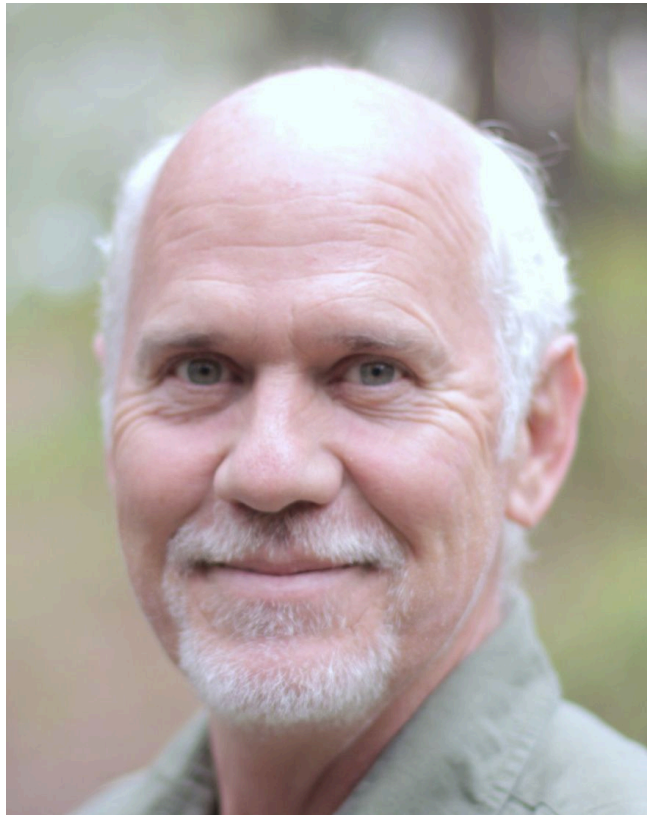


In My View: We've got to have faith!

December 28, 2023



The Del Norte County Board of Supervisors recently engaged in a public discussion about whether to accept a \$10.8 million grant that will start to address the problem of unhoused people in our community. I was alerted to this meeting by an email asking for people to come to the meeting to support this program.

“A recent negative Facebook campaign has garnered a lot of attention in the past couple of weeks. We are concerned that it will generate a turnout of people opposed to helping the unhoused. We need your help tomorrow to fill the board chambers in support of Del Norte Mission Possible and our tiny home village.”

People Came

More than 100 people attended this meeting. Thirty-seven residents provided testimony, 22 people spoke in support and 11 expressed concerns. Four were not clear what they wanted.

The most compelling witnesses described how Del Norte Mission Possible had helped them to get back on their feet through their ongoing programs. Some of the people who spoke out against this program, did not have a good grasp on the facts of this project. Facebook is not always the best source of information.

This should have been a perfunctory vote to approve acceptance of a grant that the majority had already voted to apply for, but there seemed to be some confusion over what was happening. One person wanted to decline the grant because California has a budget deficit. Another suggested the funds should be used for education.

The Encampment Resolution Fund has been allocated by the State for this specific purpose. If Del Norte County declined the grant, it would not reduce the deficit. It would be awarded to another applicant. This grant funding cannot be redirected to education or any other programs. It can only be used for this purpose.

Supervisors' Questions

There were reasonable questions about some of the issues that had not yet been resolved. One Supervisor asked if the proponents expected the Supervisors take a leap of faith that it will all work out. It wasn't lost on me that they were asking this question to a faith-based organization. I say, "Yes. We've got to have faith."

Any complex project requires some faith that it will work out. Whenever a grant application is submitted, funding can be approved prior to nailing down all the details. The granting agency takes a leap of faith that the applicant will be able to use the grant funds to finalize plans and meet the performance criteria of the grant.

The County has delegated portions of this grant funded project to very capable local partners and should trust that these partners will perform the duties they are assigned. True North Organizing Network brought forward the grant writer that secured this funding and Del Norte Mission Possible will implement the program.

More Than Numbers

It was a miscalculation to not have a more detailed overview of this project for the Board of Supervisors and the public, so everyone was on the same page. The staff report was brief and primarily the details included a list of dollar amounts that would be added to specific budget lines.

I have heard about this project, but following the Board of Supervisors meeting I did further research to refresh my memory about the specifics. I wanted to equate the budget numbers with project outcomes to fully appreciate the objectives of this project. The primary goal is to reduce homelessness.

A point in time study in February 2023 identified 656 individuals living in our community without homes trying to survive without basic shelter. This project will create a continuum of care to help people move out of the encampments into supportive housing leading to permanent housing.

What's The Plan?

There are three primary objectives. Outcome 1: Establish essential, currently nonexistent interim housing and navigation services. This will include complete development of an emergency shelter, navigation centers, storage facilities and a micro shelter village. The County will subcontract with Mission Possible for operations.

Outcome 2: Assist 475 individuals to move out of encampments and develop individual pathways to permanent housing. The navigation centers will help guide clients to transitional services in order to move from encampments to the emergency shelter, then to interim housing and ultimately to permanent housing.

Outcome 3: Assist 150 individuals to move into and maintain permanent housing. This will involve engaging landlords, developers, and government to increase availability of and access to permanent housing options. This includes ongoing case management and support to ensure long-term success in permanent housing.

Who Gets What?

The total grant award to the County is \$10,823,724. A portion of this grant will be sub granted to Del Norte Mission Possible (\$6,924,809) and the Arcata House Partnership (\$468,000). The balance of \$3,430,915 will go to the Del Norte County Health and Human Services Department, including \$515,415 for admin and overhead.

The funding to Del Norte Mission Possible will pay for personnel, start up, and operating costs for the emergency shelter and tiny homes village. Del Norte Mission Possible has a separate grant to develop the emergency shelter. Many of the concerns expressed at the Supervisors meeting were regarding the location of this emergency shelter. This is an important detail that still must be worked through.

The Arcata House Partnership will provide training and technical assistance for the emergency shelter and micro village staffing and operations. In this way Del Norte County can benefit from the experience and successes of an existing project.

The portion retained by the County will pay for the development and construction of a tiny home village to be located on County owned property near the closed Juvenile Hall. This will pay for the purchase of 50 tiny homes, with shared bathrooms, a kitchen, storage and equipment for this interim housing micro village.

Progress Achieved

After more than two hours of public comments and discussion by the Supervisors, the vote was 4 to 1 in favor of accepting this grant.

Since February, Supervisor Borges has consistently voted against this project because he does not like the location for the tiny homes village, though he has not suggested another location.

I commend the County for making a leap of faith and moving forward with this viable project. I think that this faith will be rewarded, and progress will be made in reducing our community's unhoused population.

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