

City Council votes 7-0 to purchase property near airport that could become permanent bridge shelter

In a unanimous vote, the Costa Mesa City Council agreed to allocate \$6.925 million for the purchase of an industrial warehouse at 3175 Airway Avenue that will be evaluated as a potential permanent bridge shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness in Costa Mesa.

“I’m really proud of the work the council and the staff has done,” Mayor Katrina Foley said just prior to the vote. “We have done really good work that is meaningful and will create long-lasting safety in our community and save people’s lives. It’s literally been something that no other council has addressed to get people off the streets and into housing.”

At 29,815 square feet, the building is more than sufficient size to operate a best practices shelter. The building includes approximately 5,510 square feet of office built-out, lobby, reception areas, private offices, storage areas, break room and restrooms.

The purchase helps bring to close an exhaustive effort to find a property and satisfy the terms of a settlement agreement with the plaintiffs in the OC Catholic Worker case and the expectations of Federal District Judge David Carter for Costa Mesa to provide 62 emergency shelter beds, which is based on the city’s 2017 Point-in-Time count numbers. That case was settled this past Monday March 4.

Since September of 2018, the city staff has conducted extensive research and analysis of nearly 50 properties throughout Costa Mesa.

Prior to making this purchase, the City of Costa Mesa reached an agreement with the Lighthouse Church of the Nazarene to operate a 50-bed temporary bridge shelter on a portion of property located at 1885 Anaheim Avenue. Additionally, the city has already approved an application by College Hospital to open a 12-bed crisis unit, satisfying the 62-bed number.

The temporary Lighthouse Church bridge shelter, which is expected to begin operations in early April, will be run by a combination of city community outreach staff and staff from Mercy House, an experienced, well-respected shelter operator who will ensure the facility is a reservation-based model along with 24-hour security and roving neighborhood patrol covering a half-mile radius.

If a permanent shelter is ultimately opened at the 3175 Airway property, Mercy House will also be the operator and will adhere to the same reservation-based model and security measures as will be implemented at the Lighthouse temporary shelter.

Staff believes the Airway Avenue property is the best option for purchase and further evaluation and creates the least amount of impact to the surrounding community. The property is 2,050 feet away from residential, 2,300 feet away from the closest school and 2,900 feet away from the closest park.

Mayor Foley credited the "enormous" amount of work being done by city staff and City Council members to get this accomplished.

In particular, she noted the behind-scenes-work of Mayor Pro Tem John Stephens and District 5 Council Member Arlis Reynolds, who spent many hours of volunteer time educating the community about the need for the bridge shelter.

To help offset the cost to the city's General Fund, city staff has identified \$3.3 million in projects currently budgeted in the Capital Improvement Fund (Fund 401) which can be paid for

using Park Development Fees.

In addition, because the building has two addresses, meters and separate entrances, the City Council could explore dividing the building, roughly in half, and lease the additional space to a tenant for approximately \$200,000 a year, which will offset some of the operating costs of the shelter.

“We still have much work to do to address regional solutions for the lack of mental health services for the chronically homeless in severe mental crisis and to identify permanent supportive housing solutions,” Mayor Foley said. “I look forward to partnering with my colleague Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris to once and for all address this important community concern.”