

Marin Independent Journal

Marin could pool up to \$2 million for homeless initiative

By **ADRIAN RODRIGUEZ** | arodriguez@marinij.com | Marin

Independent Journal

June 12, 2021 at 8:14 p.m.

With more than 100 new housing vouchers dedicated for the homeless coming to Marin from President Biden's housing plan, city and county leaders are proposing to pool approximately \$2 million to hire case managers to help get people off the streets, and fast.

Marin's two largest cities have thrown their support behind the county effort. San Rafael and Novato city councils voted unanimously last week to contribute \$260,000 and \$240,000, respectively.

During its budget hearings set for June 21 through 23, the Marin County Board of Supervisors also will consider adding \$1.2 million to the pot, said Matthew Hymel, county administrator.

Local jurisdictions are using an influx of federal aid from the American Rescue Plan to pay for the contributions. The county of Marin is receiving \$50 million, while San Rafael is receiving a total of \$16 million and Novato is getting approximately \$9 million.

The proposal comes as Marin grapples with a wave of new homeless encampments, including at the viaduct beneath the Highway 101 overpass in San Rafael, at Lee Gerner Park in Novato, and at Dunphy Park in Sausalito.

"It's really an opportunity to house the most chronically homeless," Hymel said.

The county's expected contribution plus the allocations from San Rafael and Novato makes up 60% of the funds proposed. The other cities and

towns make up the remaining 40%; their contributions are calculated based on population.

The councils of each remaining city and town are expected to consider participation at meetings in July and August, according to city managers with each community.

Hymel said county homeless outreach planners will get started as early as July with what funds are available.

The overall goal is to hire up to eight case managers. Each case manager can serve 17 clients, which means, if there's enough funding, up to 136 homeless people could benefit from the program at a time.

"We have 600 or more homeless-related calls for service just in our PD in the last 12 months, 50% of which were in our largest encampment (Lee Gerner Park)," Novato City Manager Adam McGill said during the council's Tuesday meeting. "Under this formula we do believe we would have a direct impact with those at that encampment."

Andrew Hening, the outgoing director of homeless outreach in San Rafael, said more of the chronically homeless population have gravitated toward encampments for various reasons during the pandemic.

The Downtown Streets Team outreach group and Lynn Murphy, mental health liaison of the San Rafael Police Department, have been able to build more and better relationships with those individuals.

"I think having people in one place can really expedite the ability to get people into permanent housing," he said at the San Rafael council's Monday meeting.

The plan to hire case managers is one part of San Rafael's multiphased approach to tackle homelessness, a plan that was endorsed by the council on Monday.

The first phase includes taking advantage of rooms made available by Project Roomkey, a state initiative that aims to provide isolated shelter beds for homeless people during the pandemic, and Project Homekey,

which is intended to lead to permanent housing. This work is happening immediately, Hening said.

The plan also includes the case management work, as well as initiating a pilot “safe camping area,” which could get off the ground this summer, Hening said.

This would be a site with tents or some other shelter for homeless to sleep and keep their belongings. Having those people in need in a single place could make it easier for the service providers to find their clients, Hening said.

“If we were able to pursue that case management we want to be able make sure that we’re able to continue to work with people in a constructive and positive way and so this could be a way that we do that,” he said.

Several residents voiced support for the project, while others opposed the ideas.

Brad Gaffney opposed the city’s partnership with the Downtown Streets Team, citing sexual harassment allegations against the organizations chief executive officer Eileen Richardson, who founded the nonprofit in 2005.

The council on Monday approved a two-year contract extension with the nonprofit for \$200,000.

Pat Langley, a member of the Marin Organizing Committee activist group, said homeless people need more help.

“This is a blessing,” she said of the plan. “But without an adequate number of case managers to assure that rental units are located and people are transitioned into their new homes we would not be able to take advantage of this opportunity.”

Hening, whose part-time contract with the city ends June 30, is remaining in Marin to continue work with Opening Doors Marin as an independent consultant on homeless initiatives throughout the county. He was a full-time city employee from 2016 through May 2020. His final salary was \$10,952 a month. He has been working on a part-time contract since June 2020, earning \$150 an hour.