



# Shelter that Succeeds

Describing a possible, practical, cost-effective emergency homeless shelter, and the argument for expanding emergency shelter in San Joaquin County.

## Executive Summary

The San Joaquin Continuum of Care recognizes that San Joaquin County faces a crisis of unsheltered homelessness. In 2019, there were more unsheltered homeless counted than ever before<sup>i</sup>, and the number of emergency shelter beds would have to triple for there to be sufficient shelter for all homeless individuals within San Joaquin County and its various communities<sup>ii</sup>. Emergency shelter beds must be created to address this crisis, and new or expanded shelter space must be designed to suit the needs of those experiencing homelessness if that shelter is to provide a reasonable return on investment.

To assist decision-makers in San Joaquin County and in various local cities including Stockton, Lodi, Tracy, and Manteca, the SJCoC has created this report to describe the key features of a possible, practical, and cost-effective emergency homeless shelter. The report includes perspectives of multiple sectors, including law enforcement, private business, homeless service providers, and homeless individuals. The report is designed as a widely-applicable guide for the effort to expand shelter and enable our communities to effectively move people off of the streets.

It must be stressed that expanding our community's emergency shelter capacity will absolutely require an ongoing commitment of local dollars, as will the continued operation of existing shelters. Ideally, an ongoing local investment would take the form of a collaborative partnership between San Joaquin County and cities such as Stockton, Lodi, Tracy, and Manteca, while leveraging new dollars that are coming from the State of California. Some form of local commitment is the only practical way forward to expand emergency shelter resources.

This report embraces a "Housing First" approach. But "Housing First" does not mean "Housing Only." Robust services are vital to the success of any shelter. Furthermore, emergency shelter alone will not adequately address homelessness. Emergency shelter provides vulnerable individuals the chance to meet their basic human needs and build a more stable personal foundation, but shelter alone does not end homelessness. To be effective community-wide, expansion of emergency shelter should be implemented as part of a broader system of housing designed to quickly move people from the streets and into stable housing, with support services built into all stages of the system. As we expand shelter space, we must also expand permanent housing, homelessness prevention, employment programs, and support services dedicated to helping our community's most vulnerable residents.

It is clear that we need more low-barrier emergency shelter space, and that this shelter space must meet the needs of those who are currently on the streets. The SJCoC supports all efforts to create emergency shelter that is possible, practical, cost-effective, and has sufficient resources to provide shelter and services on an ongoing basis.

## **Features of a Possible, Practical, Cost-effective Emergency Homeless Shelter**

Any new or expanded shelter should be “low-barrier” and align with “Housing First” principles for shelters, meaning a new or expanded shelter should:

- Allow entry and stays for all populations and household types without respect to age or composition, including: singles, families with children, partnered couples, those with pets, and those with limited possessions
- Allow entry and services to individuals regardless of sobriety
- Allow families of all types to stay together, regardless of makeup and ages of children
- Provide access to robust services for shelter residents

Services and characteristics of a new or expanded shelter should include:

- Size large enough to have an impact on unsheltered homelessness and take advantage of economies of scale (facilities capable of sheltering hundreds are required to meet the current need)
- Staff to provide security, both internal and external
- Staff to provide case management, links to services, links to permanent housing
- Staff to provide on-site support services, including counseling, clinical behavioral health services, health care services, and other social services (Social Security, IDs, applications for assistance, etc.)
- Staff to manage the overall operations
- On-site staff or formal agreements with other service providers to provide services such as education, vocational training, and employment
- Ability to move shelter stayers into housing and employment
- Food for shelter residents
- Adequate restroom and shower facilities for residents and the public
- Laundry for shelter residents
- Adequate and ongoing supply of linen, cleaning, toiletry, toilet paper, and office supplies
- Adequate storage for shelter resident possessions
- Adequate storage for staff
- Ability to accommodate pets on-site
- Ability to accommodate multiple household configurations, including households with adult partners, families with children regardless of age and gender, single individuals, etc.

