County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors
Agenda Item Submittal
From: County Administrative Office
(831) 454-2100

Meeting Date: February 27, 2018

Recommended Action(s):

1) Accept and file report on establishing housing navigation policies and procedures that explain voucher portability and provide information on the length of time it takes to secure subsidized housing in Santa Cruz, as recommended by Supervisor Coonerty.

2) Accept and file report on County of Santa Cruz funding of homeless services.

Executive Summary

On January 23, 2018 a report was provided to the Board regarding homeless policy considerations. This report is responsive to direction from Supervisor Coonerty at the January 23, 2018 Board of Supervisors Meeting.

Background

On November 14, 2017, the Board received the 2017 Homelessness Report that provided an update and overview of the demographics of people facing homelessness in the County, the public costs of homelessness, community impacts, and specific recommendations and updates on significant initiatives. Since that report, the Board has received reports on various follow-up questions related to homelessness and provided specific direction that included a request for total FY 17-18 Board-approved homelessness funding, a list of all the locally-funded assistance programs, including the number of people expected to be housed, development of policies and procedures for Housing Navigators to explain voucher portability and provision of information on the length of time it takes to secure subsidized housing in Santa Cruz and at least three other communities. This memo is responsive to that request.

Analysis

Housing Navigation
Across the County of Santa Cruz, there are approximately ten Housing Navigators working for several different agencies. Housing Navigators have the shared goal of addressing the many barriers their clients face when trying to access housing and finding permanent housing solutions for their clients. The populations served varies by agency and includes chronically homeless, families, veterans, and HIV clients. Funding sources for the Housing Navigator positions include CDBG, Veterans Administration,

County CORE (General Fund), CalWORKs, Emergency Solutions Grants, and other State or Federal funding.

Information on Length of Search Time for Voucher Holders: Staff compared length of search time of Santa Cruz County to our four neighboring counties: San Benito, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Monterey. The following table shows the poverty rate, average length of search time where available, rental vacancy rate, and median gross rent for Santa Cruz and our four neighboring counties. Poverty rate is included because HUD promotes the advantages of moving into a lower poverty neighborhood, including increased safety, improved schools for children, proximity to jobs or job opportunities, better quality housing, more responsive landlords, improved access to transportation, day care, and other neighborhood services.

County	Poverty Rate	Average # of Days to Find a Rental Unit	Rental Vacancy Rate	Median Gross Rent
San Benito County	10.8%	N/A*	1.3%	$1,316
City of Hollister	11.9%	86	N/A	N/A
City of San Juan Bautista	7.5%		N/A	N/A
Santa Cruz County	*15.1%*	*76*	*1.9%*	*$1,482*
San Mateo County	7.7%	109	2.6%	$1,830
Santa Clara County	9.3%	N/A†	2.8%	$1,813
Monterey County	16.1%	N/A†	4.2%	$1,275

* San Benito County does not have a Housing Authority. The Housing Authority of the County of Santa Cruz administers the Section 8 program for the Cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista which are counted together.
†Data not available as of 2/14/18
Poverty Rate, Rental Vacancy Rate, and Median Gross Rent Source: American FactFinder (2012-2016); the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Differing Program Rules and Data Collection Methods Limit Data Comparability and Value.
Average length of search data is not routinely collected by HUD and has been difficult to obtain from other communities. The Housing Authority advised that it is measured differently by different agencies and may reflect different voucher search time policies. Staff was able to obtain average search time for Santa Cruz (76 days), and for two of our four neighboring counties: San Benito County and San Mateo County, with average search times of 86 days and 109 days respectively. Given the potential differing methodologies and program designs, the comparability of this data is limited. Further, as explained by the Housing Authority, for its own metric, the data does not reflect the experience of voucher holders who exit the program before ever securing housing as a result of limited number of landlords that accept vouchers. Effectively, this measure only captures an average number of days for those clients that succeed; not those who fail. Staff will continue in their effort to identify comparable program metrics to inform

program design and implementation.

