

Jones, Michael (CMO)

From: Agendadesk
Sent: Wednesday, February 18, 2026 1:56 PM
To: PSFSScommittee
Subject: Fw: REAL Coalition's Housing Justice & Community Safety Workgroup Letter to PSFSS Committee re Item 4
Attachments: Letter to PSFSS re Encampments Code of Conduct 2026.02.18.pdf; San José Services-First Outreach and Housing Strategy (3).pdf

From: City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, February 18, 2026 1:47 PM
To: Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>
Subject: FW: REAL Coalition's Housing Justice & Community Safety Workgroup Letter to PSFSS Committee re Item 4

From: Gianella Ordonez <gianellao@svcn.org>
Sent: Wednesday, February 18, 2026 12:44 PM
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Subject: REAL Coalition's Housing Justice & Community Safety Workgroup Letter to PSFSS Committee re Item 4

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Dear Chair Doan, Vice Chair Kamei, and Members of the Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee,

Please see attached a letter from the REAL Coalition's Housing Justice and Community Safety Workgroups re **Item 4, Neighborhood Quality of Life Team and Enhanced Engagement Program Status Report** on the PSFSS Committee meeting agenda tomorrow, February 19.

We've also attached the **REAL Coalition's San José Services-First Outreach and Housing Strategy** for your consideration. We look forward to your discussion on this item.

Best,

Gianella Ordoñez | Policy + Advocacy Associate

Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits

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Pronouns: she/her/hers

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February 18, 2026

Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee
San José City Council
200 E. Santa Clara Street
San José, CA 95113
Sent via email

Re: Item 4, Neighborhood Quality of Life (NQL) Team and Enhanced Engagement Program (EEP) Status Report – Implementation Considerations and Recommended Actions

Dear Committee Chair and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of members of the REAL Coalition’s Housing Justice and Community Safety Workgroups, we are writing regarding the status update on the NQL Team, Code of Conduct/NEZ implementation, and the Housing Department’s Enhanced Engagement Program.

We recognize the City’s efforts to coordinate across departments and to align implementation with County partners, including behavioral health and diversion resources. Building cross-departmental systems and strengthening City–County coordination are important steps toward a more coherent homelessness response. Clear roles, shared data systems, and accountability structures are meaningful public objectives.

Executive Summary

Nearly eight months into implementation, the outreach program has not launched, and there have been zero documented “throughputs” resulting from this framework. Meanwhile, compliance-based expectations and “proactive” police staffing have advanced. This is not what the Council approved, and heightens many of the community’s concerns with the original, failed, coercive Responsibility to Shelter proposal. We continue to believe that a homelessness response should be measured by voluntary, appropriately-matched shelter and housing exits and improved well-being of unhoused individuals—not by expanded compliance mechanisms.

The memorandum emphasizes coordination and activity tracking, whereas data tracking should seek to report on **outcomes**, including shelter and permanent housing placements, retention, well-being measures, arrests, citations, and who is affected and

impacted, with an emphasis on evaluating outcomes for historically-disadvantaged (and over-represented) community members like Black residents.

Key Questions for Staff

- When outreach is fully operational, will metrics track shelter and permanent housing exits, retention, and returns to homelessness?
- What qualifies as an appropriate and accessible “offer” of shelter or housing?
- What are the total numbers of citations and arrests associated with NQL implementation?
- How are outcomes disaggregated by race and other demographics?

REAL’s Concerns and Questions

1/ The Code of Conduct introduces a compliance-based expectation that inevitably functions as coercion

The memorandum describes the Code of Conduct for Encampments as establishing behavioral expectations, including an expectation that individuals accept offers of shelter or housing when offered. This provision warrants careful scrutiny.

An expectation that individuals accept shelter or housing is fundamentally different than health and safety expectations (such as fire safety or waste management). It transforms outreach and engagement from a voluntary, trust-based practice into a compliance-based framework. We are concerned that the memorandum does not define:

- What constitutes an “offer” (including adequacy, accessibility, safety, and appropriateness);
- How the City determines whether an offer meets the needs of individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ+ residents, survivors of violence, older adults, families with children, or others with specific barriers;
- What consequences follow if an individual declines an offer that is not appropriate for their circumstances. Because the Code does not specify consequences, individuals are left to interpret compliance expectations in the presence of City officials and police. In practice, many may reasonably assume that declining an offer could result in citation or arrest (or that critical services will be withheld).

