



Office of Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

A message from the City's Senior Advisor for Housing Solutions on behalf of the Office of Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer:

February 23, 2017

These are extraordinary times for the City of San Diego. Thanks to a lot of hard work and collaboration, our community has experienced some incredible growth and success. At the same time, homelessness is on everyone's mind. **As the Senior Advisor for Housing Solutions for the City of San Diego for the last four months, I can tell you first hand that many of our friends and neighbors need services, support and housing at a level we have never seen before.**

This is one of the most personal public policy issues that is discussed openly in the public domain, and that is why I'm reaching out today, to give you a more personal update. Along with Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer, the City Council, County Supervisors, the San Diego Housing Commission, the tireless members of the Regional Taskforce for the Homeless (RTFH) and our many regional partners, I know that success in addressing this challenge is only possible through endless discussions, coordination, communication and collaboration. To that end I plan to send periodic updates to let you know what we're working on. I ask for your feedback, input and participation and will look to you to be part of the solutions. Our neighbors and our communities are counting on us, and I know we won't let them down.

How Did We Get Here?

I am often asked why San Diego's streets are the home to so many people. The reasons are almost as numerous as the number of individuals. Over the course of several years, many policy changes have contributed to our current situation. Some include:

- The State's elimination of the redevelopment program in 2012 drastically cut a needed funding stream for construction of affordable housing. **Since the end of redevelopment, the City has lost out on \$187 million – and counting – that would have gone toward affordable housing projects.**
- State voters approved Proposition 47 in 2014 which reduced certain drug possession felonies to misdemeanors and also required misdemeanor sentencing for low-level crimes such as petty theft. **Prop 47 took away a key tool from law enforcement to convince those offenders to accept supportive services instead of entering the criminal justice system.** It also took away a unique opportunity from those struggling with substance abuse. Instead of being exposed to rehabilitation services those offenders are simply put back onto the street with no guidance or resources.
- **The price of housing has increased more quickly than income growth.** People are spending a greater portion of their income on housing, and shelter has become un-affordable for more members of our community. The city is also experiencing historically low vacancy rates which drives up rental costs for residents.

- **Loss of single room occupancy housing units** as properties were renovated for other purposes, and additional or replacement units were not constructed. SROs can serve as a housing option for our lowest-income neighbors.

One could characterize it as the perfect storm for our lowest income residents. The effects of this storm can be seen in our shelters and on our streets in San Diego and other California cities. Although it is a policy crisis felt in cities all over the nation, California has been hit extraordinarily hard.

This statewide homeless crisis did not start overnight and can't be solved overnight, but we are fortunate to be part of a very strong regional collaboration to tackle this head on. The Mayor has asked that I lead the City's participation with the utmost urgency.

The last few decades have brought us some terrific and successful programs across the region that have literally saved lives. But the need has now outgrown the independently developed resources. With so many unsheltered people needing help, the decentralized and disconnected service support system has maxed out its availability, has become confusing to those who need it most and has led to some of our neighbors falling through the cracks of what should be a safety net.

It is clear that San Diego needs to improve its overall homeless system and strengthen our shared ability to serve those in need more effectively and more efficiently – and we must create additional housing for those in need. We have to work smarter to ensure that people who are sleeping on the street get access to the resources necessary to reach their full potential.

The Regional Task Force for the Homeless has been working diligently on some of the most important components to creating an efficient and accountable infrastructure: data capturing, a technological infrastructure, a coordinated entry system, and many other key elements. This has opened the door for many more of us to come in and support the collective effort to help our friends in need get that much closer to permanent housing and the services that will give them stability. It is with tremendous gratitude and excitement to share that Supervisor Ron Roberts will be taking over as Chair of the Taskforce and Councilmember Chris Ward will become the Vice Chair. Our region has been fortunate to have Rick Gentry, President and CEO of the San Diego Housing Commission, leading the Taskforce the last several months since former Councilmember Todd Gloria moved on to his new position in the State Assembly.

What We Are Doing

As this is an unprecedented problem that demands an unprecedented level of cooperation, we are working in partnership with San Diego's business community, service organizations, the County of San Diego, the City Council, the Housing Commission, the Regional Taskforce on the Homeless, Civic San Diego and charitable foundations on several actions to help several hundred people find their way off the street:

- **Immediate (temporary) beds to several hundred of San Diego's most vulnerable unsheltered**, to provide safety off the streets;
- **Reuniting homeless individuals with family members** who have made a firm commitment to provide housing stability to their loved one; and
- **Expanding capacity** at current facilities to provide more shelter housing.

Notably, we have made progress over the last year with Mayor Faulconer's "Housing Our Heroes" program for homeless veterans. Operated by the Housing Commission in partnership with the City, San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce and landlords, **I'm proud to share that – despite a historically tight rental market – 866 veterans have received housing subsidies to date.**

We need to replicate this intensive engagement between public and private partners on a much larger scale. There are dozens of nonprofits, faith-based organizations and government agencies that care for San Diego's homeless. We are blessed to benefit from their tireless dedication. Without the experience of these organizations, we would not be able to add support to developing an infrastructure to raise our system to the next level. Now, we need to come together and provide the overarching system that provides a clear path to shore up the work of these trailblazing groups.

We are working with the 2-1-1 information system on a call program that will allow us to **access information in real time 24 hours a day, seven days a week about available shelter beds each night.** The work being done now on this partnership with 2-1-1 also helps expedite and support the work being developed by the Regional Task Force for the Homeless for the long term efficiency of the coordinated entry system. So the work in the short term will produce an immediate outcome, but also reap great benefits for the long term vision of information sharing.

To build on the County Board of Supervisors' ambitious "Project One for All" initiative to house the severely mentally ill, **the City is partnering with the County to further increase mental health resources** by expanding the number of psychiatric health clinicians partnered with law enforcement and first responders working on the street. The goal is to have more professionals readily available to stabilize homeless individuals experiencing mental health crises.

Also, it's critical to remember that being homeless is not a crime. I've spent a lot of time talking to people experiencing homelessness who have been in and out of the criminal justice system and what many have shared is that what they desire most is a clear way out of the cycle. In that vein, we are working to expand a program that Mayor Faulconer and City Attorney Mara Elliott launched in December called the San Diego Misdemeanants At-Risk Track (SMART) program. **The SMART program offers homeless persons who repeatedly commit misdemeanor drug crimes a chance for housing with substance abuse and recovery programs.** Folks now have a choice whether or not to accept life-changing social services as an alternative to the criminal justice system. Our intention is to always seek to offer care as the first resort, not the last.

The Latest

Working closely with Council President Myrtle Cole and Councilmember Chris Ward, and our many regional partners, we are developing a long term regional ecosystem that can encompass all of these services, housing and opportunities that can be sustained over time. To that end, we are participating in the development of a cross-jurisdictional regional plan. We believe it needs to be abundantly clear how one enters the system for housing support and services, moves through the system to get their needs met and ultimately achieves permanent supportive housing and a life off of the streets.

This ecosystem will serve as an overall framework to help support many of their initiatives – offering a regional approach to mitigate the increase of homelessness and decrease of

housing affordability that is adversely impacting our region, with any eye towards preventing our current challenges from happening again.

For many who receive this letter I know you are dealing with the impact of the homelessness issue in your day to day life. We share the same sense of urgency you do and we are working diligently to mitigate the issues as quickly as possible. We will need your support, ideas, and guidance as we move forward. The Mayor has mandated that this is a number one social service priority for his administration – and I look forward to working with you to make a difference.

In service now and always,

Stacie Spector
Senior Advisor for Housing Solutions
City of San Diego