Progress Towards Incorporating Voucher Portability Information into Housing Navigation Policies and Practices

Historically, Housing Navigators have operated independently and without any unifying policies or procedures. However, the Homeless Action Partnership (HAP) recently convened a new Housing Navigation Collaborative through the All-In Landlord Partnership with the goals of developing best practices, establishing a real-time landlord database, and creating unified messaging that can assist with recruiting new landlords. The collaborative is in the process of developing and implementing Housing Navigation Best Practices, to be used as a minimum standard by all agencies, service providers and volunteers who assist those who are experiencing homelessness in their search for housing. The County has requested that the collaborative include information regarding voucher portability in their Best Practices, which have been drafted and will be taken to the HAP for consideration and approval at their next meeting. Responsive to the County's request, the Best Practices draft includes the following regarding voucher portability:
   1. "*Navigators provide information on local housing search and voucher portability.*"
   2. Suggested documents for Participant Housing Packet includes "*If using Section 8 voucher, information sheet on voucher portability.*"

The Housing Authority has indicated in a memo (see Attachment 1) that "*voucher portability is sufficiently complicated that we wish to remain the primary source of information for voucher holders.*" In order to support the ability of Housing Navigators to provide accurate information, the Housing Authority has offered to provide training for the Housing Navigator Collaborative that includes all of the information they need to assist clients in successfully leasing up with their voucher, including information about portability. Clients wishing to explore portability will be referred to the Housing Authority.

A draft information sheet for the Housing Navigators to provide to voucher holders regarding poverty rate, length of search, rental vacancy rate and median gross rents is provided as Attachment 2 and includes the Housing Authority Transfer Q&A which provides information about porting vouchers. This document is intended for inclusion in the Participant Housing Packet listed in the Housing Navigation Best Practices.

<u>Homeless Services Funding</u>

Total Investment: The County's 2017-18 Adopted Budget includes $9.13 million in Programs and Services Specifically Targeted to Homelessness. County departments have provided the following information on their total FY 2017-18 funding for homeless programs and services as discussed below.

Entitlement Benefits provided to People Experiencing Homelessness are Excluded. There are numerous other supports available to the homeless population, including benefits such as General Assistance, CalWORKS, CalFresh, and Medi-Cal and Behavioral Health services. Except for CalWORKS benefits that are specifically targeted to assist homeless families, these entitlement benefits are not included in this analysis. There are challenges with estimating the portion of these total expenditures that serve the homeless population due to data limitations.

County Health and Human Services for the Homeless: As a County, our primary role related to homelessness is the provision of health and social services that (1) prevent homelessness, (2) reduce the length and severity of homelessness by providing supportive, stabilizing services, and (3) assist people in obtaining permanent housing. County homelessness funding can be broadly categorized in two areas:

- Shelter and Housing: emergency shelter, winter shelter, sober living environments, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing.
- Supportive and Stabilizing Services: health services, homelessness prevention, eviction prevention, employment training, financial education, mail services, and legal services, housing navigation, case management, rapid rehousing, security deposits, rental subsidies.

Attachment 3 provides a detailed list of services provided, funded amounts, service level targets, and source of funding. It is difficult to cleanly separate County funded programs into these two categories since some programs provide services in more than one category. Staff has, however, sorted them based upon the core services as summarized below:

Category	Amount Funded
Shelter and Housing	$1,937,663
Supportive and Stabilizing Services	$7,195,809
Total	**$9,133,472**

Funded Programs' Data Collection Focuses on Service Capacity, Not Necessarily Long- term Outcomes. Compilation of county funded programs provided insight into what kind of programmatic data is being generated in terms of service capacity and outcomes. Existing contracts identify target populations to be served or units of service to be provided but generally do not measure how many clients are to be permanently housed. As the County continues to develop outcomes-driven contracting processes, and as the Coordinated Entry System is implemented by County departments and community partners, it will be possible to get an accurate measurement of housing referrals and placement outcomes for which data is not currently available.

