

against north coast weather!

~~This is Dan Price for Community Comment~~

Three months ago our civic leaders were up against an ominous deadline: namely the clearing of the Palco Marsh. Personally, I was in favor of the clearing because those people were living in filthy squalor with no running water or sewage and their tents were flimsy at best. Their lives were going nowhere, and the surrounding environment was going downhill fast.

But I say the clearing was 'ominous' because there were myriad threats, ~~legal and otherwise~~, alleging the city was doing something terrible, immoral and perhaps illegal by asking those folks to stop camping in the Marsh. One of the big questions and legal hurdles: where are the homeless persons going to go? If there were not ~~places for them to go~~, adequate beds in shelters for them to sleep in, temporary housing, etc., lawsuits would likely be filed.

Well, there is the Rescue Mission: but it constantly amazes me how many homeless people refuse to go to our Rescue mission, for various reasons, most likely to do with their request to go the chapel and stop using drugs and alcohol.

So, beds were placed at St. Vincent De Paul, a parking lot downtown was designated as a camping place, and the MAC center had a few beds that were open ... But, still, there seemed to be too little room at the inn, if all the 140 or so homeless from the PALCO marsh would descend on Eureka.

At the eleventh hour, just a few days before that May 2nd deadline an unlikely group came forth to offer a creative solution. Representatives from 'Hum CPR' Humboldt Coalition for Property Rights proposed that they would provide temporary shelters, renovated and improved box cars, with doors and windows, storage containers and a bed, and they could be placed on property owned by Mercer Fraser in Old Town. They felt they could build shelter for about 40 ~~some~~ ^{enough} persons if only Betty Chinn and the staff from her center would supervise the tenants. The City and County looked favorably upon the plan, even if not all the neighbors did, and within the span of a few days: Voila! Under the acronym of GECOP (Greater Eureka Community Outreach Project) the con-ex boxes were built, located downtown, the marshes were cleared, and a mini community of homeless moved in. There was a promise that these boxes and their tenants would be at the location for only six months.

Tenants have named it "Little Miami Village" - after Betty Chinn's estate, I think.

Half way through, I am glad to report the GECOP has been largely successful. Yesterday, at a meeting of city and county officials along with the Board of the Betty Kwan Chinn Center and staff: We heard these results. As of August 1, 66 individuals have been housed and come through the program. Of the 66 individuals who have accessed services through GECOP 26 of them, or 39% have acquired, or about to find housing; 27 of them, or 41% have found employment; 13 or 20% have exited the program voluntarily; 8 clients were asked to leave GECOP for rules violations; Identification cards have been gotten, medical interventions for over half of the clients; about 21% have entered substance abuse programs, and 36% obtained mental health services. In sum: Betty Chinn and her staff deserve a lot of praise for their tireless efforts to make this program work. It's not a permanent solution to homelessness in our community; but with the private sector, government, and non-profit charities working together—wer'e off to a great start!

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