide any *new* resources for our unhoused either since the City expects to receive the same amount of these funds as it would have received under Measure H. A third "pot" of Measure A funds is expected to be passed through the Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Regional Housing Trust. Staff reports that this money can be used for the construction of affordable housing, affordable housing preservation, tenant protection and support, and technical assistance. But we do not know how much money will be available for *Pasadena's* unhoused residents and whether it can/will be used for interim housing for our hundreds of unsheltered residents.

The staff report states "Permanent housing placements hold steady. In 2024, 327 people experiencing homelessness in Pasadena were permanently housed, contributing to the three-year total of 1,047." The community is grateful that those persons have been permanently housed. But the critical issue is what funding is available for interim and permanent housing for our unhoused going forward? How many of those 327 persons were permanently housed last year using the Emergency Housing Voucher program which will no longer be federally funded? Were any of those permanent housing placements funded by other sources that are in jeopardy? How does the fact that our City will lose 142 units of permanent supportive housing at Centennial Place (per website) affect the ability to permanently house our unhoused going forward?

Notably, in the Housing Department's section of the proposed FY2026 Operating Budget, at page 5, there is the following warning: "In FY 2025, the City awarded Project Based Vouchers (PBVs) to two permanent supportive housing (PSH) projects. With these awards, the City has nearly reached the cap on allocating PBVs, which are a critical tool in the development of deeply affordable housing . . . [W]ithout the ability to allocate additional PBVs, the development of deeply affordable housing projects (including PSH) will be nearly impossible."

D. The City Has the Money NOW to Substantially Increase Funding for Interim and Permanent Housing for Our Unhoused Residents

1. The City's General Fund

Cost savings can be achieved by decreasing the number of PPD officers while maintaining public safety in our City. In FY 2021, there were 5,766 PPD calls for service listed as "transient-related." Instead of incurring the huge expense of responding to calls for service related to unhoused individuals, PROVIDE HOUSING FOR THEM.

2. Additional Revenue from FY2025

At the May 5th opening of the public hearing on the proposed FY2026 Operating Budget, Director of Finance Hawkesworth gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Council with slides showing many one-time expenditures proposed to be funded with a total of $10.6 million in additional revenue received in FY2025. Housing for our unhoused was not on that list of proposed expenditures but clearly should be.

3. The City's Operating Reserve (5% of Annual Expenditures)

The City has a $16.184 million Operating Reserve for FY2026. Given the urgent need for more interim and permanent housing for our unhoused, funding from the Operating Reserve is required.

Significantly, in FY2020 and 2021, the City approved $21.5 million (total) to cover the Rose Bowl debt because the Rose Bowl Operating Company could not make the annual debt payments related to the massive remodel of the Rose Bowl years ago. All of those funds were from the City's General Fund AND GENERAL FUND RESERVES.

4. The City's Emergency Reserve (15% of Annual Expenditures)

The City has a $48.552 million Emergency Reserve for FY2026. Given the urgent need for much more interim and permanent housing for our unhoused, funds from the City's Emergency Reserve for FY2026 should be appropriated for that purpose.

E. Conclusion

The results of the 2024 Annual Count and the 2025 PIT Count confirm our worst fears: our homelessness crisis is getting worse. The City Council needs to undertake a serious examination of the proposed FY2026 Operating Budget to find additional General Fund money to develop the interim and permanent housing desperately needed to house our unhoused residents. The Council also needs to approve additional funding for this

purpose from the FY2026 Operating Reserve, the FY2026 Emergency Reserve and the additional revenue from FY2025.

Sincerely,

/s/

Sonja K. Berndt, Esq. (retired)

Cc: James Wong
Housing Director

Gao, Beilei

From: Bert Newton <
Sent: Monday, June 23, 2025 4:19 PM
To: PublicComment-AutoResponse
Subject: Item 9 homelessness in Pasadena

Dear Mayor and City Council

Despite all the progress we've made in affordable housing and tenants rights, the number of unhoused people seems to be climbing upward. We are a wealthy city, however, and we do have resources to continue toward a goal of functional zero homelessness.

In her letter, Sonja Berndt provides some excellent proposals for how to reallocate existing funds. I would like to add to her list a proposal that the city explore a vacancy tax and a transfer tax. The housing element states that the city will do a study of a vacancy tax. I suggest that the vacancy tax study include vacant commercial properties. There are numerous commercial sites in the city, including some on Colorado Blvd, that have remained vacant for many years, in some cases decades. These sites could be used for affordable housing.

Last year's annual count of unhoused people showed a sharp increase of people falling into homelessness. Once people fall into homelessness, mental health and substance abuse issues often are exacerbated from the stress of being on the street, then it becomes harder to get people housed. The best way to bring down homeless numbers is to not let people end up on the street to begin with, so we need to find ways to increase affordable housing. We can save money and lives.

We also need to house people on the street now. Too often the police are called to deal with complaints and issues, and that is a very expensive way to try to help our unhoused neighbors. Housing and services would be more effective both in serving people and in saving money. So the more money we put into emergency and interim housing and permanent affordable housing and services for those who need them, the more money we are saving in the long run.

Thank you,
--
Rev. Bert Newton
Making Housing and Community Happen
My Podcast

"Blessed are the poor, for they will inherit the land." Matthew 5:5 EWN Translation

06/23/2025
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