

Triaging Sonoma County transient and homeless problems and needs

Sadly we are experiencing a recent major increase in homeless, substance abuse and seriously mentally ill people at large within the City of Sebastopol and at the borders with county properties, with encampments in fire prone areas, chop shops and stolen property hoarding in the undergrowth just west of Tomodachi Park and increased homeless camping within city limits including in the town square.

As we are all aware the Joe Rodota Trail is once again closed due to transient encampments, with Santa Rosa and other areas of the county overwhelmed with homeless.

This is a rapidly deteriorating situation and the county, despite spending astonishing amounts on county homeless services appears to be as disorganized as ever, with the various 'non profit' businesses consuming huge amounts to provide services with little oversight, key performance indicators or results.

The gigantic Catholic Charities independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization will soon open huge \$43 million 'one-stop homeless services center' in the historic St. Rose neighborhood in downtown Santa Rosa. Critics have said there are not enough shelter beds and sobriety treatment facilities, that the facility is primarily a homeless processing center and that the more transients who arrive will result in larger grants and funding flowing to the organization.

Locally the City of Sebastopol attempted to ram through a 'safe parking' area on flood prone city land adjacent to the community center during the Thanksgiving holidays last year but were thwarted by legal constraints by the Greenacre group home. Through bureaucratic slight of hand St Vincent De Paul were able to quickly buy the old Amerigas site before the end of last year with virtually no time for communication with local homeowners or business owners before demolishing buildings, leasing the land to

'Sonoma Applied Village Services' who immediately moved transient trailers and vehicles onto the safe parking site.

The immediate neighborhood was understandably deeply unhappy but the council and non profits reality distortion field was able to project a 'compassionate' charming image of their actions aided by media friends. A self congratulatory press event 'town hall' with no participation by local renters, home owners or businesses, complete with mawkish music and earnest philosophical rambling and conversations with formerly 'unhoused' village' residents by Councillor Rich was the icing on this cake.

('A Town Hall' is supposed to be a public forum at which a politician or public official answers questions from members of the public, not a promotional film exercise)

The council did permit written questions before the event and have published responses to some of them [here](#) (albeit with changed wording of some questions).

We are at a difficult societal crossroads with a rapidly darkening economy, higher costs, significant drops in local sales tax (not least due to the only local hotel being purchased by the county for homeless housing, who then poured well over 3 million in 'services' for 40 local 'at risk from Covid' homeless) and a very delicate retail and hospitality environment.

Council is going to have to make some future hard decisions on whether they are representing transients (who understandably choose to live in our pleasant climate and resources) or the local citizens who pay taxes for the services a local municipality is expected to provide as their part of the social contract.

At the moment the City of Sebastopol council have made it clear they are far more interested in representing and supporting a small subset of transients who they now consider city residents, working hard to set up a 'village' within a city while avoiding any honest interactions with local

residents and local businesses.

The cosy 'Quarterly Report SAVS Contract with the City of Sebastopol for Horizon Shine Village' report (complete with Snoopy cartoons) to be discussed at tonight's council meeting and the recent 'town hall' zoom for citizens about the 'unhoused did not touch on any of the broader societal issues, or the fact that working families are close to being 'unhoused'.

Many of us are individually doing our part to help the disadvantaged through volunteer work, but councillors Rich & Glass appear to have decided to volunteer our city resources for their personal goals. It would be far more appropriate to participate as private citizens in these projects while running the city bureaucracy as councillors.

As more transients appear locally, camping in the carpark opposite the former Amerigas site and sleeping by the post office and on the town square it is now time for council to refocus on the broader problem and not just their boutique city campsite partners, working closely with the county to triage homeless to appropriate facilities or there will be a further degradation of local quality of life.

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