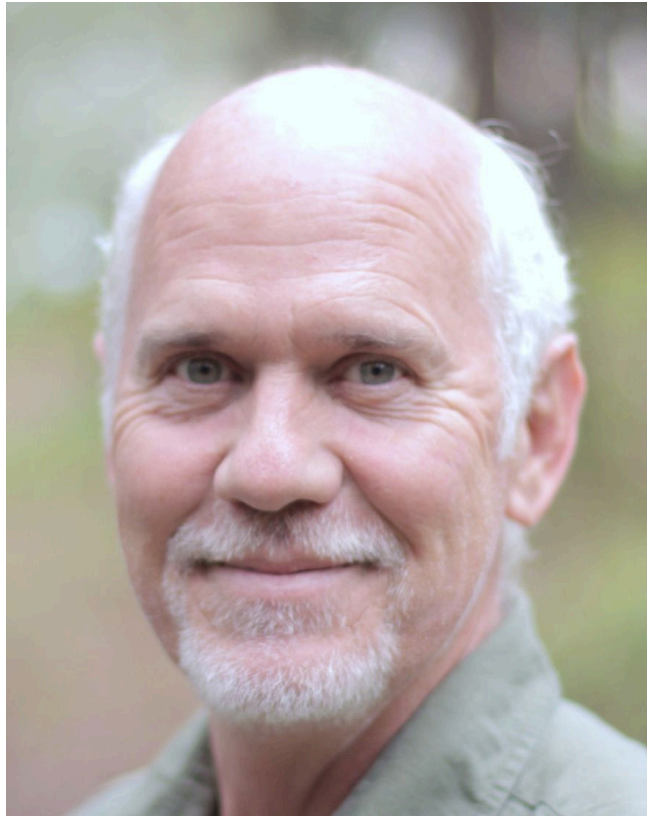


## Guest Column: Supervisors Score Hat-Trick for Housing

March 1, 2023



The Board of Supervisors scored a hat-trick at a recent meeting (2/14/23). In soccer and other games, a hat-trick is when a player scores three goals in the same game. At this meeting, the Board of Supervisors, 1) Adopted the 2022-2030 Housing Element; 2) Authorized an application for a grant to help the homeless; and 3) Adopted a resolution declaring a shelter crisis.

If the Supervisors follow up on their commitment, these three votes will help solve the local housing crisis.

### **Housing Element Adopted**

The Housing Element is a part of the County General Plan that is required by state law to be updated every 8 years. For the last 19 months the County has conducted extensive community outreach, including workshops and study sessions before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. ([housingdelnorte.com](http://housingdelnorte.com))

On February 14, the Supervisors unanimously adopted the Housing Element which provides an assessment of current and future housing needs; identifies opportunities and constraints on housing production; establishes goals, policies, and programs to meet housing needs; and recommends updates to county regulations to reflect new state laws.

The objectives of the Housing Element include conserving and improving existing affordable housing; maximizing housing opportunities throughout the community; removing governmental and other constraints to housing investment and providing fair and equal housing opportunities.

The mandated goal of the Housing Element is the construction of 386 new housing units over the next 8 years, with 40% of the housing targeted for low and very low-income residents. There is no obligation for the County to construct these housing units. They must incentivize private developers to accomplish this.

The County has discretion in most cases to establish zoning and preferred housing sites. The 2022-2030

Housing Element identifies sufficient available land for housing and very few zoning changes are needed. One area where the County has less discretion is the new requirement to zone enough land for emergency shelters.

The current conditional use permit process was identified as a constraint to developing emergency shelters. The county must remove these constraints and identify zoning where a shelter must be allowed “by right.” The County also has an obligation to consult with non-profit groups regionally to plan for emergency shelters.

### **Grant Application Authorized**

Last year, the Board of Supervisors formed an Ad Hoc Committee to address the problems with homeless camps. \$50,000 was allocated to clean up the camps, but it soon became clear that this would not solve the problem until these people have somewhere else to go.

In response to this concern, a collaborative effort of government and non-profit advocates developed a plan that will provide housing for the homeless. At their February 14 meeting, the Board of Supervisors heard a presentation from county grant writer Alison Ramsay and Daphne Cortese-Lambert, Director of Homeless Services for Del Norte Mission Possible.

They described a comprehensive program that can best be described as a continuum of housing. They requested that the Board of Supervisors authorize the County to submit an \$7 million grant application to the Encampment Resolution Fund.

This partnership between the County Department of Health and Human Services, Del Norte Mission Possible, Arcata House Partnership and True North Organizing Network is seeking funding to: 1) Expand the emergency shelter on Harrold Street, 2) Build interim housing at a “pallet home” village, 3) Build two navigation centers and 4) Fund staffing and operations for three years.

This program is designed to bring people through a continuum of care that leads from homeless encampment to emergency shelter to interim housing. The final goal is affordable permanent housing.

At this time, our community lacks a year-round emergency shelter and interim housing. This grant will fill this void. Full implementation of the housing element will provide adequate long term affordable housing.

This well-planned sequence of services will provide outreach, preparation, navigation services, storage, case management, mental health treatment, recovery services, medical services and job training.

The proposed navigation centers are critical to success. Starting at the emergency shelter, staff would welcome the clients and build a trusting relationship. This will enable staff to address the clients' needs and help identify programs they are best suited for. At this point they will need intensive case management.

The emergency shelter will provide 60 beds, with some beds set aside for youth and hospital recovery. There will be two units reserved for families. After stabilizing at the emergency shelter, clients will qualify to move into the pallet home village.

Interim housing will be met by establishing a village of 30 "pallet homes." These are not homes made from pallets. They are prefabricated shelters that are affordable, easy to ship, quick to set up and movable. This project will use county owned land on Williams Drive near the old juvenile hall.

The village will be fenced with 24/7 security. Amenities will include separate male and female bathrooms and showers, a community room and meals delivered from the kitchen at the emergency shelter. There will be a navigation center on site to provide ongoing support and assistance. Ultimately people will be able to get jobs and move into permanent housing.

Four Supervisors voted to support this project. Supervisor Borges voted no because he did not like the location, but he could not suggest an alternative site.

### **Shelter Crisis Declared**

The Supervisors scored their third point when they voted unanimously to "declare a shelter crisis and proclaim the existence of a situation in which a significant number of persons are without the ability to obtain shelter, resulting in a threat to their health and safety."

During a shelter crisis, a number of building, zoning and health and safety laws will be temporarily relaxed to allow the county to provide emergency shelter, including "sleeping cabins." This will allow more flexibility in providing temporary emergency housing for people as an alternative to the encampments in forests and wetlands.

The findings of this resolution recognize that the 2022 Point in Time Count identified 462 people who were homeless in Del Norte County. The 2023 count will be higher. "This population includes veterans, women, children, persons with disabilities, seniors and other vulnerable groups."

“These individuals lack adequate sanitary facilities and are at risk from theft, crime, and extreme weather conditions. These conditions threaten the physical and mental health and safety of those experiencing homelessness. These conditions also result in a threat to the public health and well-being of the community.”

Together these three actions by the Board of Supervisors move our county forward in addressing homelessness and the lack of access to affordable housing. These are three steps in the right direction.