

Meeting provides ideas to relieve homelessness

By Colleen Pohl
Emerald Associate Editor

A feeling of hope permeated the meeting Friday as Lane County Commissioners, homeless people, political candidates and community members worked together to begin solving the county's worsening homelessness problem.

After four hours of various presentations and open forums at the "emergency housing summit," organized by County Commissioners Jerry Rust and Marie Frazier, those who attended began brainstorming faster than Rust could write the ideas down.

Some of those proposals, grouped into categories by urgency, include:

- Lobbying to the city of Eugene to designate "safe parking

areas" where homeless people can sleep in their vehicles without being ticketed.

- Reopening an old campground at Armitage State Park that has bathroom facilities for seasonal use. Also open up undeveloped portions of Alton Baker Park and the Lane County Fairgrounds to homeless camping.

- Inventory abandoned buildings on the Eugene Mall and elsewhere for their feasibility as temporary shelters or a daytime place from which to seek housing, work or social services.

- The University's School of Architecture and Allied Arts implementing a program to help train homeless people to build their own dwellings, while at the same time teaching architecture students and the



Jerry Rust

homeless construction skills.

The brainstorming resulted in the formation of 10 committees to begin planning on the

short- and long-term proposals. They agreed to meet again at noon on Oct. 23 at Harris Hall to report on their progress.

"We definitely got very good suggestions mapped out," Rust said.

Social service providers spoke to about 80 people, most of them homeless, about the county's homelessness problem.

"With the number of spaces we have available and the length of time it takes people to find permanent housing, at this point we're only able to help about one-third of the people who need it," said Saralyn Brooks-O'Connor, who manages Eugene's Family Shelter House and oversees the waiting list for the county's shelters.

A program that Frazier is

heading, called "Take a Family to Heart," asks area families to provide various services. These services include being there to emotionally support homeless families, donating money to move homeless families into apartments, and allowing homeless families to pitch a tent in a family's backyard.

More than a dozen homeless people evicted from the encampment near Armitage Park Oct. 1 decided to move their tents and trailers a few hundred yards farther east, onto land that falls under county control.

Rust said the county has no plans to evict the campers. In fact, Rust plans to start a "cottage industry" at the site in which an artisan would teach the campers how to build furniture.



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