



Sonoma County Community Development Commission
1440 Guerneville Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95403-4107

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Barbie Robinson,
MPP, JD, CHC
Executive Director

October 15, 2020

The Honorable Bradford J. DeMeo, Presiding Judge
Sonoma County Superior Court
Hall of Justice
600 Administration Drive
Santa Rosa, California

RE: Response to the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury 2019-2020 Final Report

Dear Honorable Judge DeMeo:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Civil Grand Jury Report.

The following is Sonoma County Community Development Commission's ("CDC") response to the Report titled **"Sonoma County Has a Homeless Crisis, Is There a Response Plan?"**

The Report directs certain findings and recommendations to the elected representatives of the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council. In the last month, it was determined that the current Leadership Council was created by the CDC in 2018 without authority or approval by the Continuum of Care Board ("CoC Board") that existed at the time. Therefore, the elected representatives of the Leadership Council have no authority to respond to the Report. The CDC, as lead agency for the Continuum of Care for Sonoma County, submits the following response to the Report while we work to re-establish a CoC Board. We will present the Report to the re-established CoC Board at the earliest date practicable to address the findings and recommendations directed to the Leadership Council.

The Report requests the Leadership Council elected representatives to respond to R4 and F7, which is a recommendation and corresponding finding specifically directed to the Board of Supervisors. As such, we defer to the Board of Supervisors' response to Recommendation 4 and Finding 7.

If you have any questions, or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 707-565-4777.

Sincerely,

Barbie Robinson, MPP, JD, CHC
Director, Department of Health Services
Interim Executive Director, Community Development Commission
707.565.4777
barbie.robinson@sonoma-county.org

cc: The Grand Jury Foreperson Ronald Chestnut
The Board of Supervisors
The County Administrator Bratton
The County Clerk Deva Marie Proto

Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Homeless Crisis

Report Date: August 2, 2020

Response by: Barbie Robinson Title: Interim Executive Director

Agency/Department Name: Continuum of Care Lead Agency

FINDINGS: F1, F2, F8, F9, F10

I (we) agree with the findings numbered F2, F8, F9

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F1, F10

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed with an explanation of the reasons.)

RECOMMENDATIONS: R2, R3

Recommendations numbered: _____ have been implemented.

(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)

Recommendations numbered: R2, R3 have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)

Recommendations numbered: _____ Require(s) further analysis.

(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.)

Recommendations numbered: _____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

(Attach an explanation.)

Date: October 15, 2020 Signed: Barbie L. Robinson

Number of pages attached: 6 pages including cover letter, GJ Report form, Findings and Recommendations (refer to Civil Grand Jury Response Requirements)

FINDINGS: F1, F2, F8, F9, F10

F1. The absence of a sufficient number of temporary shelters, including support services, is a primary factor in the consistently high number of unsheltered homeless in Sonoma County.

Response: We disagree partially with this finding.

Over 2700 homeless individuals were identified in the 2020 Point-In-Time (PIT) Homeless Count conducted on February 28, 2020. Currently, Sonoma County has 700 year round emergency shelter beds, several hundred other transitional housing beds, and 100+ winter shelter beds (available between November and April each year).

Sheltering services is a key entry point into the housing system of care, however the ultimate goal is to provide adequate permanent supportive housing (PSH). One of the primary factors impacting the high number of unsheltered homeless in Sonoma County is the lack of permanent housing. If enough permanent housing were available, the need for temporary shelter would drop. Given that most emergency shelter has a six month maximum stay and exits from shelter to permanent destinations vary from 20%-30%, investments in additional shelter beds need to be carefully weighed with investments in additional permanent housing in order to avoid simply “warehousing” individuals in emergency shelter.

In December 2019, the Board of Supervisors made significant investments to address homelessness by funding the purchase of congregate housing, directing staff to secure contracts for emergency homeless services, directing staff to establish shelter and low-barrier navigation centers and outdoor shelter alternatives committing approximately \$12 Million in funding. This year our County Fund for Housing will release Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) making available \$8 Million to eligible permanent supportive housing projects. Most recently during the Budget Hearings conducted in September 2020, the Board of Supervisors approved increased investments in homeless services and annual funding for additional staffing to further support the work of the Community Development Commission in achieving functional zero homelessness.

The County and other entitlement jurisdictions continue to work to develop permanent supportive housing and affordable housing for homeless individuals within the County. The Community Development Commission (CDC) will be working to create a housing development pipeline report that will be shared widely with the community to share information regarding the development of permanent supportive housing. The Board has established a bold goal to develop 1,000 PSH units to support the homeless.

- F2. For temporary shelter sites to adequately meet the needs of homeless individuals, temporary shelters must be geographically dispersed and designed to encompass the needs of different target demographics such as families, mentally and physically disabled and LGBTQ people.**

Response: We agree with this finding.

