

CITY OF SUNNYVALE

The Heart of Silicon Valley

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Office of the City Manager

May 30, 2014

Ky G. Le
Director of Homeless Systems
Office of the County Executive
County Government Center, East Wing
70 West Hedding Street
San Jose, CA 95110

Dear Mr. Le:

Thank you for your letter dated May 15, 2014 (attached) regarding "Replacement Facilities for the North County Cold Weather Shelter Program". While I have attempted below to address the specific questions posed by your letter, a bit of context in advance is warranted. The City (primarily Housing staff) has historically been and continues to be an active participant in and supporter of county-wide efforts to end and prevent homelessness through both the county-wide CDBG coordinator's group and the Continuum of Care (CoC, formerly known as the Collaborative on Homeless Issues). Over the past several years, the City has realigned its local efforts to address homelessness with the "Housing First" approaches recommended by Destination Home and the CoC, led in large part by the County. These approaches involve a transition away from shelters, which have been proven through many years of national data analysis led by HUD and various research institutions not to be effective in ending homelessness for shelter users. Instead, the Housing First approach aims to assist every homeless person obtain standard rental housing (or transitional housing if needed) within 30-60 days of becoming homeless or first approaching the service provider. Outcomes from this approach have proven much more beneficial to the individual or family as well as to the local community.

For decades, the Sunnyvale Armory – leased to the National Guard by the City, and in turn subleased by the National Guard to the County – served as an emergency cold weather shelter for Northern Santa Clara County. When it became clear to the City that the National Guard did not intend to continue leasing this site for an Armory, and in support of the County's strategy to focus less on shelters and more on permanent housing, the City of Sunnyvale sought to repurpose the property in question. The site remains dedicated to helping solve the problem of homelessness in the County, but does so in a manner consistent with the County's revised strategy (see details under Question 3 below).

As you also know, Sunnyvale's Vice Mayor, Jim Davis, has been at the forefront of an informal collection of regional leaders attempting to find at least a temporary cold weather shelter for area homeless this winter, to fill the void left by the closure of the Sunnyvale Armory.

Lastly, on May 22, 2014, during a Budget Workshop in preparation for adopting its next two-year budget, Sunnyvale's City Council discussed the issue of homelessness and directed staff to take two actions:

- Identify for Council the value of the subsidy provided by the City for operation of the homeless shelter at the Sunnyvale Armory in recent years so that Council can consider including this amount as a contribution toward the County's efforts to establish a cold weather shelter to serve Northern Santa Clara County (see Question 1.c. below), and
- Identify issues associated with the concept of allowing Sunnyvale's Community Center gymnasium to serve as a temporary cold weather shelter for four months this coming winter.

With the foregoing background in mind, answers to your specific questions are as follows:

1. Cold Weather Shelter Program

- a. Does your city own, lease or operate any facilities – regardless of capacity – that could be used as emergency shelter during the cold weather months? For example, could any of the facilities at the Sunnyvale Community Center be used as emergency shelter?**

Answer: Yes. There are numerous City facilities (such as park buildings and the Community Center) located throughout Sunnyvale that could be considered for use as emergency shelter during cold weather months. However, there are also a large number of policy issues and operational impacts that should be addressed as a part of that deliberation. Whether or not any of these facilities should be repurposed – either temporarily or permanently – for use as a cold weather shelter is a policy question only City Council can answer. As previously mentioned, City Council has already asked staff to explore issues related to the Community Center's gymnasium for this purpose, and staff is currently working on that task. I invite you to tour the gymnasium with City staff in the near future, and to help us identify any issues you might have as regards use of that specific site as a possible temporary cold weather shelter this coming winter. It would also be important for us to understand the County's planned timetable for any such operation – i.e., by what date would City Council need to take formal action to authorize such a use in order for the County to be able to implement a cold weather shelter at this location? Ideally, staff would include this information when responding to Council's direction above.

- b. Does your city own or lease any land that could accommodate temporary or modular structures that could be used for emergency shelter during the cold weather months?**

Answer: There are both City and County lands in Sunnyvale worth considering; but without knowledge of the County's operating model (no minimum acreage or guidelines were provided), it is difficult to say for sure. Staff has provided the County with a listing of possible City properties (see City Owned Properties Attachment), and would be happy to tour them with County representatives should you wish to do so.

- c. Does your city have any funding that could be used to establish and/or support the operation of an emergency shelter during the cold weather months?

Answer: Sunnyvale's City Council has already indicated an interest in providing the same level of support for a cold weather shelter as it has provided in past years. There is currently \$15,217 earmarked for this purpose in the coming fiscal year. Those funds are in the form of an "Outside Group Funding" grant from the City of Sunnyvale to HomeFirst of Santa Clara County, specifically for the provision of services to the homeless. This is the same agency with which the County has contracted for many years to operate the Sunnyvale Armory.

