



Affordable housing would address cause of homelessness

Homelessness has become a part of our identity in Sacramento. It has been etched into our collective psyche now more than ever, and we can no longer ignore the problem.

Collectively, we can change the landscape of Sacramento by building homes for those who lack shelter.



Tent cities and homelessness have become a part of Sacramento's identity, and it's a problem that can no longer be ignored.

Photo credit: Randall Benton-The Sacramento Bee

In 2011, Mutual Housing California opened Mutual Housing at the Highlands, where permanent housing for formerly homeless individuals is combined with supportive services.

In this supportive housing community, adults who have spent years living on the river or on the streets of Sacramento, many with serious disabling conditions, now have a permanent place to call home – not just for the night or while they wait for other housing, or until someday when they are cycled back into unstable housing or homelessness.

Lutheran Social Services, partnering with Turning Point and WellSpace, provides critical services that meet individual needs, such as helping to maintain an apartment, getting along with difficult neighbors as well as not being that difficult neighbor, getting to medical appointments and meeting life goals, such as reuniting with children and grandchildren.

Many services are geared toward building community: development of a resident council, community service opportunities, holiday celebrations and barbecues.

One of the key successes of a permanent supportive housing community is in providing housing stability to people who do not have it. Without the availability of long-term affordable housing, our successful residents risk becoming homeless again.

Numerous studies nationwide show that permanent supportive housing – though seemingly more expensive – actually reduces costs.

Mutual Housing California develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

continued on back

Instead of cycling chronically homeless people through jails, emergency rooms, shelters and detox centers, and instead of spending money on police and fire personnel dealing with homelessness and the public health conditions that come from people living outdoors, those same people have homes with the services they need.

Unfortunately, Sacramento has a dire shortage of affordable housing.

According to analysis by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, when viewed through the lens of affordability, the Sacramento metropolitan area only has 18 rentals for every 100 families with extremely low incomes. This gives the Sacramento metropolitan area the sixth-largest affordability gap in the nation.

It is possible to provide housing and prevent homelessness for extremely low-income families. Mutual Housing is doing it every day in neighborhoods all over Sacramento.

Unfortunately, state and federal funding for affordable housing is at historic lows. This makes it incumbent upon all of us to urge our local public officials to:

- Think creatively about addressing immediate needs of the homeless in the short term, while at the same time initiating policies to dramatically increase the local supply of permanent supportive housing;

- Aggressively increase the resources available in local housing trust funds by identifying additional revenue sources;
- Designate a large portion of revenue previously headed for redevelopment to affordable housing;
- Reconsider the “fee-only” approach for inclusionary housing policies to increase the supply of affordable housing and ensure diverse neighborhoods. Dedicate land for affordable housing in new growth areas. A portion of each publicly supported affordable housing development should house extremely low-income people.
- Protect the remaining single-room-occupancy hotels and their low-income residents.

It is imperative to address homelessness at its root cause – lack of affordable homes – even as we pursue measures to address the immediate needs of those who struggle to live without homes in our community.

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