

**Report from Community Engagement Subcommittee**  
Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness  
January 21, 2020

**Background**

Along with the charge to engage in community engagement, the City Council directed this body, before our first meeting, in July of 2019, to “Explore the ... Wisdom Council (WC) process.” Meetings with former and current City staff led WC advocates to become involved in CACH meetings and a DF conducted by such advocates helped to create our subcommittee format, moving our work forward.

**Recent Developments**

While there was an initial proposal to sunset this subcommittee, Stoney Brook and Megan Bunch (staff) have agreed to stay on. Working with the Safe Sleeping and Camping subcommittee, specifically focused engagement meetings are in planning for the business community at this time.

The Community Listening Forum (already approved by the CACH) will proceed with at least one CACH member (Ami Chen Mills-Naim) serving as a volunteer convener and facilitator for this meeting. Date and location are to be determined and in process.

As of our last CACH meeting, three CACH members participated in a Dynamic Facilitation (DF) over two days (four hours each) on the homelessness issue at the De Anza Mobile Home Park community room. Members of the community who normally would not be engaged with one another were in attendance.

The DF included a member of the Capitola City Council and former members of the Santa Cruz City Council, as well as at least one a service provider, and at least one member of the group Take Back Santa Cruz. In the end, a “unified statement” was created that included the formation of a citizen-led (*non-government initiated*) committee that would later transition into a coalition of individuals and stakeholders that could meet on an ongoing basis without formal membership--and with DF facilitation--that would also serve as

clearinghouse for community resources and volunteerism toward homelessness, as well as a potential citizen/resident lobbying body to the Council and County Board of Supervisors.

Finally, one CACH member participated in a two-day training led by Wisdom Council Founder Jim Rough in Watsonville that included Capitola and Watsonville City Council members.

Research into similar citizen processes has revealed costs of up to \$100,000 (Citizen Juries).

### **Recommendations**

#### **Resolved:**

Recommended: That the Santa Cruz City Council launch a pilot of the Wisdom Council process around the issue of homelessness in both the City and City County.

Cost: up to \$10,000

#### **Resolved:**

Recommended: That the City engage in a *pro-active* process around community engagement, before Council decisions around location and safe sleeping sites are made. That the Council budget an adequate portion of the new City Homelessness Coordinator's time to community outreach and engagement. Roughly 20 hours per week over a six-week (combined or intermittent) period, as proposals for siting possible camping sites, safe sleeping programs, shelters and/or services come forward from the CACH and/or the Council over the course of the year as appropriate as per input from CACH and city staff. If this hire is not complete (or if staff hours are otherwise engaged) when engagement is necessary, we recommend allocating up to \$10,000 toward public engagement services via a private contractor or consultant.

Cost: up to \$10,000

## Notes from the Dynamic Facilitation on Homelessness

The DF that occurred over the last weekend on the topic of homelessness, was actually, a “community engagement” and should be considered as such by the CACH. Notable outcomes from this meeting include the following:

- Many community members are frustrated by a lack of action on the issue, and many—even those who have been seen in the past as “anti-homeless”—would like to see some kind of housing as well as many services available in our community, particularly drug and alcohol treatment. Many are willing to become engaged as volunteers, fundraisers and supporters of those experiencing homelessness.
- Those who advocate for the house-less community have a tremendous fear of overarching federal/national policies trending toward dehumanization and concentration of wealth that they believe threaten the human rights and Constitutional liberties of those without housing (as well as creating a housing shortage). There is a fear that current plans are to incarcerate or intern people experiencing homelessness. These fears, along with what is seen as a local parallel voice in our community, create a feeling of needing to rebel against the current sense of inaction and lack of adequate protection from the City and/or County, to organize themselves and defend and promote their rights.
- *There is a very negative view of **tents**, in particular, and yet, an openness to campgrounds for the un-housed and communities similar to Dignity Village, as long as these *did not involve tents*, but rather tiny houses or other similar shelters. Ideas were put forward to create such communities and include gardens, libraries, services and community involvement. The idea of incorporating **permaculture gardens** and enlisting some of the un-housed to help grow food for our community in light of possible coming food instability was well received. Actual models and plans were put forward by members of the group.*
- Advocates feel strongly that those without homes should be viewed as capable, whole human beings who can self-organize and self-manage campgrounds. Others would like to see mixed management.

- There is confusion about the real make up of the current un-housed population in terms of mental health and drug and alcohol issues. Some doubt the accuracy of the Point in Time surveys.

**Here is the summary write up from Jim Rough (not "Unified Statement," but a summary of notes):**

1 We recognize that the homeless issue is not going away. The problem arises from national, as well as local priorities and policies. And the situation is getting worse, if anything, in our area.

2 With this understanding, the typical refrain "Housing First" is possibly misleading. That might work in other areas of the country, but here we think it's more important to start with meeting people's immediate needs ... showers, storage, safety, meals, etc. And to serve people in a "Progression of Needs."

3 This diverse group has shown that with Dynamic Facilitation, it can work together in a collaborative spirit. So we shall continue meeting, tentatively as the "Homelessness Advocacy Committee." Participants from these sessions will be co-hosts, first meeting among themselves to get more organized. But then we'll invite others into building coalition.

4 We intend (as one activity) to help advocate for The Warming Center... to help shift people's understandings about this immediate needs issue and to influence policy. We anticipate supporting that enterprise as one aspect of our starting point.

5 Angela Blessing will convene the initial meetings with Merit Herman helping to provide a location for the meetings.

6 While the "progression of needs" starts with serving immediate needs, we expect to pursue housing options as well. First, we should emphasize adapting and promoting what already exists ... junior ADU's, SRO's, remodeling garages, etc. This approach is far cheaper than other options, but often needs changes to zoning regulations.

7 We also intend to support pilot projects aimed at community-oriented and sustainability-oriented buildings, rather than suburban-traditional approaches ... e.g. permaculture villages, farm worker housing, pod villages, etc.

8 This citizen-inspired committee can achieve, provide for, or think through other important issues including: a) Creating a clearinghouse for members of the community to get involved and support the homeless b) Assessing the composition of the homeless population; learning their stories, providing for “wrap-around-housing” options, building the awareness that many homeless are already part of our community, longtime residents, etc. c) Advocating for appropriate legislative changes d) Involving the whole community in building the “public will” and social capital ... possibly through use of the Wisdom Council Process.

**Idea for CACH Consideration (submitted only by Ami Chen Mills-Naim):**

That the City Council draft a statement to be adopted as City legislation that the City shall protect the Constitutional and human rights of individuals experiencing homelessness, and not subject such individuals, having committed no punishable crimes, to enforced incarceration nor interment, and protect their rights to free association and liberty of movement, while at the same time designing and providing housing and services that respect the inherent dignity and worth, as well as capacity for transformative change and positive social contributions, of all individuals residing in our City, thereby encouraging robust voluntary participation in such programs.

*Thank you for your kind attention!*