



CITY OF FORT BRAGG

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COUNCIL COMMITTEE ITEM SUMMARY REPORT

MEETING DATE: June 20, 2018
TO: Public Safety Committee
FROM: Tabatha Miller, City Manager
AGENDA ITEM TITLE: Receive Report and Discuss Homeless Issues in Fort Bragg, Including the Marbut Consulting Report and a More Comprehensive City Approach

ISSUE:

Homelessness and transients within the City continues to be a challenge and a significant issue. Obviously, Fort Bragg is not the only community in California grappling with this problem. California has 21 of the 30 most expensive rental markets in the nation. State-wide, 134,278 Californians were counted as homeless in January 2017, although the number of people without housing is estimated to be 3 to 4 times that point-in-time count. Since then the state has experienced a number of natural disasters, including local fires in October, which has reduced the available housing inventory even more.

In October 2017, the Mendocino County, through Health and Human Services contracted with homelessness expert Dr. Robert Marbut Jr., of Marbut Consulting, to perform a homelessness assessment within Mendocino County (Marbut Report). The Marbut Report, provided estimated counts for the number of "street level" homeless in the County's three most populated cities (Ukiah, Fort Bragg and Willits) and in the surrounding county. It also reported the demographics for the County's homeless population.

The County's homeless population is 61% male and 39% female, which is a higher number of females than expected. The average age is 44.4 and the average time experiencing homelessness was 4.8 years with an average time living in the County of 18.6 years, higher than other communities. Almost 62% had family living in the County or had family that had passed away from the County. This local connection was extremely high.

According to the Marbut Report the total number of street-level homeless in fort Bragg is 81 individuals with an additional 15-17 living just outside the City limits in the County but availing themselves of local services such as the 3pm meal at the Hospitality House. Although not entirely tied to homelessness, the community feels the impact from increased trash and public defecation, panhandling, public drunkenness, illegal camping, loitering and increased use of local services.

Lack of affordable housing, poverty, lack of affordable healthcare, domestic violence, mental illness and addiction are all cited as leading causes of homelessness. The Marbut report

focuses on the root triggers instead of what he refers to as the “symptoms”. He states that the root triggers are almost always behavioral health issues such as addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder or domestic violence and that recovery must focus on those issues to be successful. It is the behavioral health issues that creates much of this community’s frustration and make this such a divisive local issue.

City staff expend significant time and resources responding to and handling homeless related issues. The Police Department is the most impacted department in the City with 70+% of the officers’ time spent responding to service calls on transient issues. The vast majority of those calls do not result in citations or arrest, because no crime has been committed or because no one is willing to press charges. Most officer-transient interactions relate to managing behavioral health issues. Under current state law, many of the behavior issues are not arrestable offenses. Even when an offense is arrestable, it has often not been observed by the officers, and the cooperation of a witness or the victim is required for an officer assisted Citizen’s Arrest. Often this cooperation is not forthcoming from the witness or the victim.

Furthermore, when a citation or arrest is made, the impact to the overall problem is minimal because: 1) few individuals are eligible to be booked into jail; 2) many of the fines and penalties are waived by the courts because of the indigent status of defendant; and 3) the District Attorney’s office places a very low priority on transient cases and typically refuses to pursue them. This is a frustration for the community, who perceive that the police and the City are doing little to address the issue and the officers who spend much of their time chasing transients around town, instead of performing normal police work.

The City’s Public Works Department cleans up the messes and repairs the damage to our public parks, restroom and facilities. Tom Varga estimates that 10-15% of the crews’ time is attributable to those efforts.

The Community Development Department typically spends about 10% of its time engaged in code enforcement issues related to homelessness. Significant resources are dedicate a few times a year for larger issues such as, the Use Permit enforcement with the Hospitality House, staffing MCHC Ad Hoc Committee meetings, code enforcement for 119 Pine Street and large encampment clean ups such as 610 Cypress Street.

SUMMARY:

The Marbut Report provides 28 Recommended Action Steps grouped into Governance and County-wide Strategy Recommendations, Clinical Recommendations, Sheltering and Transitional Housing Recommendations, Public Space Issues, and Longer Term Recommendations. Cross agency collaboration and developing a common community understanding of the challenges are noted as key to moving to a coordinated strategic approach. A need for improved coordination between the County and the Cities is also identified as a recommended step.

In April, Mendocino County Board of Supervisors endorsed in concept the 28 recommended actions outlined in that report and directed staff to pursue collaborative implementation with other community partners. In May, the City of Ukiah City Council adopted in concept the Marbut Report, directed staff to pursue collaborative implementation with the County and created an ad hoc committee.

The Mendocino Coast Hospitality Center Ad Hoc Committee has discussed the Marbut report. Maya Stuart, [Mendocino County Homeless Services Continuum of Care](#) (MCHSCoC) Chair who worked closely with Dr. Marbut in researching the County for his report has attended several of the MCHC Ad Hoc committee meetings and has committed to regularly attending and engaging in those local meetings.

Objective 4.5 of the Fort Bragg City Council Goals & Priorities is Address Homelessness in Fort Bragg. With the following Strategies/Actions:

Objective 4.5: Address Homelessness in Fort Bragg					
Strategies/ Actions:		Priority	Year(s)	Responsible	Status
Form a Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) On Homelessness and Conduct Town Hall Meeting.		H	2017-19	Public Safety Committee	Pending
Coordinate With Other Agencies in the County and Research How Other Communities and Agencies Work With Homeless People to Encourage Good Behavior and Minimize Community Impacts.		H	2016-21	City Council	In progress
Support the Establishment of Transitional and Supportive Housing to Help Move Homeless Persons/Families Into Permanent Housing.		M	2016-21	City Council	Ongoing

The Marbut Report has many useful concepts and ideas. From a City perspective it makes sense to take these recommendations and work with the Police Department, Community Development Department and the Public Works Department to customize the recommendations to our community based on extensive staff experience working with homeless issues in Fort Bragg. Certainly it will take the proactive efforts of the City Council and all three Departments to begin to develop and implement solutions in Fort Bragg.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Public Safety Committee recommend that the City Council:

- 1) Adopt in concept and endorse the findings and recommendations contained in the Homeless Needs Assessment and Action Steps for Mendocino report; and
- 2) Appoint an ad hoc committee to work with staff to: a) develop a strategic approach to managing the City's homeless/transient issues; b) reach out to local stakeholders for a more cohesive approach to the issue; and c) participate at the County level on larger scale solutions.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Marbut Report
2. [Homelessness Task Force Report 2018](#)