

'Our biggest responsibility is you've got people freezing on our streets.'

—HUGH MASSENGILL

form of higher charges. Many homeless people find shelter only in the Lane County Jail, which costs taxpayers about \$359 a day per inmate.

SHELTER VS. HOUSING

But while Blue Ribbon Committee members agreed on the need to act, they were divided on just what to do.

For example, should the city focus on building permanent homes or providing emergency shelter? For decades the city has focused on building permanent low-income housing for people at risk of homelessness. But that approach has left many hard-core disabled or addicted homeless people shivering without shelter.

"Our biggest responsibility is you've got people freezing on our streets," said Committee member Hugh Massengill, also a member of the city's Human Rights committee. Massengill said he'd like half the new money to go to emergency shelter rather than just the 15 to 25 percent proposed.

But most of the local affordable housing establishment appears to strongly oppose shifting resources. Committee members Van Landingham, St. Vincent dePaul Director Terry McDonald and ShelterCare Director Susan Ban argued strongly against shifting resources from permanent housing programs.

Emergency shelters have "huge costs" and "that takes every cent a community has" for addressing the homeless problem, Ban said. She said her numbers show that emergency shelter is "the single most

expensive way to provide the service and has the poorest outcomes."

"Homeless people don't really want shelter, they want housing," said Van Landingham.

Massengill appeared unconvinced. "Communities all over the country have public shelter services." Eugene has the Mission, he said, but the church-run shelter "has a huge religious component."

McDonald said he'd heard "tension" over the religious mission of the Mission for decades in Eugene. But he questioned whether taxpayers would want to foot the bill for a nonreligious public replacement. He said he'd like a tax vote to resolve the dispute and say, "You that so strongly oppose such a way of delivering services have an opportunity to vote on it. Have a good day."

Mayor Piercy cautioned committee members not to let the fractious shelter vs. housing issue weaken their appeal to help the homeless. Let's "not approach this as one thing versus the other," the mayor said. "It just begs people to pile up on sides."

Committee member Ron Chase suggested a compromise approach could be a voucher system for emergency housing in private rentals that was linked to programs to help people apply for long-term benefits.

USING THE HOMELESS

Piercy also cautioned the committee about avoiding enmeshing itself in another fractious local issue — whether or not to expand the urban growth boundary (UGB).

Developers have long sought to use homeless people as a lever to fight regulations against urban sprawl and against impact fees. They argue that such regulations and fees reduce land supply and increase housing costs. But environmentalists have long countered that developers just want to build high-profit expensive homes on UGB expansions, and that efficient compact growth and ending developer subsidies reduce housing costs by lowering taxes.

The issue has heated up now after developers successfully pushed Springfield to fast track a UGB expansion Eugene balked at. To address the homeless issue, "what I've seen us support as a council is new development," said committee member and Springfield City Councilor Hillary Wylie.

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