Without clear standards and protections, the “acceptance expectation” operates as a coercive lever. Even if framed as coordination, it shifts the system from voluntary engagement toward conditional compliance.

At minimum, these elements should be required:

- A clear definition of what qualifies as an appropriate and accessible offer;
- Safeguards to ensure that individuals are not penalized for declining placements that are unsafe, inaccessible, or otherwise unsuitable;
- Transparent reporting on how often offers are made, accepted, declined, and why.

2/ The current throughput framework is inadequate, creates perverse incentives, and devalues outreach

The memorandum defines “throughput” as movement from encampments or EIH into shelter or motel placements. However, the metrics do not measure whether individuals exit homelessness/enter permanent housing as a result of City interventions.

Additionally, centering throughput as the primary performance metric creates perverse incentives:

- Outreach teams may feel pressure to prioritize individuals who are easiest to place, rather than those with the most complex needs;
- Declining inappropriate placements may be interpreted as resistance rather than informed self-advocacy and self-care;
- System performance will be judged by temporary shelter placement counts rather than stabilization and long-term housing retention.

The memorandum acknowledges that implementation sequencing depended on expanding interim shelter capacity. When interim sites are full and permanent supportive housing is unavailable, throughput stalls and placements become static. Because the report does not track exits to permanent housing, retention, or returns to homelessness, placement numbers reflect temporary displacement rather than durable stability.

This is not simply an operational challenge; it is a structural design issue. A model built primarily around interim shelter throughput, without parallel scaling of permanent housing, risks creating a system that appears active but cannot deliver durable exits.

Moreover, outreach also serves critical stabilization functions—maintaining health, preserving identification and benefits, building trust, and supporting income and housing readiness—that are not reflected in throughput metrics. Those purposes should not be ignored.

Lastly, the current “throughput” framework will not be interpreted correctly by community members if it is later shared on the City’s dashboard. It relies too heavily on an understanding of the relationship between the City’s interim shelter and the County’s coordinated shelter and transitional housing systems. Public outcome data should show how many people moved from “unsheltered homelessness” to any shelter (including the type and duration) and how many people moved to housing.

3/ Activity tracking must be complemented by meaningful human outcome measures

The memorandum describes dashboards, scorecards, and enforcement-related metrics. While operational transparency is important, current reporting appears to center on activity rather than well-being.

The report does not demonstrate how the lives of people living outside are measurably improved by this framework, particularly for those who remain unsheltered.

The memorandum does not indicate whether outreach systematically ensures access to key supports, such as medical and behavioral health care, addiction treatment, hygiene and sanitation, including clean water, identification and benefits enrollment, flexible problem-solving assistance, job placement, or housing navigation milestones.

A services-oriented system should be evaluated not only by how many placements occur, but by whether people and encampments are safer and healthier. We recommend adding stabilization to public reporting, alongside placement and enforcement metrics.

4/ Data transparency requires totals, definitions, and plain-language clarity

We appreciate the effort to develop a performance scorecard and dashboard. However, totals for and the nature of enforcement activities remain unclear, and those are the categories that most directly affect civil rights and community trust. For example, meaningful oversight requires publication of raw totals—not only percentages—for citations or arrests.

We also encourage the City to provide a definition of key terms and plain-language explanations of how metrics are calculated and interpreted. Many terms are undefined.

Additionally, the City's Racial and Social Equity Ordinance and the Equity Values and Standards Policy require the City to maintain racial and other demographic data to assess how this policy (and others) may affect historically disadvantaged communities, such as the Black community. Demographic reporting should clarify who was cited, arrested, placed, or diverted to assess potential disparate impact.

Lastly, future reports should outline how unhoused individuals' personal property is handled when arrests or sweeps occur.

5/ Outreach structure changes warrant clear standards and collaboration

The memorandum describes a shift in outreach structure, including reductions in certain contracted roles and expanded internal staffing.

Nonprofit outreach providers have long-standing expertise, trust relationships, and cultural fluency. The memorandum assumes but does not demonstrate how this structural shift will produce improved outcomes. If the City continues moving to bring outreach work inside, it should clearly articulate:

- How training standards for re-deployed or newly-hired City outreach staff ensure trauma-informed, culturally competent, and de-escalation practices;
- How procedures can ensure trust and community relationships are maintained;
- How nonprofit expertise and lived experience will inform system design.

