MEMBERS OF THE BOARD
JOHN C. ZARAGOZA
Chair
STEVE BENNETT
LINDA PARKS
KATHY I. LONG
PETER C. FOY

STEVE BENNETT
SUPERVISOR, FIRST DISTRICT
(805) 654-2703
FAX: (805) 654-2226
E-mail:steve.bennett@ventura.org

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF VENTURA
GOVERNMENT CENTER, HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
800 SOUTH VICTORIA AVENUE, VENTURA, CALIFORNIA 93009

September 11, 2012

Board of Supervisors
County of Ventura
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

SUBJECT: Recommendation of Supervisor Bennett and Supervisor Long to allocate $100,000 in homeless funding, originally designated during the June 18, 2007 budget hearings, to the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department for a pilot program to provide motel vouchers for homeless individuals currently living in the Ventura River who meet specific program requirements.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that this Board direct the CEO to allocate the previously budgeted $100,000 from Contingency to the Behavioral Health Department for a pilot program to provide motel vouchers for homeless individuals currently living in the Ventura River who meet specific program requirements.

DISCUSSION:

For several months, County agencies, the County WPD, the City of Ventura, and nonprofit social service agencies have been collaborating on a plan to remove homeless encampments from the Ventura River.

The Ventura River is a hazardous flood plain, an environmentally sensitive home to several endangered species, and is subject to a Trash TMDL from the regional water board. Under the TMDL, landowners and local governments face fines of $25,000 per day if trash in the river is not eliminated. There are 21 parcels and 9 property owners of the lower Ventura River area. The owners are a mix of city, County, State, private and non-profit entities. The County/WPD owns several parcels in the area that are managed by the Watershed Protection District. Some of the parcels have been cleared of encampments, and some are scheduled for clearing in the coming weeks.

Recycled Paper

Time is short. State and Federal permits require that work to clear trash and remove arundo from the river must occur between the end of the bird nesting season and before the rainy season. Therefore, work must begin in September. The work is scheduled to begin September 17, 2012.

Since June, Sheriff and Human Services Agency (HSA) staff and community service providers have been doing outreach to the individuals living in the area in order for them to be notified that camping is illegal, what action is planned, and to provide assistance for relocation. Contact has been made with 17 individuals on the County parcel. Resources exist to provide individuals with health care, food and clothing. County Alcohol and Drug Programs stand ready to assist those who have substance abuse issues, who seek treatment. Ten of the individuals are Cal Fresh recipients, one is a Veteran.

The most pressing need is for housing. In addition to the individuals on the County parcel, over the last six months, HSA has also worked with another 16 people, 8 are now housed and 6 more are in the process of getting there. HSA also partnered with Ventura community Homeless2Home service providers to provide County HPRP dollars to house an additional 15 people.

While tremendous progress has been made in establishing communications with the river homeless and opening the door to ending homelessness, at present, affordable housing options have run out. County HSA Homeless staff did a survey this week and found no affordable rentals available (approx. $500/mo.). Next week, many additional people must vacate their camps, and there is a severe shortage of places to go. The winter shelter does not open until December 1.

To provide a short-term, transitional housing option for those willing to work with a caseworker, we propose that the $100,000 of Contingency funds designated in the 2007 budget hearings for efforts to end homelessness be provided to the HCA Behavioral Health Department in order for them to obtain motel vouchers. These vouchers will be made available for homeless persons being relocated from the Ventura River who meet specific guidelines, including agreement to work with a case worker on a plan to end their homelessness. Clients who do not move into permanent housing by December 1, will be referred to the Winter Warming Shelter. Behavioral Health Department and HSA Homeless Services staff will work out the details of the program.

This pilot program provides an appropriate and safe setting for case workers to meet with clients. It is not safe for case workers to go into the river alone. It is not realistic to expect the Sheriff to accompany case workers every time they meet with a client. This plan facilitates the service connections and communication with clients so that they can work together on a plan. People do have choices. This plan gives them the ability to be in a safe place to learn about options they may have been unaware of and to think about the best choice for them.

This is a complicated issue, with significant human and environmental impacts. It is vital that, as we try to heal the environmental damage, we do all we can to mitigate harm to individuals. For those willing to work with their case worker, this can be a real opportunity to end their homelessness.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Cordially,

Steve Bennett
Supervisor, First District

Kathy I. Long
Supervisor, Third District