

# Unanimous council approves respite center for homeless

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy**



The Davis City Council voted unanimously in favor of opening a daytime respite center for the homeless in the city's public corporation yard following a lengthy public hearing Tuesday evening during which more than 50 members of the public weighed in.

More than two-thirds of those who addressed the council supported the proposal, including many residents of the Davis Manor neighborhood, north of the proposed site.

Others objected to the location, expressing concerns about the safety of children living and attending school nearby, the security of the neighborhood and diminished home values.

But council members were united in moving forward with the respite center and pledged along with city staff to have regular meetings with neighbors to mitigate issues that arise and ensure the pilot project — which Mayor Brett Lee has said he hopes to replicate around the city in the future — is a success.

The council voted to appropriate up to \$350,000 toward the respite center for start-up costs and six months of operation and execute agreements with Yolo County and CommuniCare Health Centers to provide staffing for the center.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to help fund the pilot project, appropriating \$375,000, much of which will cover the cost of having those two full-time CommuniCare case managers on site.

The two Yolo County supervisors who represent Davis on the board — Supervisors Jim Provenza and Don Saylor — both spoke to the City Council Tuesday night in support of the pilot project.

“We think it is an excellent step towards addressing the homeless problem,” Provenza said.

Dozens of other Davis residents agreed, including a number of longtime volunteers with the Interfaith Rotating Winter Shelter, local clergy members, former homeless individuals and a sizable contingent of Davis manor residents who said they welcomed the respite center to their neighborhood.

One was a student at Da Vinci Charter Academy, Sophia Nachmanoff, who said growing up in the neighborhood and seeing people experiencing homelessness always made her uncomfortable and left her feeling powerless.

“As a child in this neighborhood, this shelter doesn’t make me feel unsafe,” she told the council. “It makes me feel empowered to make change in the future.”

The Rev. Elizabeth Griswold, who lives near the respite center location, said she “could not be more in support of the respite center” and took issue with those who she said were slandering the homeless by painting them as dangerous criminals.



Yolo County supervisors Don Saylor, left, and Jim Provenza were on hand to address the Davis City Council. Anne Ternus-Bellamy/Enterprise photo

## **Location, location, location**

But more than a dozen people did speak up in opposition to the respite center's location, most of them residents of the neighborhood worried about a number of issues, including loitering after the respite center closes each evening at 4 p.m., increased criminal and nuisance activity (particularly public urination and defecation) and a decrease in home values.

Several speakers said they had been told by real estate agents that their homes would lose more than \$100,000 in value if the respite center opens.

City Council members acknowledged those concerns but voted unanimously nonetheless to move ahead with the respite center in the corporation yard.

"There are legitimate concerns that the neighbors have raised," said Councilman Lucas Frerichs, who is seeking re-election in the newly formed district that will be home to the pilot project.

"The impacts to neighbors are real," Frerichs said, "so I think that there is going to be a real need for community engagement. I have been in the neighborhood a lot... talking with neighbors about this particular issue, both those in support and in opposition, and I think that the continued discussions and communication and ... building the relationship with the neighborhood is what is going to actually make this successful or not.

"But I'm really supportive of us proceeding in this particular location," he added.

Council members also apologized to the Davis Manor neighborhood for not engaging with residents earlier in the process, though the city did hold a community meeting on the matter earlier this month.

"This has not been a perfect process," said Councilman Dan Carson.

However, he added, the rain, wind and cold are here and more is on the way "and I feel morally bound to support an action that seems well planned out that will help keep folks alive."

"But there are strong analytical public policy reasons for doing this," Carson added.

Getting people off the street so they are no longer in fear for their own lives "opens the door for strong counseling, getting them engaged with treatment — substance abuse and mental health — getting them engaged with moving on to permanent housing. It's our best chance for making things better."

The respite center pilot project approved Tuesday will be located in the public corporation yard located along Fifth Street but entrance to and exit from the shelter will be on L Street across from the Davis Korean Church.

Operating daily from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., the center will provide individual case management, connections to services and permanent housing plans for those willing, as well as food, laundry facilities, pet kennels, restrooms, showers, storage and lounge areas for the city's homeless population.

The center will be staffed by at least two managers on site during all hours of operation, in addition to city staff (including Davis police services specialists) and volunteers from the Interfaith Rotating Winter Shelter who are expected to assist with daily operations. The city will provide daily transportation from the daytime respite center to IRWS overnight shelters when the respite center closes each evening at 4 p.m.

City staff, including Mayor Brett Lee and Police Chief Darren Pytel, strongly advocated for a daytime respite center and both have made clear the plan is a pilot project and will be closely scrutinized throughout its operation to determine whether it should be continued, possibly in other locations in the city.

Lee said Tuesday night he believes the corporation yard could serve as a long-term location for a homeless respite center but said the city needs to demonstrate it "can run this well, in a way that doesn't create a lot of near-neighbor impacts."

Meanwhile, City Manager Mike Webb said efforts to prepare the location, which began in earnest after council members zeroed in on the corporation yard as their preferred site last month, will continue over the next couple of weeks.

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