

Humboldt County Human Rights Commission
Meeting of Saturday, October 11, 2008
9:00 a.m. Unitarian/Universalist Fellowship
Bayside, California

This was a special meeting of The Commission called to enable Commissioners to learn about the situation regarding the homeless in Humboldt County. Fourteen community members who work in some capacity with the homeless were invited to address The Commission. Each was asked to make a fifteen-minute presentation which would be followed by fifteen-minutes of questioning and commenting by members of The Commission. Thirteen of the invitees attended.

Commissioners in Attendance:

Stuart Atschuler
Nita Brake-Mills
Maggy Herbelin
Byrd Lochtie
Larry Miller
Jean Munsee
Neal Sanders
Jack Shaffer

Commissioners Excused from Attendance

Jamila Tharp
Bud Tillinghast

Invited Speakers:

Maureen Lawlor

Garr Nielsen
Maureen Chase
Dan Taronto
Hillary Mosher
Jared Martin
Sally Hewitt
Jennifer Coopman
Suzie Van Kirk
Lisa Riley Anthony Rozelle
Fox Olson
Kathy Anderson
Roger Herrick
Patty Rose

Community Resource Center
St. Joseph's Hospital
Eureka Chief of Police
Eureka City Schools
Code Enforcement Task Force
Concerned Citizen
Youth Services Bureau
Mobile Medical Office
Arcata Main Street
Arcata Night Shelter
Homeless Success
Arcata House
Advocate – Southern Humboldt
ACLU
Advocate – Southern Humboldt

Maureen Chase and Fox Olson did not attend.

Speakers painted a picture of a county with hundreds of homeless citizens, oppressed, persecuted, feared, and misunderstood with inadequate facilities, inadequate care, and inadequate governmental support.

Specific Needs

- Shelters
- Drop-in Centers
- Camping Areas
- Parking/Sleeping areas
- Public Bathrooms
- Public Showers
- Public Telephones
- Storage Facilities
- Medical and Dental Care
- Mental Health Services
- Rentals and Low-Cost Housing
- Improvement in Education
 - More Pre-Schools
 - Better assessment and delivery of services in K-12
- Change in Attitude of Law Enforcement
 - Treat all with fairness, respect, and dignity. Eureka Police Chief said this is his policy. Homelessness should not be a police matter. It is not criminal.
 - Stop targeting homeless and ticketing unfairly.
 - Stop harassing the homeless without regard to civil rights, especially in Southern Humboldt where a vigilante was reported to be operating in conjunction with the sheriff's department.
- Improvement in Prison Discharge Procedure
 - Provide clothing.
 - Create a plan.
 - Provide support.
- Justice
 - Provide advocate available for consultation during court appearances
- * Improvement in Community Attitude
 - Community members were said to be fearful of and hostile to the homeless. The business community perceives them as a blight and a deterrent to successful business and to tourism. The homeless are not treated with humane respect and are made to feel unworthy and unwelcome in the community. They are persecuted and victimized. Local government agencies do not protect the rights of the poor. They pander to the NIMBYs and do not protect the rights of all. The negative situation regarding the homeless in Humboldt County has been discussed among citizens and government for over twenty years but has never

really been addressed, and some speakers said that the situation has been worsening recently and needs action.

Proposed Solutions

- Provide night shelters, camping areas, and parking areas
- Provide public bathrooms, showers, trash cans, telephones
- Provide a drop-In center
 - place to learn life skills
 - place to get help with paperwork
 - place to have internet access
 - place to receive mail
- Expand low/cost medical, dental, mental health care.
- Provide clothing distribution centers.
- Involve homeless population in solution.
- Use agencies like The Endeavor to replace law enforcement when possible.
- Press North Coast Legal Services to represent the poor in court.
- Enact mediation before eviction.
- Change the situation through the courts as was done in Los Angeles.
- Human Rights Commission get Board of Supervisors to enact a Good Samaritan-type law to provide exemption from liability to anyone who provides shelter to a homeless person or persons in case of emergency..
- Human Rights Commission press The County Board of Supervisors to implement the Housing Element of The General Plan which calls for nomadic housing.
- Human Rights Commission investigate abuse by law enforcement in Southern Humboldt and the status of John Cosselli and The Eel River Clean-Up Crew in relation to the Sheriff's Department.
- Human Rights Commission meet and get input from homeless people. One suggestion was to go where the homeless are and gather a data base of stories. Another was to hold a meeting where all would be welcome with no set agenda. Verbena, an attendee, offered to help organize such a meeting. The information gathered from such meetings should be organized and presented to The County Board of Supervisors in an effort to stop discrimination against and persecution of the poor in Humboldt County.

Jean Munsee, Secretary