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Homeless issues on minds of residents

Supervisor meets with group to discuss ways to cope with growing woes

By Kyle Martin

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UNION CITY — At the Ruggieri Senior Center on Monday night in Union City, East Bay residents and local officials gathered to discuss ways to weather the storm for homeless residents in the face of potentially millions of dollars in federal funding cuts for housing.

Hosted by Alameda County Supervisor Elisa Marquez, over a dozen community members gathered to analyze the issues homeless residents and lawmakers face as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development considers chopping between \$33 to \$60 million in federal housing funding from the county's budget.

"We have a real risk when it comes to federal homeless resources," Jonathan Russell, director of the county's Health Housing and Homelessness Services department said at the senior center, which also provides safe parking for homeless residents living in vehicles at night.

As the county faces the financial loss, officials and residents are left trying to figure out how to make up for that funding in a region that is in the middle of a housing crisis. Officials said that affordable housing and shelter beds continue to be some of the top needs for homeless residents in the county. With

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funds now available through Measure W, a controversial \$1.4 billion, 10 year, half-cent parcel tax voters passed in 2020 to fund homeless services and resources, local lawmakers are expected to make significant strides to get homeless people housed.

According to a 2024 count, there were 9,450 homeless people in Alameda County, including 6,343 people living unsheltered.

Measure W is expected to provide the county about \$153 million per year in homeless services funding, which sunsets after 2030. A group sued the county over the tax, which held up the funds until earlier this year when a judge in April ruled in favor of the county, releasing the money for county use. By then, the measure had generated over \$800 million.

Russell told the crowd that by February 2026, officials expect to have provided 300 new shelter beds in facilities throughout the county.

The county currently has just over 3,400 total shelter beds between emergency shelters and transitional housing.

Other topics of interest at Monday's meeting included the county's five-year Home Together 20206 strategic plan, approved by the board in 2022, which is expected to sunset next year. The county is pursuing a new plan called the Home Together 2030 plan, which is still being developed. The county expects to release full details of the plan by summer 2026.

Members of the Youth Advisory Board, which includes residents between 18 to 28 years old with current or past experience living homeless, presented data detailing young peoples' struggles on the streets.

According to county data, over 9% of the county's homeless population, or over 850 people, is 24 years old or younger, and of those young people about half are living alone without a parent or guardian on the streets.

Khantane Jackson, a 25-year-old member of the

youth advisory board, told this news organization Monday night that "there's a lot of important work that needs to be done" to help young people living on the streets.

"Youth homelessness is a lot of times invisible," said Jackson, who lives in Oakland.

Socorro Moreland, an East Bay housing activist, spoke during a public comment portion of the meeting to advocate for a new shelter planned to open next month in Hayward through Covenant House, an organization which provides shelter and housing services to youth throughout California.

"Every person deserves the chance to thrive," Moreland told officials.

In an interview, Supervisor Marquez said she is interested in looking deeper into what further funding and services can be provided to youth and seniors in the region. She stressed the importance of Measure W funding and the county's new Home Together 2030 plan to address homelessness. She said now that the

county raised the money, it's up to city officials to step in to start putting the money to use and get people off the streets.

"We're doing our part, now it's up to local leaders to do their part," said Marquez, whose district includes Hayward, Union City, Newark and parts of Fremont. In Fremont, she was a staunch opponent of the recent strict, homeless camping ban the City Council passed in February this year that criminalized camping anywhere in the city.

She credited Fremont for recently building its Homeless Navigation Center, which provides temporary shelter and housing services to dozens of homeless residents. But Marquez said cities should be developing more ordinances that help put people in homes, not ones that punish them for being on the streets.

"We have to be part of a shared vision," she said. "We have to exhaust all viable options, and I don't think that was done (in Fremont)," she said. "I prefer more solutions ... instead of harsh extremes."

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