

## **Homeless Task Force to Focus on Temporary Housing and Shelter**

By Supervisor Dave Cortese

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

I couldn't agree more with this famous quote by anthropologist Margaret Mead. That's why I continually go to you, the residents of Santa Clara County, to help me and my colleagues on the Board tackle our greatest challenges.

In order to tap into the great knowledge and experience that is always present in our communities, the Board approved my proposal to create a new Homeless Task Force to focus on the immediate needs of the 8,000 of our neighbors who are struggling through the winter with no housing or shelter. For six months, this group will meet to develop strategies for increasing emergency shelter and transitional housing while permanent supportive housing is being built through Measure A funding.

Not surprisingly, the idea for a Task Force came from a group of people gathered at the Community Summit on Homelessness last September. The 250 participants, including 60 who were unhoused, gave up a Saturday to explore solutions to homelessness through table-top conversations led by trained facilitators. They based this on the success of the 2015 Housing Task Force, which led to the Measure A \$950 million housing bond for permanent supportive housing.

Measure A is scheduled to provide 4,800 affordable housing units over 10 years, with 75% of them targeted for those who are extremely low income and very low income as identified by federal guidelines. At this time, 18 housing projects are in the works, and three have opened, which will provide about 2,000 units. Some of the units are called permanent supportive housing. This means that the tenants will also receive services, including treatment for addiction, mental and physical healthcare and job training. The idea is that people who have been homeless for a long time not only need roofs over their heads but help to stabilize their lives and put them on a path to success.

But Measure A funds cannot be used for temporary shelter or transitional housing, which is why you continue to see homeless on the streets. The funding is restricted to building new housing and to renovating existing housing for use as permanent supportive housing. That's the deal we made with voters who approved the Measure A Affordable Housing Bond in 2016. So, while we're making progress

toward the medium- and long-term solutions to respond to our housing crisis, we are long overdue in addressing the desperate need to provide temporary shelter and housing while the permanent housing is being built. That's what the Homeless Task Force will be charged to do.

The Summit participants also came up with an impressive list of other recommendations that the Task Force can look into, including expanding mental health teams, providing lockers for unhoused residents to safely store their belongings, funding more portable showers, providing cell phones and chargers and educating the public about the diverse experiences of homelessness and include positive stories.

To read the report and the list of recommendations, visit my website at [www.supervisorcortese.org](http://www.supervisorcortese.org) and click on the item about the Task Force.

You can also call my office at 408-299-5030 or email me at [dave.cortese@bos.sccgov.org](mailto:dave.cortese@bos.sccgov.org).