

—Walnut Creek Homeless Community Task Force—

Leadership & advocacy for realistic solutions

1271 S. California Blvd, Walnut Creek, CA 94596

March 27, 2019

Re: Letter to Mayor Wedel dated October 10, 2018

Dear Mayor, Council Members, City Manager and Staff,

This letter is an update to our letter of October 10, 2018 that outlined the priorities of the Walnut Creek Homeless Community Task Force and recommendations for reducing the impact of people living without housing to the City.

With the passing of only five months, we do not believe the priorities for long-term solutions have changed. There continues to be a significant need for:

1. Additional alcohol and/or drug abuse detox beds
2. Treatment facilities for mental illness
3. More affordable permanent supportive housing

From the addendum on page 6, four short term projects remain high priority (numbered in order of importance):

1. Designated sites and provisions for homeless individuals who sleep in their cars
- Safe Parking Program (see proposal.)
2. Storage units as options to stashing belongings in bushes, along creeks, or behind dumpsters. Storage units have been located but both location and funding are needed.
3. Designated dumpsters, regular garbage pickups, and portable restrooms to provide sanitation. A donation from Republic Services for a dumpster and regular pick up would address complaints residents have about trash caused by the homeless. Portable restrooms would improve sanitation and reduce waste in public spaces. Funding and locations are needed.
4. Public education to increase awareness about homelessness and how to humanely deal with homeless individuals. Hosting a series of community meetings and funding for materials are needed.

Sincerely,

Walnut Creek Homeless Community Task Force

Jenny Quijada, Lisa Andrews, Co-chairs

Donna Colombo, Executive Director, Trinity Center

wchomelessctf@gmail.com

—Walnut Creek Homeless Community Task Force—

Leadership & advocacy for realistic solutions

1271 S. California Blvd, Walnut Creek, CA 94596

October 10, 2018

Dear Mayor Justin Wedel,

The Walnut Creek Homeless Community Task Force (“Task Force”), composed of Walnut Creek City staff and WCPD, community organizations, local businesses, and residents, has been meeting regularly for four years with a mission to research and identify best, promising, and emerging practices for short-term and long-term solutions to the causes of homelessness; to present information and recommendations to Walnut Creek City staff and City Council; and to work collaboratively to put into place respectful and compassionate solutions.

While we have identified several areas of need for homeless individuals and working poor in Walnut Creek, we have identified three top challenges that stand in the way of making significant progress in solving homelessness in Walnut Creek.

4. Lack of alcohol and/or drug abuse detox beds
5. Untreated mental illness
6. Lack of affordable permanent supportive housing

We are making three recommendations to address these challenges and suggesting solutions for reducing homelessness and the risk of homelessness in Walnut Creek.

1. Detox Center

We need a local detox center with five to nine recovery beds and recommend that the City of Walnut Creek, the Task Force, and the Contra Costa Health Services' Alcohol & Other Drugs Program (AOD) meet to discuss the opportunity for a detox center in Walnut Creek. According to AOD Chief Fatima Mata Sol, there is funding available to open detox centers in the county, which are medical facilities, not open shelters. The AOD has the funding and Walnut Creek has the need. A five-bed facility would have a deep and meaningful impact on our homeless issue.

Chronic alcoholics and drug users who are ready to get clean and off the streets must go through a three-day detox stay, and then a longer five-day recovery program before they are eligible for a one-year to two-year residential treatment and recovery program.

The three-day detox center is essential. Chronic alcohol and/or drug users who want help must be clean for three days before moving into longer-term treatment and recovery.

We recommend beginning with a study session that would include the County AOD (Fatima Mata Sol), County homeless services (Lavonna Martin), City staff, WCPD, and the Task Force to gather information and learn what detox facilities are available and what we can do to create more availability in order to serve 5-10 chronic alcohol and/or drug abusers in Walnut Creek per month. The three-day detox might be the same facility as the longer five-day recovery program.

Trinity Center regularly identifies people who are ready to get off the streets, get clean, and get into a program of recovery and support. When these individuals are ready, we have to get them at that moment. If they have to wait for any length of time for any of the services, they give up and we lose them. They get dragged back down into life on the street, in the camps, down by the creek, and under the overpasses. They start drinking and using again, and then it may be weeks before they are ready again.

There are nine detox beds in the entire Contra Costa County for hundreds, if not thousands, of people who are ready for and who need a detox facility, but who have no insurance and little, if any, income.

In December 2018, the County is opening a second detox facility in Martinez with nine beds. Opening a detox facility in Walnut Creek, or nearby, would have a huge, positive impact on homelessness in our city.

What would that look like? Can we use an existing building? Do we have to build a new building? Can we remodel or convert? Can it be a part of John Muir Medical Center or Kaiser Permanente? A study session would bring together experts in the field of homelessness and social services. Creative minds. Visionaries. Thought leaders. What is it going to take to open a detox facility in Walnut Creek or within reasonable transport distance?

Individuals who are ready for detox are either on our streets, along our creeks, in our parks, or inside, getting clean. Which scenario would you rather have? The need is immediate and acute.

An alternative or interim solution to establishing a Walnut Creek detox center is entering into a contract with an existing facility outside Contra Costa County, such as Cherry Hill in Alameda, Healthrite 360 in San Francisco, and Southern Solano Alcohol Council Detox in Vallejo. A contract would allow us to send Contra Costa residents to a contracted facility; we would simply need to provide transport.

2. Mental Health Facility

We must determine as a community how to better support the work of Contra Costa Health Services and its Mental Health Evaluation Team (MHET), such as expanding the County facility in Martinez, increasing the number of mental health professionals to care for all the patients, and working with the District Attorney's office to enforce 5150 holds and strengthen those holds with permanent stay orders for people who are repeat 5150 orders.

