

# HOUSING FIRST FOR HOMELESS

Advocates weigh in on a housing complex to be built near Lane County Behavioral Health

Lane County has announced plans for a housing complex for the homeless adjacent to the Lane County Behavioral Health building near Autzen Stadium. The plans follow a “housing first” model, and while Lane County has done housing first on a small scale, according to the county’s human services manager Steve Manela, the new 50-unit complex would be the largest effort yet.

Housing first is an initiative to provide shelter first and foremost for the homeless, then to go on to give residents access to necessary treatments, services and resources.

Manela says it is “a harm reduction model, where folks may come in drinking or using but housing will still be accessible to them.”

Community members and homeless advocates have varying opinions about the plans.

Some have expressed concern that the complex will not help locals in need but in fact bring more homeless people to the city. Sue Sierralupe, clinic manager of the free medical service Occupy Medical, says she commonly hears people say, “if you build it, they will come,” but, she says, we need to dispel that myth.

“If you build a hospital, yes, sick people will come, but they will come for the services and leave healthy and well,” Sierralupe says. “The thing that is a problem is then no longer a problem.”

Sierralupe also says that, more often than not, the homeless in Eugene are not people who have traveled to get here but are from Eugene originally.

“Most people that are wandering around homeless are often wandering in the place they are born in — you are simply offering services to people who are your neighbors,” Sierralupe says. “And I have never seen anything negative come from offering services.”

The complex is projected to be 35,000 square feet and four stories tall. The first floor would have offices; counseling, laundry and meeting rooms; and a 24-hour reception desk. The upper three floors would have 50 studio-style apartments with a sleeping area, bathroom and small kitchen.

The complex’s location near the Lane County Public Health building also generated mixed reactions, according to human rights advocate Ken Neubeck. Members of the homeless advocate community are divided on the fact that the county is choosing to build one building as opposed to many smaller complexes around Lane County.

“But being right next to the Behavioral Health building is a definite step forward,” Neubeck says. “We just don’t have much of anything like this already, and we need something.”

Sierralupe says that, in her time working with the homeless, having different services all in different places is a frequent frustration. “I’ve found when we have a piece somebody needs that’s in a different building, it’s more difficult to get it,” Sierralupe says. “So having everything all in one makes it more likely that the people will get what they need, which is what we want.”

There is a precedent for this location. From December 2014 to August 2015, Nightingale Health Sanctuary’s rest stop for the homeless was located near the Lane County Behavioral Health building, the same area where the new housing complex is projected to be.

Nightingale manager Nathan Showers says being near the Lane County Behavioral Health building was “definitely a benefit because of all of the services they offered.”

“It’s a great location for this, and we are all for it,” Showers adds. “They just need to come up with the money first.”

As for the money, the cost of construction alone is estimated around \$8.5 million, while design, legal fees and other “soft” costs are estimated around \$3.2 million — totaling at least \$11.7 million, according to Manela.

While some have expressed dismay on social media about the high price, Sierralupe asks, “How can we *not* afford it?” The jail, she says, where many homeless individuals frequently end up, is an extremely expensive thing.

“Having this option will help, as it’ll very literally get some of the homeless inside,” she says. “It’ll bring more folks out of the shadows and allow them to come out with pride, getting help to improve their lives.”

Manela says the plans to begin building next summer are ambitious, but can happen if funding is figured out over the next few months. Lane County’s Poverty and Homeless Board has set a goal to have 600 units for the homeless over time, he adds.

“This is our cornerstone project — we hope this project succeeds, and is followed by many more projects,” Manela says. “This can make a difference in our community.” ■

# SLANT

- Seeing our name in the *New York Times* doesn’t happen every day. In fact, we’re not sure *Eugene Weekly* has ever been mentioned in the *Gray Lady* until this week, when NYT classical music writer Michael Cooper credited us for breaking the story of the **Oregon Bach Festival’s firing of Matthew Halls**. His extensive piece, “A Firing and a Question of Race Roil the Oregon Bach Festival” (Sept. 18), laid out the whole messy business, from Halls’ mysterious termination on Aug. 24 through the spurious Reginald Mobley “racism” incident to the meaningless explanations from the University of Oregon. It concluded with music world doubts about the 47-year-old festival’s future.

- You may remember Eugene fashionista Marjorie Taylor’s **spectacular “Lucky in Love” ball gown**, a crowd favorite in the last-ever Mayor’s Art Show in 2015. It’s among 103 finalists from around the world for an international fashion award this week in New Zealand. The gown, along with Taylor, who owns Velvet Edge Boutique in Fifth Street Market and is a psychology prof at the University of Oregon, and her husband, UO economics prof (and gadfly blogger) Bill Harbaugh, is in Wellington for the World of WearableArt awards. Crafted from 160 decks of recycled Las Vegas casino playing cards, the dress was entered in the recycled category. Winners in the Sept. 20 judging take home up to \$30,000 in New Zealand dollars and will be in a fall exhibition in the World of WearableArt and Classic Cars museum in nearby Nelson.

- It was quite a jolt to see UO Emeritus Professor George Wickes of Eugene in the opening segment of ***The Vietnam War by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick*** on PBS. An agent in the Office of Strategic Services (the precursor to the CIA), Wickes was what the UO public relations office called a “spy” in that terrible conflict so well documented in this series. He taught English at the UO over five decades. If you can bear it, watch the last half of the 18-hour documentary next week. It is so well done and so depressing.

- You can tear down those signs, folks **Lane Transit’s EmX expansion into west Eugene is here**. The bus rapid transit route had its kickoff Sept. 17 and passengers can now catch the green buses (EmX stands for Emerald Express) and head out the West 6th, West 7th and West 11th corridors. Eugene and Springfield are growing, and while we encourage the area to grow up, not out, mass transit helps manage traffic and fight global warming causing greenhouse gases.

- **’80s night is back!** In downtown news, we hear that the owners of The Starlight Lounge and Luckey’s Club have just purchased the former Sidelines Grill and Sports Bar at 77 W. Broadway. The venue used to be John Henry’s and when it was sold, downtown lost part of its nightlife. (And we missed the sticky floors, late night ’80s dancing as well as GLAM night, burlesque and some decent bands.) The news owners announced on Facebook that it’s now called The Drake Bar and they are “rebranding it to focus more on the dancing and nightlife.”

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