Shelter and Housing: The County's FY 17- $1.9 million investment in shelter and housing provides an array of housing capacity as dedicated beds, bed nights of shelter, and housing units. The County's current investment in shelter and housing for the homeless addresses maintenance of current housing supply, both emergency and permanent, but does not address the critically needed increase in affordable housing stock. The County has contributed to the financing of various affordable housing development projects with units targeting homelessness in years past. Below is a summary of the County-funded shelter and housing capacity provided:
- Beds:
  - 32 Emergency Shelter
  - 6 Transitional Housing
- Bed Nights:

- o 23,143 Emergency Shelter, Winter Shelter, and Warming Center*
  - o 5,200 Sober Living Environment (SLE)
- Housing Units:
  - o 101 Permanent Supportive
  - o 11 Sober Living Environment Housing units
- Emergency shelter for
  - o 31 families,
  - o 15 individuals
  - o 105 households.

Approximately 50% of Winter Shelter costs are funded by the County, with the balance of cost shared by the Cities. Bed nights reported here reflect the total bed nights available. The chart provided as Attachment 3 reflects the County's contribution towards these bed nights.

At present, all of the County-funded permanent supportive housing units are filled and have no anticipated vacancies.

Supportive and Stabilizing Services: The County provides $7.2 million in funding for supportive and stabilizing services for over 2,300 homeless families, individuals, or households. Services in this category are generally intended to (1) prevent people from becoming homeless or (2) assist them if they do become homeless through some combination of the following: health services, eviction prevention services, rental assistance or subsidies, rapid rehousing, employment training, transportation, financial and legal education/assistance, housing navigation, and housing retention case management.   Contracts in this category do not generally have "secured housing" as a stated outcome but are designed to provide an array of services to a targeted number of families, individuals, or households, as summarized in the following table.

Supportive/Stabilizing Services	Families Targeted	Individuals Targeted	Households Targeted	Total
Employment-Related Assistance		500		500
Health Services		1,200		1,200
Rapid Rehousing	80			80
Other Services*	117	139	295	551
Total	197	1,839	295	2,331
* Prevention, rental subsidies, housing navigation, case management, legal/financial assistance				

Current Work to Improve Service Delivery and Coordination and Address Critical Gaps. The County has multiple efforts underway to increase the coordination and effectiveness of county delivered services to people experiencing homelessness and associated operational policy decisions; to improve the regional governance structure and regional system performance; and to address immediate, critical service area gaps through partnerships. These efforts include:

- Establishment of the County's interdepartmental homeless policy and operational groups to ensure county functions and services are integrated and aligned, and larger regional efforts are supported. Charter and work program for the groups are in development.
- Continue to support improvements to the HAP in the role of Lead Agency for County-wide Homeless Continuum of Care securing around $2.8 Million per year through HUD and the Emergency Solutions Grant.
- Expanding capacity to provide education and training services for those experiencing homelessness through CalFresh funding through partnerships with city jurisdictions and community organizations.
- Proactive support of HAP's implementation of the Smart Path Coordinated Entry System to (1) facilitate effective assessment of the needs of those experiencing homelessness; (2) prioritize access to the region's limited supply of shelter and housing resources; and (3) create an integrated data set documenting the levels of need within the homeless population and housing outcomes.
- Partnering with City of Santa Cruz, City of Watsonville, and other community partners to stand up 24/7 navigation centers including day services and low barrier shelters in the Santa Cruz and Watsonville areas.
- Supporting the City of Santa Cruz effort to establish a managed campground alternative to the encampment on the Benchlands.
- Developing specific strategies to address homelessness in the youth and young adult populations utilizing $2.2 M Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project funding from HUD through the HAP.
- Researching feasibility of emergency bridge housing pilot projects in collaboration with Planning Department.
- Leading regional effort to improve homeless governance model to guide policy, implementation priorities, and resource decisions.

Collectively, these efforts will improve the County and the region's capacity to respond to the critical issue of homelessness in the community through improved service delivery that achieves desired outcomes by resolving root causes, more robust systems for governance and for data collection to inform resource investment decisions and program design, implementation of population specific strategies for better outcomes, and creation of additional emergency bridge housing resources.

Submitted by:
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Recommended by:
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Attachments:

a   Housing Authority Memo (Attachment 1)
b   Housing Navigator Handout (Attachment 2)
c   2017-18 Homelessness Funding (Attachment 3)