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COUNTY AND CITY ANNOUNCE ACTION PLAN FOR HOMELESSNESS

Santa Cruz (February 8, 2019) – The County and City of Santa Cruz have announced a joint emergency effort to address the local homelessness crisis.

Working collaboratively, City and County staff have developed a proposal to increase immediate and year-round shelter capacity, including for vulnerable populations such as single women and families; to explore secure areas for safe overnight parking for RVs and/or cars; to increase existing services such as showers, health care, storage, and warming facilities; and to mitigate unsanctioned outdoor encampments posing a risk to public health and safety.

The plan is subject to review and acceptance by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and approval by Santa Cruz City Council. Both bodies will consider the proposal at their February 12th meetings, with the County meeting at 9 a.m. and the City Council at 7 p.m.

To meet immediate shelter needs, City and County staff are proposing augmenting existing shelter capacity at the VFW Post 7263 in Live Oak, faith-based sheltering programs, and Warming Center Program, and reestablishing capacity at the Salvation Army Santa Cruz Corps Community Center on Laurel Street and the 1220 River Street parcel. The Paul Lee Loft in Santa Cruz and Salvation Army in Watsonville provide additional shelter, and staff will continue working to identify additional sites as needed.

The plan includes an updated mitigation plan for the homeless encampment at the intersection of Highway 1 and River Street in Santa Cruz to ensure public health and safety, including increased security presence and increased health and services delivery. Under the proposal, the encampment would be abated by March 15, 2019, at which time additional shelter capacity is expected to be online.

In addition to the emergency plan noted above, the County and City also propose to work with not-for-profit community partners to provide year-round, 24/7 shelter sufficient for at least 100 people, to be operational by July 1, 2019. Within 60 days, the City and County will determine if there is a suitable site and operator to meet the July deadline and if so, an actionable plan would be proposed by April 30, 2019.

The activities are being funded by emergency state funds to address homeless through the Homeless Emergency Aid Program and Homeless Mentally Ill Outreach and Treatment Program. The Homeless Action Partnership recently approved emergency funding to address immediate health, safety and shelter needs, and the proposal represents the first of several measures to address homelessness through emergency services and shelter by June 2021. The County and cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville have jointly issued a request for proposals to provide additional shelter and programs, with responses due Feb. 22, 2019, as well as a Letter of Interest for emergency shelter, with projects to be implemented by March 15.

Homelessness in Santa Cruz County has reached a crisis point. The rate of unsheltered homeless individuals in Santa Cruz County is among the highest in the country, with 80 percent having no access to shelter, decreasing outcomes for homeless individuals and increasing community impacts from homelessness. The rate lags behind San Francisco (58 percent), Seattle (52 percent), Houston (32 percent), Miami-Dade (23 percent), New York (5 percent) and most metro areas. Locally, 98 percent of homeless unaccompanied minors are unsheltered.

Across California, 134,000 individuals are homeless, representing a quarter of the homeless population in the U.S. In Santa Cruz County, local jurisdictions and nonprofits have a demonstrated track record of collaboration to reduce family homelessness, veteran homelessness, youth homelessness and chronic homelessness.

To read more about local efforts to reduce homelessness, the countywide strategic plan to address homelessness, “All In: Toward a Home for Every County Resident,” is [available here](#).

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