

**WEST COUNTY HOMELESS ADVOCATES (WCHA) LETTER OF SUPPORT
FOR PARK VILLAGE AND HORIZON SHINE AGENDA ITEM 6 RESOLUTIONS**

Dear Council: On behalf of West County Homeless Advocates (WCHA) of which I am chair, this is to urge your support of Resolutions in Agenda Item 6 tonight 10-4-22 calling for continued funding for Park Village and the Horizon Shine RV Village for persons who might otherwise be unhoused. WCHA, as you will recall, as an ad hoc volunteer group drawn from churches, service organizations, and interested and activist citizens.

Horizon Shine specifically is at risk of losing its funding by the end of the year. This would expel its residents back onto city streets or outlying areas that are even more unwelcoming than when Horizon Shine was created earlier this year, defeating everything that the Council and the City's various departments including police, planning, and public works, and Sonoma Applied Village Services (SAVS) has accomplished in the past year.

The effort expressed in creating Horizon Shine and the continuing support for Park Village, and the related unhoused outreach contract caseworker Jennifer Lake with WCCS, are the admirable legacies of this Council, and should neither be abandoned nor left to whatever an incoming and perhaps differently-directed Council may decide after elections just more than a month away. This Council should stand with the proposed Resolutions which reflect the history and accomplishments of this Council for as long as this Council as presently constituted remains seated.

Horizon Shine as a housing alternative was a key legal element to the clearance of Morris Street and similar encampments, in conjunction with the City's revised parking ordinance which banned all RVs from all city streets except for a late night/early morning window of time. Shifting unauthorized RVs out of city limits onto outlying areas was frankly stated by former Police Chief Kevin Kilgore in Council testimony as a related device to clear Morris Street and environs. Termination of Horizon Shine simply spills all of its residents back out into wherever they might relocate in unorganized encampments without services.

There has yet been a failure of higher government entities to address this problem here, and the proposed resolutions tonight call on higher government to act. That action must be more than expanding tolerance county-wide for encampments, which we see already encroaching onto the City Plaza. It is well-established that housing, even such as Tiny Homes, or RV villages, is key to recovery for the unhoused, with drug and mental health services. Horizon Shine is a model for meaningful response.

The quarterly report of SAVS provide to the Council is admirable in its honesty. While documenting its successes, it does not sugarcoat its problems. These problems are not failures. Rather they speak to the enormity of the task in assisting the unhoused who are disadvantaged in a variety of directions. SAVS staff and volunteers have been shocked as they intimately encounter situations they formerly knew closely but at arm's length. This is a process of education for all. A reported reduction in the homeless count does not mean the problem is close to being solved; it reflects only a beginning. The task undertaken by SAVS cannot be allowed to lapse.

One can care not at all about the unhoused themselves, yet decide to assist them because it is better for the City in every way, than to have them back randomly and unsupported on streets, in the Laguna, in neighborhoods, or on outlying private lands. Even as some blame the unhoused for their predicament as a result of bad choices (ignoring mental health challenges that may go back to childhood and early youth), we do not vilify the tobacco smoker with lung cancer for his/her decisions or deny him/her insurance coverage: programs/treatment/hospitalizations exist to help. Unhoused unfortunates deserve no less.

Respectfully submitted,

Arthur George
Chair, West County Homeless Advocates (WCHA)

