

Memorandum

TO: Mayor & City Council

FROM: Councilmember Pierluigi Oliverio

SUBJECT: Transportation for Homeless

DATE: October 29, 2012

Approved: Councilmember Pierluigi Oliverio by D.F. Date: 10/29/2012

Recommendation:

Direct the Administration to bring information back to the city council regarding how the City of San Jose can provide transportation (paid for by the Housing Dept.) for homeless people to be reunited with their families that live outside San Jose.

Background:

Government has offered—and continues to offer—assistance to the homeless. There could be a debate by some on how much or how little in social programs we as a society offer the homeless. Some of the homeless suffer from mental illness, while others struggle with substance abuse or have experienced grave misfortune in life.

The homeless are offered emergency shelters, potential transition to housing, federal work programs, county programs and non-profits services which may include assistance with substance abuse or medical care. The cost of these services comes out of our taxes. Some would argue that when more assistance is offered it attracts more homeless people to where those services are provided.

I don't necessarily agree that an individual city could ever build enough housing for the homeless as more individuals would come. San Jose has had a homeless population for decades. However, there may be a more cost-effective solution for a portion of the homeless population that could also help reunite families.

On the 5 homeless encampment cleanups that I participated with I found that many of the people I encountered within the homeless encampments were not from San Jose or even California. Regions known for good weather and being generous have become places where homeless individuals are more inclined to relocate. We live in a borderless society between states and cities in the USA, and social problems ebb and flow based on the movement of people.

For all the programs we offer, I believe we should also offer one-way transportation to homeless individuals who desire to be reunited where they may have the support of family and friends. I understand, however, that not everyone who has family and friends in their hometown may be welcomed due to personal conflicts, abuse or shame. But still some people may prefer this option.

Families that have abandoned their homeless relatives, for whatever reason, may find that distance allows them to easily forget. Perhaps reuniting homeless individuals, even where there has been abandonment, could change circumstances, especially if medication is appropriately provided for those who need it.

New York City offers one-way transportation to homeless individuals, some of whom are even flown to other continents. Even international air transportation is less expensive than the cost of housing associated with homeless individuals in New York. Reunification is also spreading to Hawaii and Florida.

If someone wants to return to his or her hometown and we can facilitate the less costly alternative, then why not? It may be easier for some of these individuals to get into a regular groove with their family or friends.

In conclusion, a percentage of San Jose's homeless population would like to be reunited with family and friends. Enabling reunification would allow government to better provide the necessary services to the remaining homeless population.