

VISALIA TIMES-DELTA

Tulare County wants to use state money to end homelessness

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By: Luis Hernandez

Tulare County officials took steps forward to address the local homeless issues in Visalia and Porterville.

Officials will seek money to increase affordable housing and continue a partnership with Self-Help Enterprises following an approval Tuesday by supervisors. It was proof officials and administrators are doing their part, said Supervisor Amy Shuklian said.

“Today, it gives an example we are doing a lot,” she said. County administrators will use portions of the No Place Like Home program and apply for a \$52 million funding stream.



Homeless encampments were torn down in northwest Visalia. The city is making way for a walking trail near Riverway Sports Park.

Betsy McGovern-Garcia, director of real estate for Self-Help, said using the state funds provides good leverage while seeking added money from programs. Leftover money can be used for separate projects.

“We think there’s tremendous opportunity in Visalia and Porterville,” she said.

Housing projects in Dinuba will receive added money and five No Place Like Home units will be built, McGovern-Garcia said.

While recognizing county officials’ actions or securing state funding won’t end homelessness locally, Shuklian said there’s plenty to do when it comes to adding affordable housing and spreading the word about social services and programs.

McGovern-Garcia said securing state and federal funding and then building affordable housing can make a dent in the homelessness issue.

“That’s the only way to chip away at homelessness,” she said.

Nationally, 34 percent of the homeless are sleeping on the streets, rather than shelters or crashing on couches. In Kings and Tulare counties, the number is greater — 58 percent.

But funding only goes so far.

In 2017, Tulare County received \$1.9 million for rental assistance to help get homeless people into housing, a slight increase from 2016.

McGovern-Garcia said affordable housing construction can be expensive, costing as much as \$220 a square foot. Construction costs are increased because the affordable housing project must exceed state standards on energy use, McGovern-Garcia said.

“It’s tremendously expensive,” she said.



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But the housing projects are expected to have a 55-year lifetime use and utilities are low — a plus for those seeking permanent housing.

“The quality lends to long-term sustainability,” he said.

McGovern-Garcia also said the housing projects can be viewed as investments.

Supervisor Kuyler Crocker, the board’s newly-named chairman, said he wanted a work session for further discussion on local homelessness.

In a presentation to supervisors, Michele Cruz, mental health services manager, said those who are homeless are also dealing with mental health and substance abuse issues.

Next week, Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance will complete a point in time count for those who are homeless.

The count is done on the same day as Project Homeless Connect, which helps identify services needed and connect the homeless with various programs.

How to attend:

When: Jan. 24 from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Hanford Pentecost Church of God, 323 E. 11th Street
Tulare First Baptist Church, 469 N. Cherry Street
Visalia’s Anthony Center, 345 N. Jacob Street.



Machael Smith, director of Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance address planning commissioners during a special meeting on Wednesday, Dec. 19.

Jan. 25

Porterville's First Methodist Church, 344 E. Morton Ave.

Information: Visit www.kthomelessalliance.org/phc/