



NEWS RELEASE
City of Chico
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 21, 2020

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*****MEDIA ALERT*****

UPDATES FROM THE CITY OF CHICO

(Chico, CA – December 21, 2020) The City would like to provide an update on the continuing efforts to support alternatives to additional sheltering for persons experiencing homelessness.

City staff, in coordination with the staff of the True North Housing Alliance, the County of Butte and Safe Space Winter Shelter, identified a viable building that could efficiently serve as a short-term emergency shelter. The facility had interior sprinklers, was large enough to accommodate between 90-100 persons, with appropriate COVID spacing, and had transportation from the area to other destinations in the city. As a key and vital emergency shelter provider within the city, True North was awarded funding to open a navigation center with emergency shelter beds, however, the City of Chico learned that a decision by the True North Housing Alliance was made to forego opening a new navigation center/emergency shelter given the current pandemic. The Board of Directors felt it would be irresponsible for the organization to put both staff and program participants in harms way given the virus and its ability to spread quickly in congregate settings.

Additionally, the City was made aware that Safe Space Winter Shelter also believes that it would not be prudent to open a congregate warming center or emergency shelter during the peak of COVID-19. With both of the City's primary emergency sheltering service providers hampered by COVID-19 constraints, the challenge of providing immediate sheltering needs remains extremely difficult.

Despite these ongoing challenges, City staff continues to work on an effort to potentially establish a location to accommodate camping for up to 40 tent sites and 30 single room occupancy/non congregate units at the current location of the Silver Dollar BMX track on Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway. The City has identified city-owned property due to its proximity to the Torres Shelter, but an easement from a neighboring property for secondary ingress/egress to better enable emergency vehicle access is desired. It is anticipated the controlling property interest will consider the City's request for such emergency access in January. Additionally, the City will need to complete the relocation of the Silver Dollar BMX, which many community members have voiced a desire to help support, but the City still needs to raise funds to complete the effort. If the City is successful in readying and utilizing this space, it will still require a service provider to facilitate operations. This option would only serve to be a short-term solution and provide a place where people would feel safe and secure while being connected to other resources that could improve overall health outcomes. It is anticipated the City Council will give further direction on this potential option at their meeting of January 19th.

The City is not considering allowing camping at the new Chico Police Department records office (the old CHP facility). This facility is now the access point for the general public to obtain their records

from the police department and for police department operational considerations is not a viable location for a camping facility. However, the City continues to offer a warming center, when the temperature dictates such, to those who may need a respite from the colder weather. Although the warming tent was made available this past week, only seven (7) individuals took advantage of the opportunity, nightly.

The City has explored numerous other options/project sites in partnership with True North Housing Alliance, Safe Space Winter Shelter, and other providers, including, but not limited to the Walgreens facility on East/Esplanade; the Armory; the former Kmart building; buildings on Convair, Fortress, Park Avenue, Fair Street, and Humboldt; city buildings and parcels; and several other vacant lots throughout the city. Even when a project site proves viable for emergency shelter or a legal camping environment, service provider capacity is extremely lean to bring the alternative to fruition. Regardless of the continuing challenges, the City will continue to work with our community service providers, the County of Butte and others to work toward viable solutions.

For media inquiries, please contact Suzi Kochems, Homeless Solutions Coordinator, at (530) 228-7811 or Lynda Gizzi, Public Information Officer, at (530) 896-7204.

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