- Ability to accommodate special and vulnerable populations, including seniors, those with disabilities, those with enhanced medical needs (respite care), etc.
- Provide adequate privacy and space for shelter residents
- Not forcing residents to exit and return on a daily basis
- Ability to adequately monitor behavior of shelter stayers and prevent victimization
- Ability and capacity to accept middle-of-the-night entry for those contacted by outreach and law enforcement
- Operation by entity with the capacity and experience to successfully manage and operate an emergency homeless shelter

A location for any suitable emergency homeless shelter should:

- Have direct access to electricity, running water, and sewage
- Be close to basic necessities (groceries, schools, etc.)
- Be close to services (Human Services Agency, Behavioral Health Services, WorkNet, Social Security, DMV, health care, etc.)
- Be close to robust and useful transportation
- Have the ability to be secured, especially at night
- Be located where unsheltered homelessness is common
- Be large enough to adequately contain a shelter large enough to make an impact on unsheltered homelessness and take advantage of economies of scale
- Be able to accommodate those with Criminal Code 290 (sex offense) restrictions
- Be environmentally consistent with human habitation and residential uses
- Conform to zoning and municipal code guidelines of the relevant municipality (for example, in Stockton, municipal code Section 16.80.155)

Potential options for land or parcel(s) for a shelter:

- Government-owned property that can be used for an emergency shelter
- Partnering with a private landowner whose holdings are within zoned land that makes it easier to establish a shelter
- Purchase of private property that is within zoned land that makes it easier to establish a shelter

The best options for a shelter structure are:

- Purpose-built structures that can accommodate various types of households, including singles, families, partnered couples, those with pets, and those with limited possessions
- Existing residential, hotel-motel, or institutional structures that meet all habitability standards of the local municipality, the State of California, and the federal department of Housing and Urban Development

### **Potential Cost — Effective Return on Investment**

Developing new shelter space requires a significant investment of money and resources. But significant investment in emergency shelter is cost-effective if it maximizes the return on investment as measured by fewer people on the streets and more people helped into housing. A shelter can maximize the potential return on investment by incorporating the recommendations of this report, as those factors will lead to a shelter that most effectively moves people off the streets and provides the stability and resources necessary for individuals to move into permanent housing.

The cost to establish and operate expanded emergency homeless shelter depends upon several factors, including the number of people to be served, land acquisition and infrastructure development, type of structure used, and quality of services offered to those who stay in the shelter.

Based on feedback from service providers, law enforcement, the business community, and residents, the SJCoC recommends that services at any expanded emergency shelter be robust in order to increase the chances of shelter residents moving into permanent housing and toward self-sufficiency. This also requires that staff be employed to deliver those services.

Local feedback also leads the SJCoC to recommend that whatever physical structure type is used as a shelter, it should be configured so it can be used simultaneously to shelter individuals, families with children, partnered couples, and households with pets. All of these household types currently represent a significant portion of those who are unsheltered homeless and who are the prime target population(s) for expanded emergency shelter.

The shelter should also be low-barrier, meaning those with active addictions, with no income, or with disabilities should not be turned away.

Furthermore, the SJCoC recommends that an expanded emergency shelter be operated for a significant period of time, measured in years rather than in months. Long-term operation of a shelter provides those being served by the shelter a greater chance of establishing stability and entering permanent housing; closure of a short-term shelter will result in people returning to unsheltered homelessness without having the chance to establish stability or obtain housing.

Organizing a long-lived shelter that serves the types of households commonly seen on the streets and that offers robust services will require a greater investment of resources than a “bare bones” facility that serves only a narrow subset of the homeless population. However, this does not mean that a more expensive facility is less cost-effective.

The SJCoC believes the most cost-effective strategy is to create a long-lived emergency shelter that accommodates a wide population and offers robust services, as this type of emergency shelter has the greatest chance to get the most people off the streets and into a better living situation. This is a wiser investment of public funds than simply providing a temporary roof without services.

Given these parameters, we can provide a rough estimate of cost based on the expenses of local emergency shelters and the experiences of neighboring communities that have recently stood up this type of emergency shelter.

Sacramento’s Meadowview emergency shelter is organized around the same best-practices principles as those recommended by the SJCoC. The Meadowview shelter will serve at any one time 100 people of various household compositions with robust services and links to housing. Estimates for construction of the Sacramento Meadowview shelter are about \$3,800,000, with annual operating expenses estimated at \$3,100,000 — or \$85 per bed, per night.

