

## Homeless Task Force Meeting (12-20-12) Report Prepared for Waterfront Committee (1-2-13)

Guest speakers Albany Police Chief Mike McQuiston and Sgt. Chris Willis (primary contact with Bulb residents) – The chief emphasized current municipal policy “encourages homelessness,” a socio-economic problem the police department cannot “fix.” Unfortunately, the department remains the city’s primary point of contact with this population. He said anecdotal evidence suggests the majority of Albany’s homeless population fall into a so-called “resistant/will not” category, which is defined as those who choose to live in what some might consider a non-traditional or non-conformist way. (The category is one of three found within the San Luis Obispo annual census, the others being approximately 20 percent who are considered “ready” homeless for fewer than two-and-a-half years; another 40 percent who are “unable/cannot” homeless for more than two-and-a-half years but find change difficult due to challenges of mental illness, addiction, etc.) The chief called the city’s approach in 1999 an initial “success” that was backed by strong “political will” but eventually derailed by a lack of long-term planning and funding. In contrast, he defined “sustainability” as “letting the police enforce” with stronger links to social service resources and, possibly, a more effective point of contact). Typically, the police department receives four or five calls a day from businesses/residents about an estimated two or three homeless people who drift within the city proper but most contacts are with Bulb residents. About half of the calls to the department are simply expressions of “concern for welfare” of the person involved, meaning most people just want to make sure the person is not having some kind of medical emergency. Acting under guidelines by the city council, the police department exercises enforcement discretion when dealing with Bulb residents, with the caveat being all California penal codes are enforced to ensure health and safety. The chief acknowledged a natural “ideological” opposition to the idea of redefining homelessness, saying he was “doubtful it would succeed” but supported the city’s desire to address the issue by creating a task force.

Other items of note: 1) City staff members Ann Chaney and Isabelle Leduc reviewed a preliminary meeting a representative at Everyone Home, county agency dedicated to homelessness and housing issues. Staff members are researching federal and local social service agency funding opportunities and, with support from the task force, will make recommendations in the coming months. 2) The task force reviewed a draft report outlining its activities to date. The report will be presented to the city council later this month.

Attachment(s): Homeless Task Force meeting agenda