News Release

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Summit Brings Together Diverse Participants to Explore Housing Solutions

Homeless Residents, Community Leaders, Policymakers Exchange Views

Seated at dozens of round tables on a warm autumn Saturday, 250 people from diverse backgrounds, incomes, ethnicities and life experiences, came together to talk about the biggest challenge facing the County and region: housing and homelessness.

About 50 of the participants knew a lot about the subject. They came to the Community Summit on Homelessness at the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds from shelters, tent camps and city streets to tell their stories and work with others in the community to find solutions.

The County’s first summit on homelessness on Saturday, September 21, was produced by the Office of Supervisor Dave Cortese in partnership with the American Leadership Forum and other community partners. An extensive outreach effort was conducted to bring people who don’t have housing to the event.
“So often we talk about our unhoused residents and what to do for them without them being part of the conversation,” said Supervisor Cortese. “We wanted to make sure that didn’t happen at this event.”

Participants in the five-hour table-top exercises and discussions were led by facilitators trained by ALF, with consultant Greg Ranstrom and Protima Pandey, director of the County’s Office of Women’s Policy, serving as chief facilitators.

Participants also included residents, health care providers, housing experts, community leaders and County workers. All were committed to listening to each other’s views on the homelessness crisis with the goal of coming up with solutions and continuing the engagement beyond the one-day event.

Focusing on two talking points – what we see is happening and what we can do about it – the conversations were sometimes uncomfortable and emotional but always respectful, according to facilitators who led the table talks.

All participants had the chance to put in writing their opinions and ideas about the area’s housing shortage and the lack of resources for people who live outside. In Santa Clara County, the last homeless count resulted in an increase from 7,000 to nearly 10,000 in the past two years.

In the afternoon, participants formed their own discussions groups on topics that ranged from accountability in spending to home building and the critical need for transitional housing while permanent supportive housing is being built through the Measure A Housing Bond approved by voters in 2016.

The information gathered on Saturday will be compiled, analyzed and put into a report that will be provided to the public and presented to the Board of Supervisors. Special attention will be paid to suggestions that can be put into action. Last year’s Community Summit on Firearms Safety produced several ideas that became programs, including one that allows unwanted weapons to be turned into the Sheriff’s Office at any time.

“This isn’t going to be a report that sits on a shelf and gathers dust,” said Cortese. “Not only will we try to put the ideas into action, we will continue the discussions in neighborhoods, community centers, school, places of worship and other venues where people are interested in civic engagement.”
For more information on the Community Summit on Homelessness, contact the office of Supervisor Dave Cortese at 408-299-5030.