

Yolo supervisors to focus on homelessness, seniors and agriculture in 2015

Seniors and ag also priorities

By Sarah Dowling

sdowling@dailydemocrat.com @woodlanddowling on Twitter

CREATED: 12/31/2014 03:21:55 PM PST# COMMENTS

http://www.dailydemocrat.com/news/ci_27237460/yolo-supervisors-focus-homelessness-seniors-and-agriculture-2015.html

Another year has come and gone and Yolo County supervisors are looking forward to what changes and challenges 2015 will bring.

During their final meeting of 2014, supervisors chose Matt Rexroad to serve as board chairman, leading the group of five into the new year.

For Rexroad, combating homelessness across the county is one of his top priorities for 2015.

In particular, he wants to monitor the progress of the Bridge to Housing program — a pilot project aimed at relocating dozens of homeless people from a West Sacramento riverbank to permanent housing.

"The Bridge to Housing Project is the most important thing the county is doing right now," Rexroad said. "Homelessness is a huge issue in Yolo County."

In November, project volunteers moved 63 homeless people and their pets from the North Levee encampment to a hotel in West Sacramento, where they were paired with county services such as job placement, health insurance and counseling.

The success of the "experimental" program is important not only to Rexroad, but to county staff who are directly involved, including Mental Health Director Karen Larsen.

"I have to say from a personal standpoint that this was one of the best days of my entire life," Larsen said, referring to the day she helped relocate 63 people into temporary housing. "It was extremely inspirational and that was in large part due to our county staff, city staff and all the volunteers that showed up."

After a month, only two people left the Bridge to Housing program. This fact surprised Rexroad, who thought the drop-out rate would be much higher.

"We are talking about people who have lived outside for 10 years," he said. "When you spend all that time outdoors, your first instinct is to sleep outside."

Rexroad had a similar experience in the U.S. Marine Corps, when he returned home from spending six months in Kuwait and Iraq where he slept outside.

"It was a tough thing to do being forced to be inside," he recalled.

While homelessness is at the forefront of Rexroad's mind, Supervisor Jim Provenza plans to focus on the county's youngest and oldest populations.

"We need make sure all seniors have access to the services they need," he said. "A number of senior citizens are entering retirement age and we need to make sure they have access to transportation, medical services and so on."

Looking back, Provenza joined the board during a time of major budget cuts.

"I'm optimistic about 2015," he said. "We have been rebuilding revenues and restoring our reserves. We are much more financially stable than when I joined the board six years ago."

Provenza would like to see funds go to seniors, as well as the county's children, which are his two main goals for 2015.

Meanwhile, Supervisor Duane Chamberlain, whose district encompasses rural Yolo County, plans to continue to preserve agriculture.

"One thing I would like to see is more of our local food being processed locally," he said, noting olives, grapes and other crops are often shipped elsewhere to be turned into wine, olive oil and other commodities.

Another priority, which Chamberlain has voiced at numerous meetings, is to build water storage in Yolo County.

The county's water supply comes from two main sources — the Indian Valley Reservoir and Clear Lake — are located in Lake County. The water then travels down creeks and tributaries, making its way to Yolo County.

"It is a massive waste of water," he said. "We need to be building some storage in Yolo County for Yolo County, especially during a drought."

Like his fellow supervisors, Chamberlain recognizes county finances are improving, but remains cautious about how money is spent.

The year's first Board of Supervisors meeting is scheduled at 9 a.m. on Jan. 13 in the county administration building on Court Street in Woodland.