

Emergency housing, homelessness discussed by council

December 19, 2022



The Crescent City Council will have to deal with emergency housing and homelessness in its housing supply, a more liberal policy around allowing additional housing units on property and assisting a 27-unit senior housing apartment complex.

As the State of California continues to prioritize housing for low- and middle-income people while addressing the needs of the unhoused, towns like Crescent City are pressed to comply despite having not a single overnight shelter for the homeless.

Councilor Ray Altman pushed back referring to Crescent City as too small when discussing shelter for the unhoused.

“I think an emergency is temporary. We’re a small city, are we providing services that may be getting too big for our britches?” he asked his fellow council members.

Altman recommended the homeless seek out services and shelter in the county instead.

Mayor Pro Tem Blake Inscore disagreed, arguing that Crescent City had failed in its responsibilities to all the members of its community stating that housing is a right.

“We have a responsibility to allow a legitimate nonprofit to build a permanent shelter and we haven’t done that.”

He also contended that arguments about Crescent City being too small or not having enough buildable land were “inappropriate” and untrue.

Inscore stated that Crescent City checked a necessary box to comply with state rules in their housing capacity without ever seriously considered building or allowing shelters to be built. Councilor Jason Greenough agreed saying, “They checked the box and moved on.” He agreed with Inscore, stating that most working people were one paycheck away from becoming homeless and that the city owed them protection, too.

Planner Ethan “Red Eagle” Lawt suggested that the council could direct staff to add a public facility zone, come up with a second zoning district or create a special overlay which would allow for such facilities.

The council generally agreed that planning documents included in the housing capacity should include the possibility of shelter for the unhoused as well as emergency shelter in case of disaster.

The majority directed the staff to include a “realistic” overlay in its housing analysis that created a plan and availability for shelters.

Additionally, the council heard about the process for construction of additional homes on residential properties under the state law which demands that cities allow these units without delay. These units, known as additional dwelling units or ADU’s can be as large as 1,200 square feet or as small as 150.

They must have basic cooking facilities and bathrooms or access to an indoor bathroom without having to go outside to access one. And under the law a person with enough space could build more than one on a designated lot and could also build a “junior ADU” which would exist inside a home but have a separate entrance and an efficiency kitchen as well as access to the bathroom.

The critical point of the discussion was around short or long term stay requirements. The planning commission had recommended, as well as the state, that ADU’s be created for additional affordable housing and be required to be rented at 30 days or more.

But the law does not demand that and the city could leave it open to shorter stays.

Numerous other rules about heights, setbacks and parking have changed to make it easier for these units to be built including no parking requirements on site and no or few additional fees.

Concerns were raised by Inscore about not charging for utility connections but that was cleared up by stating if the utilities to the property are inadequate, fees could be charged for an additional connection.

The council took no action, but the planning department and planning commission are continuing to create policy around the new rules and will bring it back to the council for their decision regarding future ordinances.

And finally, the council accepted a \$485,000 state grant awarded to a developer to begin a 27-unit, three story senior apartment building at 655 H Street referred to as Harbor Point.

The plan had been proposed in the past but was stalled due to finances. The project is estimated to cost approximately \$16 million to build. But the state planning grant, if approved, puts the project in line for greater funding.

The group creating the housing, Danco Communities is creating something similar in Eureka as well.