

Panil meeting summary August 11, 2021

The meeting was hosted by Valerie Winemiller

There were 26 people in attendance at height

The NCPC portion of the meeting does not occur this month. Officer M. Gichki, CRO, sent over stats, which will be posted on the PANIL web site. Auto burglaries continue to be biggest problem. Police will present at the next meeting.

Valerie reported a mysterious flyer was distributed on Howe street about proposed housing development on the current CVS lot on Howe. It reprinted the summary from the PANIL web site, and contained our old logo. The front of the flyer implored people to share thoughts with Dan Kalb's office. It was not published by PANIL, and our organization has NOT taken a position of the development, as details are still sketchy.

Deidre Moss from Dan Kalb's office was present and provided an update. The number of units has been reduced below the 200 originally proposed, but there's little new information. It's not really "too early to call it a project."

## **Main Meeting Topic:**

### **Who are the Homeless?**

### **What is Alameda County Doing About Homelessness?**

**Speaker: Amy Shrago**, was the last minute fill in for **Emma Ishii**, Social Services Policy Associate in the Office of Supervisor Keith Carson, District 5 Alameda County Board of Supervisors. Amy is Supervisor Carson's Chief of Staff. She is also in charge of health policy and programs.

Because it is Alameda County that controls funds that address homelessness, we wanted to hear from the County Board of Supervisors.

Amy emphasized that the County and City work in tandem. For homeless, public benefits. She stated that they don't have a current count of homeless in the county. The last count was done in 2019 and it is supposed to be done bi-annually, but because of the pandemic, there was no census this year. There probably won't be one until 2022.

Counts in 2019 put the total of unhoused in Oakland at 3200, but the informal estimate for the count at is time is about 5000.

With respect to homeless. The county's number one activity is focusing on street-based health care. Keeping people from dying on the street is the highest priority. The county has a teams of case (navigation) workers, often with a nurse and physician that periodically visit homeless hot spots to attend the most vulnerable. Case workers typically handle 8-10 individuals at a given time when full wraparound service is required. In the Rapid Rehousing Program, where little assistance is needed, a case worker might handle 50 cases.

Ronile Lahti asked where the homeless come from. Ms. Shrago stated that majority where formerly housed in the same zip code as they are now homeless. But precise statistics are not available, as no comprehensive census was done since 2019.

Bill Manley asked if the county has made the effort to find land for tent encampments as most homeless are living in tents, but often on public land such as parks and medians, not designed or suited for camping. And would this not be a good use of eminent domain to acquire such land, if it's not available.

Ms. Shrago said no land has been set aside, and as she is not a land-use attorney, she could not comment on the use of eminent domain.

Asked about how much money does the county provide to Oakland for homeless management, she stated the county "does not write a check" but provides services to the cities. The county budget for healthcare for the homeless is in the 100's of millions annually. The program is federally funded.

Ms. Shrago noted that a common approach and recognition for caring for the homeless is providing "Housing First." To that end, several hotels are being renovated in Oakland. [No information on the number of beds,]

Asked about the Dyer Detention Center [jail]— on 6<sup>th</sup> Street] that is being converted for homeless, Ms. Shrago noted the conversion is slow and costly, "cost prohibitive," but no information was provided on the capacity, or a timeline for beginning occupancy.

An audience member ask if there is special treatment for families. There was, and an attempt is made always to keep families together. And for those found alone, one of the first strategies utilized is reunification with other family members who can intervene.

Where can people go if they need assistance? Ms Shrago noted that St. Vincent DePaul on Grand is a great resource, and that they can always call the Supervisor's offices.

Valerie Winemiller asked if the speaker could say how most people became homeless. Ms Shrago stated that it was often people on the margin, and some traumatic event like an illness, accident, or job loss that triggers moving onto the streets. A snowball effect. She further stated the about 60% of homeless are on probation or parole. She could not provide information on numbers that are substance-addicted (e.g. opioids or alcohol).

Linda Taylor asked what happens when people are offered housing but don't want it? It often happens because a homeless person might want to keep pets or a partner that is not permitted in the facility. Offers are made to such persons no more than three times. After that teams "move onto the next person in need."

Question was posed about impact of the decision decades ago to close mental hospitals in the state. Ms. Shrago responded that responsibility was given to counties, but that was never followed up with funding. There is an acute shortage of mental health providers and professionals. Fhe Affordable Care Act put greater requirements for mental health providers, but the industry has not met the demand.

Janet Noble asked whether the county could set up tents in some open areas of the county, in a managed campground. Ms. Shrago stated that no supervisor has shown a willingness to provide such a center in their district. Ms. Noble observed that trying to provide services to people living in medians does not seem very efficient. Ms. Shrago agreed. Ms. Noble also observed that the Dyer Center utilities purportedly cost 800k in utilities alone, and if even if the center wasn't a perfect solution it could be put to use for some level of housing.

Do welfare benefits pay for housing? SSI benefits pay for a percentage of rent, but the amount paid is far below the average rental cost in the Bay Area. Even the “affordable” level of housing is far beyond the reach of most homeless, who fall into “ultra-low income” category (less than 20k),

Does the County or Red Cross provide tents? Ms. Shrago could not confirm.

Asked about the effectiveness of Section 8 vouchers, Ms. Shrago stated there are not enough HUD vouchers available, and the vouchers don’t approach the actual rental cost of rental housing in the Bay Area. The Section 8 waitlist is very long.

The County does have a program for rental property providers that guarantees payment and covers any damages to apartments. This ensures full rental, albeit below market rate. The link is <https://homelessness.acgov.org/initiatives.page>.

For more information, people can contact Supervisor Carson's Office at 510-272-6695 and Amy herself at [Amy.Shrago@acgov.org](mailto:Amy.Shrago@acgov.org)