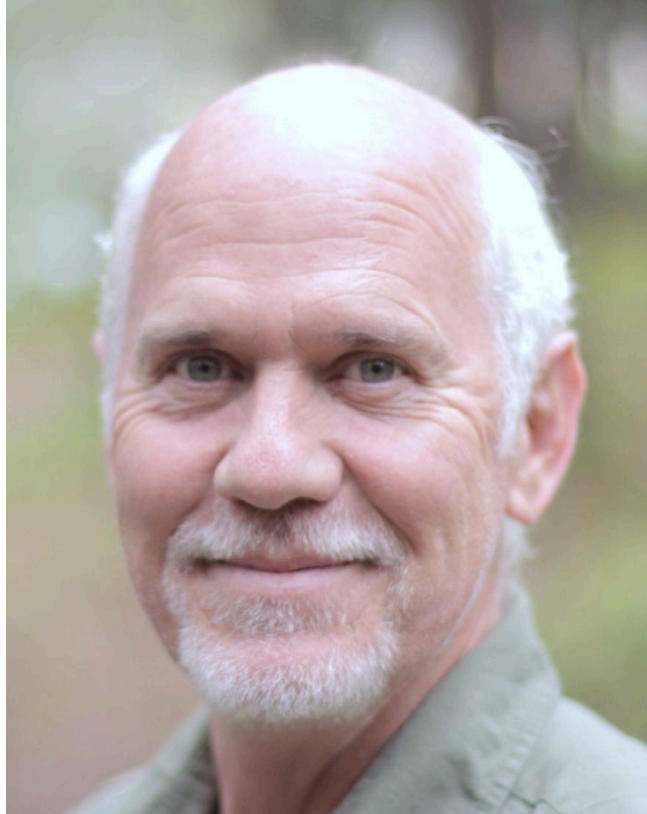

In My View: Sometimes government works

March 3, 2024



“I love it when a plan comes together.” This was a famous line by Lieutenant Colonel John “Hannibal” Smith, the leader of the A-Team, an 80’s TV show about four former members of a U.S. Army Special Forces unit.

At the Board of Supervisors meeting on February 13 the Del Norte A Team brought their A game. After a compelling and informative presentation from Del Norte Mission Possible, the Board of Supervisors authorized the use of county-owned property on Williams Drive to establish centralized services for the unhoused.

After years of planning and advocacy, the County has formed a partnership with Del Norte Mission Possible to develop a 60 bed emergency shelter and a tiny home village with up to 50 temporary housing units. The project will be built over the next two years thanks in part to a state grant of \$10.8 million.

Future Vision

The PowerPoint presentation to the Supervisors stated, “This community needs space for those experiencing homelessness to achieve stability and find a path to permanent housing, dignity and reengagement in society. This is the best option for doing so.”

Del Norte Mission Possible considered 38 different properties for an emergency shelter for our unhoused population. Three were seriously explored and none were found feasible. This was complicated by community misunderstanding about what the project will and will not be.

The recommendation to locate this shelter on county-owned property was developed by the County Housing and Homelessness Ad Hoc Committee with input from the City, County, Police, Sheriff, Behavioral Health and the community. The project will utilize county-owned property that is underused, not visible, and close to services.

Evolving Understanding

When the Board of Supervisors discussed this subject in December, there was a lot of confusion. At that time Supervisor Borges was opposed to the location, but ultimately the other Supervisors approved locating the tiny home village on the Williams Drive property. The location of the emergency shelter was still up in the air.

At the most recent meeting, Supervisor Borges had clearly done his homework and had a much better understanding of what this project would entail. He literally went the extra mile to visit a homeless shelter in the Rogue Valley to observe how they operate and get answers for questions he had about our local project.

I find it encouraging when an elected official is willing to absorb new information and change their position based on an evolved understanding. It is hard for a new Supervisor to immediately be up to speed on the multitude of issues that they must deal with. I am pleased to see Supervisor Borges step up on this issue.

Combined Effort

As of December, it was planned that the tiny home village and the emergency shelter would not be at the same location. It makes much more sense to have these services co-located to improve efficiency and long-term reduction of expenses.

The project will co-locate a 60-bed congregate emergency shelter and a micro village with 50 tiny homes. Both housing components will be able to share accessory services that the grant will pay to set up, including kitchen and bathroom facilities, community area, storage, laundry, garden, and pet area.

More important than the physical layout, the transitional services are an essential component for the success of this effort. On-site staff will provide individualized support services to assist the residents to stabilize their lives and prepare to transition to permanent housing, improved health, and employment.

Not the Stereotype

It is a common misconception that there will be crowds of homeless people loitering around the location of these housing services. Some of us have seen rescue missions that allow people to simply drop in and wait for a bed to open up. This project will not be like that. Del Norte Mission Possible has a better plan.

All residents will be screened at offsite “navigation” centers and transported to the facilities. There will be no drop in or first come first served, no lining up for a bed and no loitering. This housing compound will be secure, fenced and monitored by security cameras and security staff.

There will always be at least two staff members on site who are trained in trauma informed care and de-escalation. This program will offer more than just a bed. They will provide relationship-based case management and goal setting. They will provide opportunities, establish behavioral rules and accountability.

More Is Needed

There are still more details to work out, but this project is off and running because of inter-agency cooperation and collaboration with capable community partners. Sometimes government works.

This project will not completely solve the challenges of our unhoused population, but it is a good start. Del Norte Mission Possible will directly reach out and find the people who want to be helped.

These facilities will provide basic comfort but will not be so comfortable that people will want to stay forever. This housing is intended to be temporary and transitional to permanent housing. As these programs succeed, more people will be housed, and temporary beds will open up for the next person in need.

At the same time, the County and the City should aggressively support policies and programs that develop more affordable housing in our community. The shortage of affordable housing is one of the reasons that some people become homeless. The obvious long-term solution for people who are unhoused is more housing.

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