Rough cost estimates for ongoing operation of a low-barrier shelter or multiple low-barrier shelters in San Joaquin County range between \$12 and \$85 per bed, per night, depending on the size of the facility, the services offered, the staff hired to provide those services, and the outcomes sought for those staying at the shelter. The Sacramento example should serve as a blueprint and estimate at the high end of the cost spectrum for a low-barrier shelter, but also as an example of a shelter with the best outcomes for a very vulnerable population. These estimates do not include capital, up-front investment costs.

Type of shelter	"Some Service" low barrier — some supports and services, no food, restrictions on population	"Full Service" low barrier — robust supports and services, food provided, wide population
<b>Total cost, annual</b>	\$1,200,000.00*	\$3,100,000.00**
<b>Number of beds</b>	285*	100**
<b>Cost per bed, annual</b>	\$4,210.53	\$31,000.00
<b>Cost per bed, per night</b>	\$11.54	\$84.93
<b>Cost to provide beds of shelter for all SJC unsheltered (1,558) for 1 year</b>	\$6,560,000.00	\$48,298,000.00
<b>Cost to provide beds of shelter for 50% of SJC unsheltered (779) for 1 year</b>	\$3,280,000.00	\$24,149,000.00
<b>Cost to provide beds of shelter for 10% of SJC unsheltered (156) for 1 year</b>	\$656,000.00	\$4,829,800.00

\* Based on figures from low-barrier shelter within San Joaquin County.

\*\*Based on figures from proposed Sacramento Meadowview shelter.

It is clear that significant resources will be required to operate an expanded low-barrier emergency shelter that provides robust services. This type of shelter is expected to have significantly better outcomes than a shelter with no services or few services, and will offer the greatest return on investment — making it the most cost-effective approach for expanding emergency shelter.

## **Method — How the Report Was Developed**

Those reading this report should have confidence that the SJCoC's recommendations are well-sourced and supported by experience, statistically significant research, and examination of best practices.

Developing this report was a cross-sector collaborative process undertaken by the SJCoC in response to the need for local decision-makers to have good information regarding possible new or expanded emergency shelter. Rather than recommend a particular location for a shelter, the SJCoC wanted to provide a widely-applicable set of guidelines that would help decision-makers determine if a location or specific shelter design was possible, practical, and cost-effective.

Those providing feedback included emergency shelter and homeless service providers, members of law enforcement, business community liaisons, health care officials, and local residents<sup>iii</sup>. Best practices were also researched and included in this report, especially guidelines from the United States Interagency Council of Homelessness and the federal department of Housing and Urban Development. Examples from other communities that have various emergency shelter models included but were not limited to Sacramento, Modesto, San Francisco, New York City, and Spokane, Wash.

While this report does not necessarily represent the opinions or conclusions of all entities that provided feedback for this report, this report's specific recommendations accurately reflect specific feedback those entities provided. Often, organizations with different mission statements gave the same recommendations for a shelter — such as service providers and law enforcement citing the need for shelters to accommodate households with pets and households with partners in order to shelter the largest number of persons possible. In other cases, the report's recommendations were sourced from the verified experience of organizations that have operated emergency shelters and have firsthand knowledge of day-to-day shelter needs. All recommendations fully align with best practices as articulated by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the federal department of Housing and Urban Development.

## **Final Analysis — All Communities Need Shelter**

Increasing low-barrier emergency shelter beds in all communities in San Joaquin County should be a goal shared by all jurisdictions, agencies, and community benefit organizations interested in reducing unsheltered homelessness. All urban/suburban communities in San Joaquin County are experiencing an increase in unsheltered homelessness, and more emergency shelter beds will allow more people to be sheltered, resulting in fewer individuals living on the streets.

It is the strong contention of the SJCoC that increasing emergency shelter beds in our communities will not cause more people to live on the streets. It is true that even if emergency shelter is expanded, unsheltered homelessness might increase anyway because of factors somewhat outside local control, including the regional employment market and regional housing costs. But there is no way to reduce unsheltered homelessness without providing more capacity to move people off the streets. Unsheltered homelessness will not decrease unless there are more emergency shelter beds.