In December 2019, the County established the Los Guilicos Village sheltering site that consists of 60 units of shelter. On July 7, 2020 the Board of Supervisors committed to establishing sheltering services and programs in each supervisorial district. Currently the Community Development Commission is working to establish additional sheltering options throughout the County. Prior to these recent investments, the County has supported shelters in south county, west county and east county. The Community Development Commission is currently working to identify sheltering options to meet the sheltering needs in the northern region of the County. We recognize that additional shelter investments should be made with consideration of geographic equity as well as different subpopulations. Currently, West County (Guerneville area) and North County (Cloverdale – Healdsburg) have no year-round shelter. Additionally, East County/Sonoma Valley has only Los Guilicos Village which has not been approved as a permanent shelter. The Commission will bring recommendations on possible additional shelter sites to both the Board of Supervisors as well as the Continuum of Care Board (Leadership Council) once funds are identified to support additional sites.

Family shelters currently support over 80% of families and in the most recent Homeless Point in Time count, preliminary results show numbers have dropped by 9% since 2019. Staff recommend additional shelter efforts be targeted toward transition age youth. Efforts in 2020-2021 will focus on better reaching this population; ensuring that shelters meet the needs of the LGBTQ community, particularly with the current administration's rollback of the Equal Access Rule.

In October 2020, the Homeless Youth Task Force, staffed by the Commission, will meet for their annual Homeless Youth Needs Assessment to estimate the number of year round beds, both shelter and permanent/rapid rehousing with youth input. After that, the Commission will utilize data from the Needs Assessment to continue mapping out the number of beds needed. Additional feedback from the soon-to-be-formed Youth Action Board will drive the action plan for creating additional shelter capacity. As we continue to expand homeless sheltering options, we will ensure families, mentally and physically disabled and LGBTQ people are appropriately supported and sheltered.

- F8. The Leadership Council played no role in developing policies or procedures to respond to the Joe Rodota Trail crisis.**

Response: We agree with this finding.

This was managed primarily by the County Board of Supervisors because the property is under the County's control.

F9. The fact that the Leadership Council does not include members from all cities in Sonoma County limits its ability to develop policies on a truly County-wide basis.

Response: We agree with this finding.

F10. Neither the Leadership Council nor the Technical Advisory Committee has the resources necessary to adequately address the homeless crisis in Sonoma County.

Response: We disagree partially with this finding.

A goal and priority of the Lead Agency is to ensure that cities are active participants and that each jurisdiction can make the appropriate investments necessary to achieve functional zero homelessness county-wide. There is additional work that the Leadership Council needs to do in order to improve the county-wide response to homelessness. The goal is to strengthen the design of the Council to ensure the meaningful involvement and representation of the stakeholders who are critical to successfully address homelessness in the County. In the 2020 Budget deliberations, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors made significant investments to help support the functioning of the Home Sonoma County Leadership Council. It is with these additional staff resources that additional attention can be given to helping to identify funding strategies for the Council.

The Technical Advisory Committee is not a mandated system component and is recommended to be removed from the structure with all Technical Advisory Committee representatives participating in the Leadership Council Taskgroups to help inform and guide the decisions of the Leadership Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS: R2, R3

R2. The Leadership Council develop and implement a strategy for funding appropriate shelter space that addresses the needs of sub-groups within the homeless community by December 31, 2021. [F1, F2, F3, F9]

Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

This recommendation will be discussed with the Leadership Council for direction and strategy by December 2020, and a strategy will be developed by March 2021 to address this recommendation. It should be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, sheltering options have changed since the release of this Grand Jury report, and shelters must take into account social distancing and other mitigation measures. Strategies developed will have to consider COVID-19 requirements.

The Continuum of Care Lead Agency is currently working to secure sheltering for homeless and sub-groups identified in this report through Project Roomkey and Project Homekey. Governor Newsom’s project, launched June 20, 2020 provides funding to acquire and rehabilitate various housing options (hotels, motels, vacant apartment buildings, residential care facilities and tiny homes). It also includes funding for wrap-around supportive services to COVID-19 vulnerable populations. Two hotels have been identified and applications submitted to the State for consideration. As of this writing, one application has been approved and the other waitlisted. Funding would be awarded sometime during the fall 2020.

R3. The Leadership Council adopt a plan to deal with homeless encampment emergencies by December 31, 2020. [F9, F10]

Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The Leadership Council established an Ad Hoc Committee to make recommendations for homeless encampments. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this work has been delayed. It is anticipated that the Ad Hoc will convene this work beginning no later than November 2020 with recommendations to the full Leadership Council in the spring of 2021. Sonoma County is actively using the County’s Interim Encampment Policy and response efforts for revision and refinement.