

Council takes historic vote to address homelessness with new bridge shelter at Lighthouse Church

The Costa Mesa City Council voted unanimously at its Tuesday Jan. 15 meeting to move forward with a plan to partner with the Lighthouse Church of the Nazarene and expand what is an already existing inclement weather shelter into a high-security temporary solution to offer shelter beds to those in need.

In addition, the council announced to a packed house gathered at the Costa Mesa Senior Center for the meeting that it will explore the possibility of a permanent shelter and is already looking at one location at 3115 Redhill Avenue.

“In a move to protect the residents and taxpayers of Costa Mesa, last night we authorized a temporary bridge shelter at Lighthouse Church and directed staff to work with the county on a permanent shelter near the airport,” Mayor Katrina Foley said. “This means, we will be able to clear parks and residential areas from the impacts of homelessness while offering a humane response to this growing crisis.”



“Three main reasons exist to move forward with the bridge shelter and permanent sheltering plan,” Foley said. “One, a federal judge mandated this so we can again enforce our anti-camping ordinance and other laws to move people off the streets. Two, it costs less to shelter individuals than to manage the impacts of people living on the streets, in our parks and even on private property; and finally, it’s morally right.”

Mayor Foley said the goal is to restore the safety and security of the neighborhoods. She noted the plan for the temporary and permanent shelters will be to operate them in such a clean, safe, secure, and responsible manner, that it’s hard to tell they even exist.

Establishing this bridge shelter option for those experiencing homelessness will provide the 50 shelter beds that the City of Costa Mesa is expected to create based on a proposed settlement agreement in the OC Catholic Worker lawsuit that in turn would restore the city’s powers to enforce trespassing and anti-encampment ordinances.

The Lighthouse Church shelter at 1885 Anaheim Ave. will be run

by a combination of city outreach staff and an experienced, well-respected operator who will ensure the facility is a reservation-based model along with 24-hour security and management covering a half-mile radius.

“The approved temporary bridge shelter at Lighthouse Church is part of an overall Westside Restoration Plan, including many infrastructure improvements and the opening of our new library in April 2019,” Foley said. “These infrastructure improvements, coupled with reduced homelessness and its impacts, should improve the quality of life and property values on the Westside. In addition to the infrastructure projects already planned, additional lighting and fencing at the Church, we are soliciting input from the community for additional needed improvements to restore the safety and character of the neighborhood.”

Through this temporary shelter arrangement with the Lighthouse Church, the city will invest in the property creating security fencing around the church, and adding portable buildings for restrooms, storage of personal belongings, offices and space for shelter beds.

Unsheltered individuals will be offered job training and placement services, mental health assessments, health and dental care, substance abuse treatment and connections to permanent housing.

By embarking on this solution to homelessness, Costa Mesa joins the broader efforts of the cities of Anaheim, Santa Ana, Orange, Tustin, Fullerton and Buena Park and the county of Orange in taking an active solution to combatting the crisis of homelessness throughout the county and beyond.

A 2017 study conducted by the University of California Irvine, United Way and Jamboree Housing estimated the annual cost of homelessness in Orange County to be \$299 million, \$120 million of which is shouldered by cities.

Costa Mesa has been a leader on this issue. Since 2013, the Network for Homeless Solutions – which includes City staff and representatives of faith-based organizations and local non-profits – meets weekly to discuss specific cases and developments in our efforts to reduce homelessness in Costa Mesa.

Costa Mesa outreach workers make contact daily with individuals experiencing homelessness and the city spends approximately \$1 million each year on this effort. Funds are expended on outreach workers as well as police officers assigned to our Community Policing Unit.

Since its inception, the Network for Homeless Solutions has helped to house more than 300 individuals as well as reconnected about 90 with family or loved ones.