The City should adopt explicit outreach training standards and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure engagement is non-punitive and person-centered.

6/ Community and lived-experience co-design should be strengthened

The memorandum largely describes an internally-coordinated system rather than one that is designed in consultation with key partners and experts, including:

- People with lived experience of homelessness;
- Nonprofit outreach and shelter providers;
- County behavioral health and crisis response partners;
- Faith leaders; and
- Community-based organizations serving specific populations.

Given the scope and complexity of the challenges, meaningful collaboration and co-design would strengthen legitimacy, equity, and effectiveness.

Requested actions

We respectfully request that the Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee:

1. At minimum, require clarification and safeguards regarding the Code of Conduct’s “acceptance” expectation. REAL continues to oppose this coercive approach.
2. Ensure “throughput” is not the sole performance metric, and require reporting on permanent housing exits and retention. Add stabilization and well-being measures to public dashboards.
3. Ask staff to publish raw totals and a data dictionary for all performance metrics, particularly relating to enforcement activities.
4. Require staff to adopt minimum outreach training standards and establish quality assurance protocols.
5. Convene a structured co-design process with nonprofit providers, County partners, and people with lived experience. Many providers in REAL stand ready to participate productively in co-design dialogues.

The REAL Coalition’s *San José Services-First Outreach and Housing Strategy* (attached) reflects a fundamentally different design approach. It centers permanent housing production, multidisciplinary non-law enforcement outreach, health stabilization, and community co-design as the primary drivers of system performance. By contrast, the current framework places significant weight on coercion and shelter throughput. We urge the Committee to carefully consider whether the City’s approach is structured to produce durable encampment management and improvements in homelessness overall—or whether it risks reinforcing a cycle of temporary placements, displacement, and trauma to our unhoused neighbors.

We look forward to continued engagement. Contact REAL with any questions at shannonz@svcn.org.

Respectfully,
Members of the REAL Coalition Housing Justice Workgroup and Community Safety
Workgroup

Cc:

Mayor and Members of the San José City Council
City Manager
Chief of Police, San José Police Department
Director, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services
Director, Housing Department

About REAL Coalition

The Race Equity Action Leadership (REAL) Coalition is a Santa Clara County–based alliance of more than 50 nonprofit organizations, individual leaders, and hundreds of community participants committed to advancing racial equity and systems change. Our membership spans housing and homelessness, behavioral health and healthcare, domestic violence, food security, disability rights, LGBTQ+ advocacy, legal services, education, environmental justice, immigrant rights, and other sectors.

San José Services-First Outreach and Housing Strategy

Summary

In response to proposals criminalizing homelessness, this comprehensive outreach strategy offers a humane, effective alternative rooted in evidence-based practices. By focusing on coordinated outreach, housing solutions, and comprehensive services—including medical respite care—the plan aims to reduce unsheltered homelessness in San José. This approach centers dignity, public health, racial equity, and long-term cost-effectiveness. This proposed strategy, because it is designed to be comprehensive, includes a number of current strategies that the City, County, and partners already employ or are planning. (Community Plan to End Homelessness)

This proposed strategy was prepared by members of the nonprofit Racial Equity Action Leadership (REAL) Coalition—specifically members of REAL’s Housing Justice and Community Safety Workgroups—as well as homelessness shelter and services providers and grassroots allies.

1. Guiding Principles

- **We need more places for people to go.** Expanding shelter options, temporary housing, and long-term affordable housing is fundamental. Without real options, even the best outreach and support strategies will fall short.
- **Enforcement and criminalization are costly and ineffective.** Research shows that punitive approaches do not reduce homelessness and often exacerbate trauma, legal complications, and service avoidance. These methods divert funds from housing and care, yielding poor outcomes and increasing long-term public costs (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021)
- **Housing is a human right and healthcare.** Every San José resident deserves access to safe, stable, and dignified housing. Recognize housing as a fundamental determinant of health, aligning with Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (BHHI) and UCSF’s position that housing reduces hospitalizations and improves long-term health outcomes (UCSF BHHI).
- **Outreach must be non-punitive, person-centered, trauma-informed, and founded in self-determination.** Building trust and supporting long-term

engagement requires consistency, compassion, care, and respect (see Journal of Positive Psychology).