2. Inclement Weather Program

If your city is unable to support a cold weather shelter program, would you please consider the questions that are stated above as they relate to warming shelters. The County is considering ways to prevent cold weather injuries and death for unsheltered populations. While the CWSP operates during a specific season, during extremely severe weather (e.g., near-freezing temperatures) certain shelters could be activated.

Answer: Yes. Answers provided above apply as well to warming shelters.

- 3. Finally, are there any opportunities to establish new housing programs to serve homeless individuals and families? Ending and preventing homelessness are still priorities for the County. Increasing the supply of permanent supportive, transitional, rapid re-housing or homelessness prevention programs are important components of a comprehensive response to homelessness in North County.**

Answer: Yes. The City has historically funded, and continues to fund, a number of housing projects and programs that help homeless people secure housing, supportive services, referrals, case management, and food, including various capital projects and programs of HomeFirst SCC, Bill Wilson Center, Maitri, the YWCA's domestic violence programs and shelters, and Momentum for Mental Health, Sunnyvale Community Services, and West Valley Community Services, among others.

The current development of the old Armory site by MidPen Housing and Catholic Charities is an excellent example of this. This project will provide 115 units of permanent, supportive rental housing for very low and extremely low income families, of which 47 will be reserved for homeless applicants (plus two units for onsite property managers). All of the 47 homeless units will be filled with homeless clients referred directly from the County (MHSA and CoC programs) or the County Housing Authority, and will receive operating subsidies from those two agencies to ensure that the rents are affordable to the homeless clients, based on the project-based voucher awards already committed by the County CoC, MHSA, and the Housing Authority.

In addition, the City has partnered with the County for two years now on a transitional/rapid rehousing program, through a revenue sharing agreement with the County Mental Health Department executed in early 2012, to operate a **Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA)** Program for homeless residents of Sunnyvale, funded with the City's HOME grant. This transitional housing program provides rental assistance vouchers, similar to a Section 8 voucher, for approximately 15-20 formerly homeless households each year for a term of up to two years per household, at which point the clients are expected to be able to pay rent on their

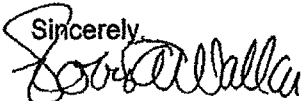
own. City Housing staff is currently working directly with your office to finalize an agreement to continue operating this program for the next two fiscal years, with an additional two years' worth of City HOME funds (approximately \$500,000 from the City's 2013 and 2014 HOME grants). For a number of years, the City has been encouraging other local jurisdictions to contribute their own local funding to this type of program so this could be expanded to be a county-wide program. As far as we are aware, the only other jurisdiction, other than the County and Sunnyvale, currently funding a TBRA transitional housing program is San Jose. We encourage you to continue asking other cities to follow Sunnyvale's example and contribute funding to such a program.

An additional program the City has been providing to the local homeless community for the past two years is the "WorkFirst Sunnyvale" program, implemented by a partnership including Sunnyvale Community Services, Downtown Streets Team, and more recently NOVA. This program provides volunteer work experience, supportive services, job search skills training, and career development counseling to homeless and at-risk individuals who are otherwise able to regain employment. The program also supports the clients of the TBRA program by helping them increase their earned incomes during the two-year period of rental assistance, so that they will be able to rent on their own at the end of the assistance term. The City provided more than \$220,000 in CDBG funding for this program in FY 2012/13 and FY 2013/14, and for FY 2014/15, the City has awarded the program a grant of \$322,000. This program is very crucial to the success of the TBRA program, and has effectively ended homelessness for a number of participating clients already. We encourage the County and other cities to take advantage of the very successful model Sunnyvale has established, and replicate this program at either a county-wide level or in additional cities.

The City intends to continue working with the County and other local jurisdictions on establishing new programs to end or prevent homelessness. As you are aware, the City has already convened several meetings for county-wide staff to discuss this topic in the last two years, primarily to develop plans for programs and/or facilities to offset the possible impacts of the closure of the North County shelter.

Please contact me as soon as possible if you wish to follow up on any of these issues. Clearly, the sooner the County can outline more specifically its plans and timelines for establishing a cold weather shelter to replace the old Armory building, the better City staff will be able to present a clear picture for City Council to consider. Given the variety of issues that likely would need to be addressed in advance (breaking contracts with existing Community Center users; public notification and hearings; drafting of use agreements with the County; etc.), there is already a sense that we may be rushed to get something in place for this coming winter should Council wish to pursue this.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Walker
Interim City Manager

cc: Sunnyvale City Council
Deanna Santana, City Manager
Department Directors
Suzanne Ise, Housing Officer
Gary Graves, Chief Operating Officer, County of Santa Clara