

MEMORANDUM

Building Safety and Housing Department



DATE: January 4, 2021

TO: Mayor and Council

THROUGH: Steve McHarris, City Manager *Steve McHarris*

FROM: Sharon Goei, Building Safety and Housing Director
Renee Lorentzen, Recreation and Community Services Director

SUBJECT: Establishment of a Homelessness Task Force

Background

At the December 15, 2020 meeting, the City Council directed staff to place an item on the January 5th Council meeting agenda related to creating a Homelessness Task Force. This information memorandum provides background on this topic.

Recent experiences in establishing the Suicide Prevention and Tenant Protection Task Forces may provide a framework in developing a Homelessness Task Force. In each case, a structure was established to determine the duration and size of the Task Force, the types of members recruited, their qualifications, and the desired outcomes the Task Force was established to accomplish.

Tenant Protection Task Force

The Tenant Protection Task Force was ad hoc, established to bring together tenants and property owners for a duration of five to six months to identify any commonalities and develop fair tenant protection. The Task Force was comprised of eight members, representing four members each of the two main focus groups: Tenants and Landlords. To be a member of the Tenant Protection Task Force, subject matter expertise was considered a priority. An interest in establishing fair and equitable tenant protection was another desirable factor. Representatives included individuals from the tenant and landlord community, external stakeholders such as the California Apartment Association, the Santa Clara County Association of Realtors, the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, and non-profit partners such as the Silicon Valley Independent Living Center and Project Sentinel. These participants were vetted through the City Manager's Office and selected based on their subject matter expertise and demonstrated interest in collaboration towards tenant protection.

Due to the composition of two different focus groups, the Task Force utilized a consultant as a staff co-facilitator for the meetings to ensure neutrality. The Task Force meetings spanned from September 2018 to February 2019. The landlord and tenant groups met individually for three months and met together for another two months. At the conclusion of the Task Force meetings, both the tenant and landlord groups were asked to identify and present their main issues and core values to the City Council.

In April 2019, the City Council received the staff report on the Task Force. Staff noted that both tenant and landlord groups agreed that more outreach and engagement with the tenant and landlord communities was a critical starting point. Staff recommended and the City Council authorized funding an additional \$10,000 to Project Sentinel for more outreach and engagement, with a focus on pre-emption services. Additionally, the City Council authorized the formation of a Housing Subcommittee to directly respond to the housing needs of the community. Subsequent action by the Housing Subcommittee has led to the creation of the Rent Relief Program and Rent Review Ordinance.

Suicide Prevention Task Force

The Suicide Prevention Task force was approved as part of the Suicide Prevention Policy adoption by City Council in 2018. The Task Force's purpose was to collaborate and help implement with education and outreach on programs, services, and events related to mental health and wellbeing suicide prevention, and grief and crisis response. This community-based Task Force includes stakeholders from the community including agencies/organizations that provide health services in Milpitas, represent at-risk communities (veterans, LGBTQ, seniors), and/or work heavily with the public. There are currently 15 active task force members from staff identified agencies/organizations. There are no term-limits for members and all meetings are open to the public and noticed on the City's Website. To create recognition and brand in the community the Task Force created the name HOPE (Helping Others Process Emotions) and associated logo.

Through the Task Force, a collective of mental health information has been organized and disseminated into the community, while seasonal resources and support services have been made available during special events. Town halls in several languages have been hosted with panel experts speaking on youth suicide, resources for parents to identify signs of suicidal youth, and a townhall offering support and connection for residents alone for the holidays. The Task Force identified a general lack of support group services for these mental health issues. The City's Social Services Program Coordinator will begin support group services in 2021. Additionally, target area workgroups within the Task Force were formed to address strategies and programs for first responders to provide information and resources after an attempt or death by suicide for families. An update on the Task Force progress and accomplishments for the coming year will be presented to City Council in early 2021.

Background on Subcommittees related to Housing

Currently, the City Council Housing Subcommittee and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Subcommittee each produce recommendations to the City Council that aim to address homelessness in a variety of ways.

The Housing Subcommittee discusses topics related to homelessness prevention and assistance to the unhoused as well as those at risk of homelessness. The Subcommittee allows the Councilmembers, staff, and the community to engage in substantive discussion related to resources and programs. Based on these discussions, the City Council directed staff to pursue an agreement for homeless outreach and assessment services with the Santa Clara County Office of Supportive Housing. For at-risk residents, the City's Rent Relief Program has prevented over 250 Milpitas residents from becoming homeless by providing a much-needed safety net during a period of housing and financial instability.

The CDBG Subcommittee recommends the City's CDBG funding allocation and activities to the City Council. In FY 2020, the City allocated \$1,364,363 in Community Development Block Grant Funds, of which \$834,293 was allocated to respond to, prepare for, or prevent COVID-19. As we start the new year, the new funding cycle will require new funding allocation in FY 2021, which may coincide with the efforts of the Housing Subcommittee and Homelessness Task Force.

Considerations for Establishing a New Homelessness Task Force may include:

- Specific Purpose of Task Force to ensure no duplication of efforts related to other topics related to the unhoused
- Duration of Task Force
- Size of Task Force
- Eligibility Criteria and Terms for Task Force Members
- Selection Process for Task Force Members
- Role of staff