- **Shelter and services should be matched to individual needs.** Responses must be tailored to populations including LGBTQ+ individuals, older adults, people with disabilities, DV survivors, immigrant communities, and vehicle dwellers.
- **Equity and inclusion are essential.** Bias and systemic disparities, including racial disparities, ableism, and anti-LGBTQ+ bias, must be addressed throughout systems of care. For example, Black residents are especially overrepresented in the unhoused population. (Santa Clara LGBTQ+ Study).
- **Data-Driven Decision Making.** Utilize real-time data to inform outreach efforts, resource allocation, and policy adjustments (HUD Exchange).
- **Solutions must be community-informed.** Co-design with people with lived experience of homelessness is critical.
- **Partnerships with the County, CoC, and community-based organizations are foundational.** Elevate partnerships with the County, service providers, faith-based groups, and private entities to co-design and implement solutions. This plan is intended to build on the City and County's strong existing infrastructure, not replace or delay it.

2. Encampment Resolution Framework

Adopt best practices from the BHHI Encampment Resolution Guide, prioritizing structured engagement and supportive exit strategies (UCSF BHHI Encampment Toolkit).

- **Identification and Assessment:** Prioritize sites based on objective health and safety criteria.
- **Planning and Engagement:** Develop individualized outreach plans; ensure multidisciplinary teams offer a continuum of care and housing options.
- **Drawdown and Follow-Up:** Close encampments only after housing or interim solutions are available to all residents, with follow-up support to prevent returns.
- **Property Protections:** Avoid seizure of property unless it is abandoned, dangerous, or constitutes contraband (Austin v. U.S. District Guidelines). Consider adopting elements of the City of Berkeley's Property Storage Policy as a model for San José.
- **Sanitation Infrastructure:** Maintain sanitation infrastructure such as trash receptacles and portable toilets near encampments. These should remain in place for at least three years unless safety conditions warrant removal (City of San Jose Municipal Code).

- **Protection of civil rights:** Any encampment management plan must respect individuals' civil and property rights, including but not limited to the right of people with disabilities to reasonable accommodations.

3. HEART: Multidisciplinary Outreach

HEART (Homeless Engagement, Assistance & Response Team) will serve as San José's **non-law enforcement, trauma-informed outreach response** for urgent situations involving unhoused residents. HEART aims to connect individuals with **housing, health care, harm reduction, and community support**—not criminalization.

Interdisciplinary and Inclusive Response Teams

HEART teams will include:

- **Social workers and case managers**
- **Peer support specialists** with lived experience of homelessness
- **Mental health and substance use professionals**
- **Medical personnel and street medicine providers**
- **Faith-based liaisons** offering spiritual support and community connection
- **Legal aid attorneys** to assist with outstanding tickets, eviction defense, or benefits issues
- **Housing navigators** and shelter placement specialists
- **Crisis de-escalation and trauma-informed care experts**
- **Teams reflective of the demographics of the unhoused population**, with cultural fluency to support Black residents, immigrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, Indigenous people, disabled people, and other marginalized groups

HEART Call Response System

To ensure **equitable, accessible, and dignified support**, San José will launch a **dedicated HEART Response Line** for:

- **Unhoused residents** seeking services or medical help
- **Family members or friends** requesting wellness checks
- **Neighbors or businesses** seeking a humane response to visible need—not enforcement

Key features:

- **Multilingual call, text, and app-based access**
- **Trained civilian triage operators**, not law enforcement
- **Anonymous option** to reduce barriers and stigma
- **Real-time dispatch and follow-up tracking**
- **Seamless integration with County Coordinated Entry, shelter beds, and hotel vouchers**

The HEART response system will be **co-designed** with input from:

- **Unhoused individuals and advocates**
- **County and City TRUST teams**
- **988 and 311 system partners**
- **Continuum of Care providers and case management systems**

Proactive Outreach Strategy

HEART will also conduct **ongoing, proactive outreach**—not just respond to calls.

Teams will:

- Establish **regular presence in known encampments, vehicle dwelling zones, and high-need areas**
- Build **relationships over time** to increase trust and service engagement
- Deploy **targeted outreach to specific populations.**

- Coordinate with **community-based organizations, faith groups, and public health providers that already conduct outreach and provide support to people who live in encampments**

This proactive strategy ensures that those most disconnected from systems—including people without phones or identification—are still seen, respected, and served.

