



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember David Cohen

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: June 21, 2022

Approved

Date: 6/17/2022

SUBJECT: QUICK BUILD/EMERGENCY INTERIM HOUSING

RECOMMENDATION

1. Accept the recommendations in staff's 6/10/2022 Memorandum, and amend recommendation (b)(3) as follows:
 - a. Direct staff to, in coordination with the District 4 council office, initiate a community outreach process in the Noble neighborhood to engage the community in the development of the identified Noble Ave site prior to approval and development.
2. Prior to further action regarding the Noble Ave site, return to Council with a full evaluation of the Pecten Court site, including analysis of capacity, cost, timeline, and pros and cons, including the following factors:
 - a. Proximity to public transit
 - b. Proximity to amenities
 - c. Accessibility for services
 - d. Time to develop
3. Direct staff to evaluate the city-owned site behind Fire Station 25 on Wilson Way and Grand Boulevard for its suitability as a safe parking site and return to Council with recommendations.
 - a. Work with the District 4 council office to identify alternatives if the Wilson/Grand site is deemed impractical for safe parking.

BACKGROUND

I want to thank staff for the substantial work and analysis that has gone into their recommendations for expanding emergency interim housing in San José. The tremendous success we have seen at the Mabury emergency interim housing community (EIHC)—where nearly two-thirds of participants transitioned to permanent housing just within the first 120 days of the program, exceeding initial goals by nearly 50%-- is evidence of the value EIHCs bring to our efforts against homelessness. As we continue to build a spectrum of strategies addressing all

facets of our housing and homelessness crisis, it's crucial that we invest in proven solutions like emergency interim housing and safe parking, and that we make their rapid development and operation a priority.

I am confident that, in a district as large and diverse as District 4, there is space and capacity for more than one EIHC. To ensure we identify and develop as many viable sites as quickly as possible, I am recommending that staff continue to evaluate the Pecten Court site identified in the staff report. This site is located just half a mile from a BART station and is down the street from a bus stop with access to multiple different routes; also within easy walking distance are amenities such as grocery stores and jobs. Given these factors, as well as its size—at nearly 4 acres, it is much larger than any other site recommended for new EIHC facilities—I believe it is worth giving the site further consideration.

With regards to the Noble site proposed by staff, we need to bear in mind that an EIHC was proposed at this site in the past only to be withdrawn in the face of overwhelming public opposition from the community. It is not clear at this point that the factors that scuttled the first attempt to develop an EIHC in the area have changed since then. The city has not made an effort to conduct outreach to the community to determine if public opinion has changed, nor has the city worked with the residents since the initial plan was abandoned to find a path forward for the site. I am concerned that moving forward with development at Noble without prior community outreach risks draining valuable time and resources only to once again be left with an angry community and no new interim housing. Far from expediting the creation of interim housing as suggested in the staff memo, such an outcome would stall our efforts to ensure our most vulnerable unhoused residents have a safe place to stay.

Before we initiate any development or preparation at the site, we should be engaging with the community to ensure they recognize the vital role of EIHCs in ending street homelessness, and the urgent need to expand EIHCs wherever viable—because they're a proven solution to one of the largest quality-of-life issues in San José. My office looks forward to working with staff throughout that process in the hopes of finding a solution that serves our unhoused residents. Part of that process could include consideration of designating the site for specific segments of the unhoused population; the site's location presents an opportunity to create a housing community dedicated to families with school-aged children, who can take advantage of its immediate proximity to two schools.

I also appreciate the work our Housing Department is doing, in concert with LifeMoves and Amigos de Guadalupe, to set up safe parking sites in south San José. A similar site in District 4, which has one of the highest rates of vehicle occupancy among unhoused residents in the city, would be invaluable in helping vehicle dwellers—nearly one fifth of the county's unhoused population—transition to stable housing in a safe, service-accessible environment. I would like to propose, as a starting option for evaluation, the lot directly behind Fire Station 25; at two to four acres in size, city-owned and currently unused, the lot is a worthwhile candidate for consideration. Should the lot be found unviable, my office would be eager to work with staff to identify alternatives in District 4.

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The data from our last Point-in-Time count—indicating a clear decline in our city’s unsheltered population, even through the worst of a pandemic—are a promising sign that the strategies implemented by staff since 2019 are working. Our priority now should be to build on and expand those strategies throughout the city, and the recommendations from staff offer a strong framework for doing so. The direction provided here will help ensure that we bring proven housing solutions to District 4 in a timely and effective manner.