

NEWLY ADOPTED CITY BUDGET INCLUDES \$1 MILLION FOR SHELTER

The ongoing debate over solving homelessness in Eugene

On June 26, the city of Eugene's 2017-2018 proposed budget, presented by City Manager John Ruiz, was adopted by Eugene City Council. Before approving the budget, the City Council amended the budget to include \$1 million to fund a homeless shelter from a settlement the city received from Comcast.

Twylla Miller, city budget and analysis manager, tells *EW* via email, "The original budget did not contain money for a shelter."

Funding for a shelter in Eugene is critically needed, as the city does not have a shelter that can accommodate people struggling with substance abuse or address a majority of the unhoused population. While the debate over how to provide for the nearly 3,000 people the city estimates are living on the streets, in parks, wooded areas and under overpasses persists, \$17.85 million is designated for the construction of a new City Hall.

Except, currently, the total \$17.85 million is no longer available. In March, *Eugene Weekly* reported the city has spent nearly \$6 million on plans for a City Hall that may not be used.

While the city has wasted money on the City Hall project, City Councilor Emily Semple says none of the Comcast settlement funds have been designated to the project as of now. "I am not convinced that we need a new City Hall right now," Semple says. "I'm so disappointed we took down our old City Hall, but it's gone."

Semple says she hears people constantly saying the city isn't doing enough to address homelessness. "Well, everything we need to do costs money. Like most people, the city is short on money," she says. "So we decided to allocate the one million dollars and at that point it was seed money for a shelter and or day center and/or continuing support of the rest stop, tiny houses and stuff like that."

But Semple says, "if we decided not to build a shelter, we were not obligated to spend that money on a shelter, we could then use it for something else."

In February 2017, the *Register-Guard* reported the city of Eugene spent \$160,000 on an out of state consulting firm to assess its downtown area and the firm's findings labeled downtown as in "crisis."

Semple says, "A shelter is not going to solve the problem." She says the biggest obstacle is finding money and finding an organization to operate the shelter. "But the problem with homelessness is it's such a conglomeration of many problems. Unfortunately, they all take money to fix."

Heather Sielicki, a member of the city's Homelessness Work Group, says public education in Oregon is at the root of the homelessness, citing that the state has one of the worst dropout rates in the U.S.

"We're not investing in our children," Sielicki says. "There's an obscene rate of kids going into foster care. A lot of the social services that we used to rely on and people being foster parents relied on, a lot of that's gone now. A lot of children are faced with situations where the odds are against them."

Mental illness is a crux among the complexities contributing to homelessness. Semple says the city lacks entry-level living wage jobs and affordable housing. She also cites education as an additional predicament.

The city's budget also provided an increase of one-time funds of \$154,655 for the Dusk to Dawn winter warming site program.

Sielicki says she's glad the

city now has a fulltime policy analyst, but one person addressing homelessness is not enough. "It takes a lot longer to get things accomplished," she says. "I can't say that people aren't working on it, sometimes it's hard to get your arms around it. Everyone is doing the best they can, but we can definitely be doing things a lot faster."

Semple says now the biggest hurdle the city faces is building or locating shelter and finding an organization to run it. "Between the public perception of what it would be like and impacts on business or livability of neighborhoods, it makes it a really hard problem to find a location," she says.

Semple says she has said to people that if they know of a place — industrial land, a commercial building that isn't being used, then perhaps money could be found to rent it. "Not huge market rate rents," she says, but perhaps there could be some compensation from the city. "I've asked that direct question and been told yes," Semple says.

Ruiz was not available for comment. ■

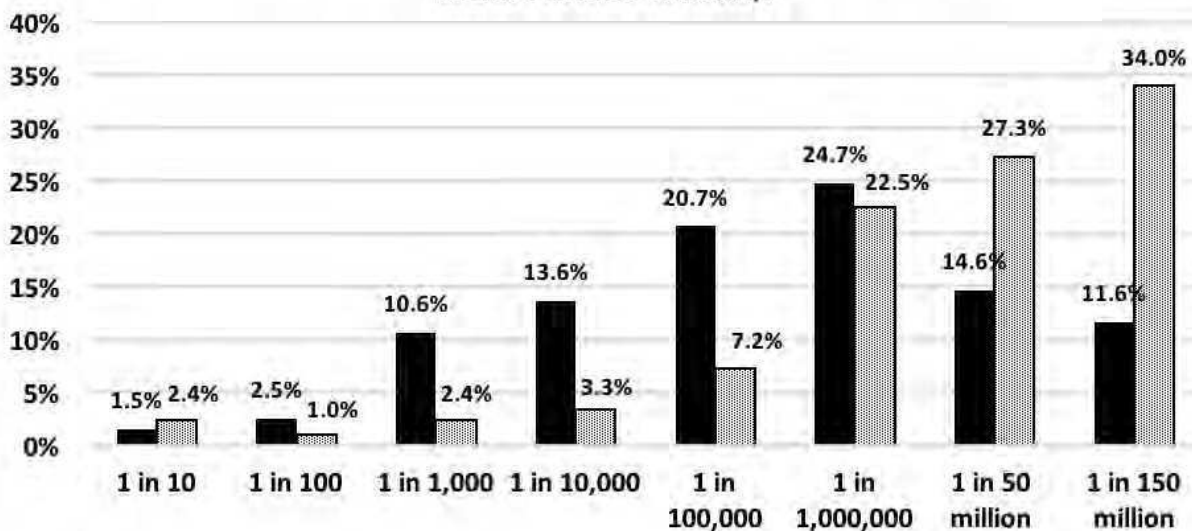


EMILY SEMPLE

WE'RE SO SKEWED.

COMPARING DONALD TRUMP VOTERS AND HILLARY CLINTON VOTERS

What do you guess are the approximate odds that a person will die in their lifetime from a legally documented refugee committing a terrorist act (for example, there is a 1 in 7 chance a person will die of heart disease in their lifetime)?



73.7% Trump voters overestimated odds

38.8% Clinton voters overestimated odds

This line graph reveals that sampled Trump voters, more than the Clinton voters, tend to overestimate the chances of a person in America dying from a "legally documented refugee committing terrorist act." The actual U.S. statistical estimate is 1 in 46+ million (National Safety Council). PolicyInteractive has previously reported that conservatives and liberals have more in common than one would think, but the current political climate is seen to be driving increased political polarization. PI asks the question why are some people attracted to the conservative ideology and others attracted to the liberal ideology? What are the issues that are pulling us apart and why? Watch this space for continuing exploration of why "we're so skewed."

National survey conducted by PolicyInteractive out of Eugene, OR; See full results and methodology at goo.gl/Cf5Xcp. Robin Quirke is an associate researcher at PolicyInteractive.

■ Trump Voters ■ Clinton Voters

(N=407; 198 Trump voters; 209 Clinton voters; nonprobability sample)