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More Formerly Homeless San Diegans in Permanent Homes for the Holidays, Dozens from the Streets Now in Shelter

OPERATION SHELTER TO HOME CHANGING LIVES AND OFFERING RELIEF TO RESIDENTS LIVING ON CITY STREETS

SAN DIEGO – Just one week after Mayor Todd Gloria announced plans to extend operations of the temporary shelter at the San Diego Convention Center, the City of San Diego and the San Diego Housing Commission announced today that more than 165 San Diegans who previously experienced homelessness have moved from the Convention Center and other shelters into homes of their own, and dozens who had been living on the streets are now residing in the emergency shelter during the holiday season.

Over the past several weeks, teams from Operation Shelter to Home have worked to transition 165 individuals from the Convention Center, Father Joe's Villages' Paul Mirabile Center and People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) Connections Interim Housing Program to two hotels purchased and transformed into 332 new units of permanent housing with supportive services.

“Operation Shelter to Home is living up to its name by providing safe shelter to hundreds of San Diegans every night and finding them housing as quickly as possible,” Mayor Gloria said. “These moves opened up the ability to serve even more individuals and offer the same opportunity to connect them to resources and end their cycle of homelessness. San Diego’s pipeline to housing is working, and we’re going to keep going until every person has a place to call home.”

After extensive evaluations of 29 properties earlier this year, the City Council in October approved a proposal to purchase two hotels with furnished units, one in Mission Valley and one in Kearny Mesa. Combined, the two properties can accommodate as many as 400 individuals. Nearly half of the units are now occupied, and the Housing Commission is working with the two contracted service providers, PATH and Father Joe's Villages, to continue to move people into these new homes, with the intention of having all apartments filled by mid-January.

“The San Diego Housing Commission is pleased to welcome these new residents to their homes at these former hotel properties this holiday season and in the weeks to come,” SDHC President & CEO Richard C. Gentry said. “A collaborative effort made the unique opportunity to buy these properties possible, providing permanent homes with supportive services to help these individuals get back on their feet.”

Residents at the two properties have access to on-site supportive services from experienced service providers, Father Joe's Villages for the Kearny Mesa property and PATH for the Mission Valley property. Services include mental and behavioral health services, healthcare services, substance use services, case management, life skills training, education services, employment assistance and more.

"Every day, Father Joe's Villages is blessed to see the impact of housing and comprehensive services on the lives of those we serve, and we're grateful for the opportunity to help even more neighbors overcome homelessness through the community in Kearny Mesa and the Convention Center," said Deacon Jim Vargas, President and CEO of Father Joe's Villages. "I thank Mayor Todd Gloria, the City of San Diego, and the San Diego Housing Commission for this opportunity, as well as my staff for working tirelessly to support our neighbors during this challenging time. As we enter the coldest season of the year and COVID-19 continues to endanger the lives of San Diego's most vulnerable, it's more critical than ever that we provide the opportunity for neighbors to remain healthy and warm through the winter with access to comprehensive services that will help them end their homelessness for good."

"The timing of this move could not be better. We are ecstatic about moving our clients into their new homes just in time for the holidays," said Hanan Scrapper, Regional Director of PATH. "We greatly appreciate the partnership and support of former Mayor Faulconer, Mayor Gloria and the San Diego Housing Commission. Everyone deserves to ring in the New Year in the comfort of their own home, safe from both COVID-19 and the cold weather."

The purchase of the hotels is part of broader housing navigation strategies being deployed across the City's homeless system. Since the launch of Operation Shelter to Home in April, more than 1,050 individuals and 43 families have been connected to permanent and longer-term housing. Hundreds more have been matched to housing resources like vouchers or other rental subsidies.

This week, outreach teams brought 52 new people through the Operation Shelter to Home coordinated intake process, which includes evaluating their medical needs and determining the appropriate shelter option for them, and will continue welcoming new residents as resources permit.

In December, intakes to the Convention Center were temporarily put on hold due to an increase in positive cases at the shelter, which mirrored trends throughout the region. Intakes also were affected by the need to quickly conduct mass testing of current residents and staff, as well as move many shelter residents to their new permanent homes. The transition of those individuals opened up shelter capacity, to offer relief to more San Diegans experiencing homelessness on the streets.

Given the extra safety measures established as part of the shelter's intake process and the ongoing spike of cases in the broader San Diego community, new residents are being brought in using a scaled approach, under guidance of County Public Health staff located on-site. The City, the Housing Commission and service providers monitor the shelter population and staffing capacity daily, using that information to make available as many beds as possible to serve individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Though cases have been detected at the shelter, ongoing testing has shown a 5.9% positivity rate from this week's test results, compared with the region-wide rolling average rate of 9.7%.

BACKGROUND ON OPERATION SHELTER TO HOME

Operation Shelter to Home launched on April 1 by moving individuals already in shelters into the San Diego Convention Center to allow for proper physical distancing to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Because the

effects of the pandemic were creating staffing challenges at the City's various shelters, the program centralized staff in one place to ensure personnel could be efficient even with limited numbers.

One of the core missions of Operation Shelter to Home is to find permanent housing for individuals. So far, the agencies have housed more than 1,050 individuals and 43 families during the pandemic with more than 300 others in the process of finding a permanent or longer-term housing solution.

The emergency shelter is a collaborative effort between the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, San Diego Housing Commission, Regional Task Force on the Homeless, San Diego Convention Center and homeless service providers, Alpha Project and Father Joe's Villages.

Updates on the shelter are posted online at sandiego.gov/coronavirus/shelkertohome.

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