

01-27-2021 Town Council Meeting Responses to Council Questions

ITEM #7: Update on Town Efforts to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis

Council Question:

Could the presentation please include an update on steps that have been taken with the unhoused community residing on the Wallace Deck?

Staff Response:

Throughout the summer and fall, the Wallace Deck provided a centralized location for persons living unsheltered. In November, the Orange County Housing and Community Development staff worked with IFC and coordinated with Town staff to create a plan to expand IFC noncongregate sheltering and staffing to provide safe housing for the community's most vulnerable residents. The Housing and Community Development staff worked with the County Emergency Operating Center to expand noncongregate sheltering by 16 beds under the current program managed by IFC at a local hotel. Manager Jones also approved Town CARES funding to the IFC to accommodate the increase in staffing needed to support the additional residents. The Town's Police Crisis Unit and the Orange County Street Outreach Team connected with the individuals on the Wallace Deck and organizing their move to the hotel including transportation.

The residents camping on the Wallace Deck now at IFC's noncongregate shelter have been connected to the Coordinated Entry system for Orange County via the Housing Helpline and HOME Committee. This evidence-based and best practice process provides for community partners and resources to come together each month to secure permanent housing and supports such as Rapid Rehousing and housing Choice Vouchers for people experiencing homelessness. (In 2020, the HOME Committee successfully housed 87 Orange County residents.) The residents formerly residing on the Wallace Deck will continue to receive support services from community partners who will work closely with them to move towards a more stable housing solution. The timeline for housing for people experiencing homelessness depends on the funding available as well as the availability of landlords accepting vouchers. For example, in Orange County there are more than 50 people experiencing homelessness with a Housing Choice Voucher in-hand in active housing search.

We understand that there are still residents camping on the Deck from time to time. The Orange County Street Outreach Team and the Town's Police Crisis Unit continue to connect with residents to identify alternate resources with the goal of permanent housing placement.

Council Question:

I was excited to learn that that the Biden administration announced that the federal government will fully reimburse local governments for the cost of housing people who are

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homeless and vulnerable to COVID-19 in settings where they have space and separation from others, such as hotel rooms through Sept. 30, 2021. Will this change any of our efforts to support this community?

Staff Response:

To date, Orange County has covered expenses related to the hotel program (rooms, food, laundry services) and planned to seek reimbursement from FEMA for these costs. The Town has provided CARES funds so IFC could hire additional staff to support residents while in the temporary hotel location. In addition, IFC applied for additional funds for cold weather cots and staffing support through the Emergency Solutions Grant funding process coordinated by the Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness. We will seek reimbursement if these expenses are eligible through the new federal legislation, and will continue to support the needs of our residents experiencing homelessness.