4. Housing & Shelter Interventions

- Rapid scaling of hotel/motel vouchers for immediate relief (Project Roomkey model).
- Prioritize non-congregate shelter with low barriers to entry (no curfews, pet/family-friendly, ADA-accessible). Remove across the board length of stay restrictions that are not tailored to individual needs.
- Expand permanent supportive housing and targeted transitional programs.
- Launch at least one sanctioned Safe Parking site per council district for vehicular shelter residents
- Leverage vacant publicly owned land and preapproved prefab/modular housing models to reduce construction costs and delays (California HCD).

5. Medical Respite Care

- **Definition:** Short-term, accessible residential care for individuals experiencing homelessness who are too ill to recover on the streets but not ill enough to remain hospitalized.
- **Local Implementation:** Expand programs like Santa Clara Valley Medical Center's Medical Respite Program.
- **Standards and Best Practices:** Follow *Standards for Medical Respite Care Programs* by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC).
- **Benefits:** Improve health outcomes, reduce emergency department use, and decrease hospital readmission rates (Health Affairs).

6. Special Populations and Equity-Driven Programming

Tailor programs for groups with unique barriers including:

- **Address racial disparities:** Black residents make up only 2.5% of Santa Clara County's population but represent 17% of those experiencing homelessness, reflecting deep racial inequities that must be addressed in all homelessness response strategies (Destination: Home).
- **LGBTQ+ individuals:** Expand beds with affirming services and trained staff (Santa Clara LGBTQ+ Study).
- **Farmworkers:** Utilize simplified permitting under recent zoning laws (Santa Clara County Zoning Ordinance).
- **Veterans:** Integrate with VA response and ensure utilization of VASH vouchers and HUD-VASH supportive services (VA).
- **Survivors of Violence:** Increase confidential shelter options and simplify documentation (San Jose Housing Focus Group, 2019).
- **People with Disabilities:** Enforce reasonable accommodations and reduce rules that exclude based on disability-related needs (Fair Housing Act).

7. Health, Safety, and Weather Policy

- Suspend abatements and impoundments during extreme weather (heat, cold, storms, rain) (NOAA HeatRisk Guidance). Work with people with lived experience of homelessness and providers to review weather guidelines to ensure they are appropriate and not causing harm to and modify as needed. (<https://news.santaclaracounty.gov/news-release/county-santa-clara-office-supportive-housing-declares-inclement-weather-episode-2>)
- Right to vehicle habitation where legally parked and zoned, with safe parking sites in each council district.
- Notification and opportunity to relocate vehicles before enforcement (L.A. Vehicle Dwelling Guidelines).
- Free or reduced-cost vehicle retrieval and item access without proof of ownership based on ability to pay.
- Maintain hygiene infrastructure, including mobile showers and 24-hour restrooms (BHHI).

8. Accountability and Transparency

- Establish a **Housing Accountability Commission** of people—including those with lived experience of homelessness—to advise and monitor implementation (Santa Clara HEAP Plan).
- Establish a cross-sector and cross-governmental case planning team to confidentially address challenging situations and evaluate progress.

- Provide a dashboard that informs the public of shelter access, outcomes, comparison costs of programs and approaches, and enforcement actions.

9. Funding and Resources

- The Mayor's Office will establish a position to leverage public-private partnerships for land and services (e.g., Microsoft-Alviso model).
- Assess how the reallocation of funds from policing and carceral budgets could be more effective toward housing and care solutions (Prison Policy Initiative).
- Expand flexible rental and emergency cash assistance (Benioff UCSF Brief).
- Increase state/federal housing funding (ELI support via HCD, HUD).

10. Coordinated Governance and Collaborative Framework

- This proposal is designed to build upon the strong foundation already in place through the City of San José, Santa Clara County, and the Continuum of Care (CoC), including its nonprofit service providers and outreach teams. There is significant work already being done across the region to prevent and end homelessness through inter-agency collaboration, service innovation, and regional planning. Rather than replace or supplant these efforts, this proposal seeks to strengthen, expand, and scale what is working—filling service gaps and accelerating progress.
- The proposal aligns with key goals outlined in the **Santa Clara County Community Plan to End Homelessness 2020–2025**, including:
 - Addressing racial and other systemic inequities in housing and service access;
 - Strengthening supportive housing infrastructure;
 - Preventing homelessness through upstream investments and services;
 - Enhancing accountability, transparency, and system coordination.
- [Read the full plan here](#)

Conclusion

San José must reject criminalization and embrace a services-first model rooted in compassion and data. This approach has proven effective at reducing homelessness while maintaining public safety and fiscal responsibility.

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