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Task Force Completes 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Santa Clara County

SAN JOSE, Calif. – At its meeting today, the County Board of Supervisors will receive the report “Keys to Housing: A 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.” The Plan was developed over a 5-month period by a 45-member task force of community, government, and private sector representatives co-chaired by County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors members Jim Beall and Don Gage.

Last December the County and cities jointly funded a one-night countywide count of the homeless population and found 7,646 people on the streets or in emergency facilities. The number of people homeless, at some time during 2004, was estimated to be 20,339. The larger number was based on a turnover rate established through personal interviews of 1,796 individuals.

The Task Force is recommending a number of changes in the way homeless problem is addressed in Santa Clara County. Its goal is to completely eliminate homelessness over a period of time. The most significant change recommended is to gradually phase out emergency shelters and identify permanent housing with supportive services.

“This shift to ‘housing first’ is becoming a national model and has proven effective in a number of cities, including San Francisco and Palo Alto,” said Marjorie Matthews, Director of the County’s Office of Affordable Housing. “Studies now show that when

people don't have to worry about finding a place to sleep every day, they can better address other serious issues they may be coping with, like mental illness, drugs or alcohol, domestic violence, or unemployment.”

Another key recommendation is to prevent homelessness by changing practices at jails, hospitals, and foster care programs so that individuals are not released from these systems into homelessness.

“Preventing people -- especially young people – from entering the cycle of homelessness in the first place, should be our first priority,” said Supervisor Jim Beall. “Linking 18-years olds from the foster care system with permanent supportive housing is especially urgent, since nearly one third of foster children end up homeless.”

The cooperative agreement among cities and the County of Santa Clara government to conduct the homeless count was a significant first step. Moving forward on the Task Force recommendations will be the next cooperative challenge. Officials believe that lowering the homeless population will cause a corresponding reduction in the cost of providing more expensive services and shelter to this group in jails, emergency rooms, and homeless shelters, but outside sources of revenue also will be needed.

“If the plan to end homelessness in the County is to be successful, it will require an ongoing commitment by all levels of government and raising the visibility of the issue so that the entire community can become engaged in the solution,” said Supervisor Gage.

The 10-year plan is part of a national movement to end homelessness. More than 150 cities and counties have adopted 10-year plans, including San Francisco, Alameda, and San Mateo counties. The 10-year plan is part of the County's strategy to address the homeless problem by making the County more competitive for grants from the federal Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Preliminary Implementation Schedule available online -
<http://www.sccgov.org/scc/assets/docs/864327TMPKeyboard201126389.pdf>