The Contra Costa County psychiatric services hospital was designed for 200 people. It now serves 900 patients. Patients are kept for 36 to 48 hours, and then they are let out because there are no beds for them, no place to stay. Trinity Center often sees people who have just gotten out of the psychiatric hospital, not fully treated and not fully recovered. There is no longer a place for people with severe mental illness to go for long-term help and support. They need a bed and long-term care—16 weeks to 18 weeks—to complete physical and behavioral health assessments, to get stabilized on medication, and to get into treatment. Without a bed, assessment, and treatment, they’re out on the streets and unable to deal with their own mental health issues. They’re in front of the library. They’re at Trader Joe’s. They’re down by Whole Foods. There is no place for these people to go to get healthy.

We need to enter into a dialogue with mental health advocates and stakeholders to promote greater awareness and understanding of severe mental health and 5150 issues and to determine how we can enhance and strengthen programs and facilities for individuals with severe mental illness.

3. Affordable Permanent Supportive Housing

We need more affordable housing and we need that affordable housing to be permanent supportive housing such as St. Paul's Commons, which is affordable housing with wrap around services. Supportive services are critical, because without those services, homeless individuals who have been homeless for a long time or who have had multiple incidences of homelessness and who become newly housed will not be successful.

Supportive services include help with physical and mental health, social services, medications, and independence. Homeless individuals often live in communal camps; individual apartment living can be very isolating. Part of learning to stay housed is learning how to live on one's own.

With support services on site, case managers can meet with the newly housed on a regular basis and help them remain stable, increasing their likelihood of success. Without onsite support services, housing is often a revolving door. We find that even if a homeless individual can become newly house, it is difficult to get him or her to reach out for services that would help ensure staying housed.

We need to balance the development of market rate housing with affordable housing. Right now, there is no balance. Housing tilts toward market rate. This affects not only the homeless, but the general working population, as well. If there is no affordable “workforce housing” for those who work low-income jobs in education, health care, public service, and the nonprofit sector, for instance, we risk their becoming homeless (the working poor). This is a cycle we can break with affordable permanent housing and affordable permanent supportive housing.

1. Incentivize developers to build affordable housing. [Relax building requirements or speed the permit process, for instance.]
2. Identify parcels that might be unattractive to market rate development, but perfect properties for affordable housing development, with incentives. There

are many ways to build affordable housing when we consider: What is the best fit for that land?

3. Invest in land trusts by coming together as a community, purchasing land through a public-private partnership, and working with developers to build affordable housing. [Land deemed unusable, unlivable, and too close to an underpass is now the site of ten of Habitat for Humanity homes.]
4. Consider alternatives to multi-story individual apartment buildings, such as community housing and shared housing.
5. Study, research, and Identify city-owned properties that could be used for affordable permanent housing and affordable permanent supportive housing. Look at current plans for the city and identify properties that could reasonable and realistically be sites for affordable housing. The North Downtown Specific Plan is a perfect opportunity. While thinking about land use, office space, and auto dealership sprawl, seriously consider affordable workforce housing in the mix.

In summary: The need for a detox facility, enhanced mental health services, and affordable permanent supportive housing are all interrelated. We have a choice now to reduce homelessness and prevent more homeless, more homeless camps, and more alcohol and drug abusers by providing the services and the affordable permanent supportive housing homeless and those at risk of homelessness need.

When people are housed with supportive services, they can stabilize their physical and mental health, they can find employment, and they can reunite with community.

Benefits? There will be fewer homeless individuals on the street because they are clean and sober; they are getting physical and mental health care; they are getting employment support; and they have a comfortable place to live off the streets and out of the camps. Newly housed residents will patronize local shops, restaurants, public transit, and other amenities. They will be a part of the community, not apart from the community.

We look forward to hearing from you and being a part of study sessions that will explore the issues of homelessness and our suggested solutions. We look forward to taking the next step with you to make this happen—to reduce homelessness and the risk of homelessness in Walnut Creek.

In this letter, we have outlined three critical needs and long-term solutions. Attached is an addendum outlining four short-term solutions that would ease the suffering of the homeless and address immediate concerns of the community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Walnut Creek Homeless Community Task Force
Jenny Quijada, Co-chair
Lisa Andrews, Co-chair

Donna Colombo, Executive Director, Trinity Center
wchomelessctf@gmail.com
925.457.4533

cc Lavonna Martin
Fatima Mata Sol
Kathy Hemmenway
Jay Hoyer

Addendum

Following is a list of short-term solutions that will not reverse homelessness, but will make life on the street a little better. These are not permanent solutions, but can be put in place until permanent solutions are established.

We understand there is \$200,000 in the Walnut Creek General Budget for homeless services. CORE receives approximately \$75,000. The Winter Program receives \$100,000. How can we use the remaining \$25,000 to help address the consequences of homelessness? We need your financial help and advocacy to implement short-term solutions.

5. Storage units as options to stashing belongings in bushes, along creeks, or behind dumpsters. Both location and funding are needed. Visit *The Bin* [<http://curious.kcrw.com/2016/02/storage-facility-for-homeless>] to learn how Chrysalis, the Los Angeles homeless assistance organization, has contracted with the City of Los Angeles to provide and manage storage lockers for free for the homeless.
6. Designated dumpsters and regular garbage pickups and portable restrooms to provide sanitation. A donation from Republic Services for a dumpster and regular pick up would address complaints residents have about trash caused by the homeless.
7. Designated sites and provisions for homeless individuals who sleep in their cars.
8. Public education to increase awareness about homelessness and how to humanely deal with homeless individuals. [For instance, rather than giving homeless money or food, provide homeless individuals with information about getting help and services.]

We have brought together a number of experts with resources, ideas, and best practices and examples of what's been done successfully in other communities. We would be happy to share that information with you.