This is true of all major population centers within San Joaquin County. Each major population center is experiencing an increase in unsheltered homelessness, and each population center has a responsibility to address this crisis within its own community. While establishing a regional shelter facility has been frequently discussed as one possible method to address unsheltered homelessness in San Joaquin County, such a facility would require strong, equitable, well-resourced commitments from every jurisdiction involved in order to be a viable local initiative. It is unreasonable to expect one city, jurisdiction, or nonprofit to bear the sole responsibility of providing shelter to all parts of the county.

Community-based responses to homelessness should be driven by input from local residents, officials, and agencies in order to best address local needs and the unique nature of each community. However, the creation of overnight low-barrier emergency shelter beds should be a guiding priority for each population center in San Joaquin County. It is the responsibility of local leaders, including grassroots organizers and elected officials, to build the political and community will to make this happen.

Emergency shelter capacity will only expand with direct local support. Local dollars are the lynchpin to successful emergency shelter expansion. Those resources are crucial to establish increased shelter capacity and to support the staff and services that will make the shelter sustainable on a long-term basis. The spending of local dollars is one of the most consistent features of communities that have successfully increased their ability to get people off the streets. This example repeats itself throughout the state and the country, with recent expansion efforts in Sacramento being one nearby example.

There is also a need to link shelters with robust services and pathways out of shelters. “Housing First” does not mean “Housing Only.” In addition to investing in shelters, we should also invest in services that increase personal stability, in intervention programs that break cycles of addiction and criminal behavior, in employment programs that help people earn income, and in permanent housing programs that can get people out of shelters into housing. Emergency shelter alone will not solve homelessness.

Providing adequate emergency shelter is only one of several steps to reducing homelessness in our communities. All communities in San Joaquin County need more housing that is affordable, as the county’s major population centers have failed to build enough affordable and workforce housing to keep pace with demand. Our communities must also invest in more robust prevention services that can prevent at-risk households from becoming homeless in the first place, whether through rent support, utility support, or other resources that allow families to remain in housing.

It is also important to remember that when we speak of households who are homeless, we speak of our neighbors, our friends, and our family members. Of these individuals and families who are living unsheltered in our communities, many have endured repeated trauma, abuse, and neglect; many have life experiences that damage their overall wellness and ability to thrive; and many face additional barriers such as drug use and prior criminal histories.

The SJCoC recognizes community concerns often associated with unsheltered homelessness, including substance use, criminal activity, and individuals’ prior place of residence. But using any of these challenges as a reason to not expand emergency shelter will only make it that much more likely that unsheltered homelessness will continue to increase in our communities, and that individuals and families will continue to lack the resources to rise out of homelessness.

Our communities can no longer afford to find reasons to remain inactive or wait for someone else to do the work. This crisis calls for action.

## Conclusion

Communities throughout San Joaquin County face a crisis of homelessness, and further inaction will only lead to greater numbers of people living on the streets. More low-barrier emergency shelter beds are needed throughout San Joaquin County. New shelter must meet the needs of the unsheltered homeless, housed residents, businesses, and law enforcement while remaining cost-effective. Shelter should be paired with programs that promote permanent housing and self-sufficiency, making emergency shelter part of a broader service-rich system designed to quickly move people from the streets and into stable housing. Local money will be a critical component to the stand-up and ongoing operation of expanded shelter capacity. We will only reduce unsheltered homelessness in our communities by taking real, concrete action, and by taking that action together.

Sincerely submitted on behalf of the San Joaquin Continuum of Care by



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Chair, San Joaquin Continuum of Care

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<sup>i</sup> 1,558 in 2019 compared to 567 in 2017 — SOURCE: 2019 Point-in-Time Count of Unsheltered Homeless in San Joaquin County

<sup>ii</sup> 753 in 2019 — SOURCE: 2019 Housing Inventory Count for San Joaquin County, submitted to Housing and Urban Development

<sup>iii</sup> Local entities that provided feedback included: Stockton Shelter for the Homeless, Gospel Center Rescue Mission, St. Mary's Dining Room, HOPE Family Shelter-Raymus House, Central Valley Low Income Housing Corporation, Ready to Work, Lodi Committee on Homelessness, SJC Administrator for Homeless Initiatives, San Joaquin County Health Services, San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office, Stockton Police Department, Stockton Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Stockton Alliance, Business Council San Joaquin County.