

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: Whittier Navigation Center

WHAT ARE THE FACTS ON HOMELESSNESS IN LA COUNTY?

According to the most recent 2020 Point-in-Time count conducted by the County of Los Angeles, there are approximately 66,433 people in LA County experiencing homelessness, a jump from the 58,936 identified in 2019. 2020 also saw a rise in homelessness among seniors age 62 and older, as well as transitional-aged youth ages 18 to 24. The majority of the County's homeless, whether male or female, are U.S. citizens and long-term Los Angeles County residents of over 10 years.

HOW IS HOMELESSNESS BEING ADDRESSED IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY?

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is the lead agency in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care, which is the regional planning body that coordinates housing and services for homeless families and individuals in Los Angeles County. In late 1993, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and the City of Los Angeles created the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) as an independent, joint powers authority. LAHSA is the lead agency in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care, which is the regional planning body that coordinates housing and services for homeless families and individuals in Los Angeles County – including in the City of Whittier. LAHSA coordinates and manages over \$300 million annually in federal, state, county, and city funds for programs that provide shelter, housing, and services to people experiencing homelessness.

The County is divided into eight geographic areas designated as Service Planning Areas (SPAs). Each SPA is expected to have a balance of homeless services. LAHSA helps coordinate efforts among agencies, businesses, community leaders, government agencies, and elected officials to determine priority needs and services from a local, regional, and county-wide basis.

Whittier is located within SPA 7, along with the cities of Artesia, Bell, Bell Gardens, Bellflower, Cerritos, Commerce, Cudahy, Downey, East Los Angeles, Hawaiian Gardens, Huntington Park, La Habra Heights, La Mirada, Lakewood, Maywood, Montebello, North Whittier, Norwalk, Pico Rivera, Santa Fe Springs, Signal Hill, South Gate, South Whittier, Vernon, Walnut Park, and West Whittier-Los Nietos.

HOW DOES THE *MARTIN V. CITY OF BOISE* RULING AFFECT WHITTIER AS IT RELATES TO HOMELESSNESS?

On September 4, 2018, the United States Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the City of Boise's "anti-camping" ordinance banning sleeping outdoors is unconstitutional if the people it affects have no other options available for shelter. The Ninth Circuit Court agreed that Boise violated plaintiffs' Eighth Amendment rights when it issued citations for sleeping or camping in public. As a result, cities throughout the jurisdiction of the Ninth Circuit Court of appeals are not

allowed to enforce such laws, if they did not provide housing options and resources, such as Navigation Centers.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITY OF WHITTIER?

The City cannot legally keep homeless individuals from creating an encampment within public areas (such as parks, sidewalks, near the libraries, or along the Greenway Trail) without enough shelter beds to accommodate all of the individuals experiencing homelessness in Whittier.

During an April 22, 2020 closed session meeting, the Whittier City Council voted unanimously to enter into a settlement agreement with the Orange County Catholic Workers without protracted litigation. The settlement agreement will allow the City to enforce quality of life and public safety ordinances in parks and public spaces as soon as the City is able to provide sufficient shelter beds exclusively for Whittier residents. The agreement outlines specific criteria by which Whittier residency would be determined.

WHAT ARE THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AS SET FORTH BY THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT?

To begin enforcing the camping and public property storage rules, the terms of the settlement under the jurisdiction of Federal Judge David Carter require the City of Whittier to provide 139 shelter beds to Whittier's homeless residents. The number homeless individuals identified is based on the 2019 Point-in-Time Count conducted by LAHSA, along with the City's Whittier-commissioned Census performed by City Net, a local non-profit homeless outreach partner.

HAS WHITTIER IDENTIFIED SHELTER BEDS IN THE CITY?

After reviewing various industrial sites located within the surrounding area, the City of Whittier has designated the former Salvation Army building, located at 7926 Pickering Avenue, as the site for a Whittier Navigation Center.

Whittier will be able to further meet the needs of our homeless residents by providing an adequate number of beds, regular meals, and services designed to meet the needs of each individual's unique circumstances. The City will also be able to resume enforcement of no camping, curfew, and other quality of life City ordinances once the Navigation Center is established. The combined efforts of The Salvation Army, who has a long history of working with those in our community who are living unsheltered, along with our existing outreach and service providers, will make a big impact on the current state of homelessness in our community.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 24, 2020, Council directed that City facilities be identified for potential use as emergency shelters for Whittier residents experiencing homelessness. In a Special Meeting on July 21, 2020, the City Council authorized the opening of a 139-bed emergency shelter at the Uptown Senior Center.

HOW HAS COVID-19 CHANGED THE CITY'S APPROACH TO HOMELESS HOUSING?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Council directed that City facilities be identified for potential use as emergency shelters for Whittier residents experiencing homelessness. This is an effort to ensure vulnerable residents are housed and have access to food, hygiene facilities and wrap-around case management to preserve the health and safety of the entire community. In a Special Meeting on July 21, 2020, the City Council authorized the opening of a 139-bed emergency shelter at the Uptown Senior Center. The City's identified service provider, The Salvation Army, will operate the shelter at the Senior Center until the Navigation Center on Pickering Avenue is ready to open.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE SERVICES THAT WERE OFFERED AT THE SENIOR CENTER?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City has temporarily terminated in-person services at the Senior Center in conjunction with state and regional public health safety measures. The City is currently providing other services to local seniors including performing wellness checks, offering Dial-A-Ride dispatch, and coordinating meal program assistance, CalFresh appointments and Grief/Women's support group services. City staff also offers a Pen Pal program and sends timely information to clients via an email newsletter.

WHEN WILL THE SENIOR CENTER BE REOPENED FOR USE?

As a result of the COVID-19 public health crisis, senior facilities remain closed until further notice. The Whittier Senior Center will serve as an emergency shelter until the opening of the Salvation Army Navigation Center in January 2021. At which point the Navigation Center is up and running, and pending COVID-19 operating restrictions, the City will refurbish and update the existing Senior Center building to reopen again for in-person senior services. Information will be shared publicly through the City's regular communication channels including website, email, channel 3 and social media.

WHAT KIND OF SECURITY AND SUPERVISION WILL BE REQUIRED AT THE SHELTER?

In addition to staff and case managers, there will be 24-hour a day facility monitoring through security cameras and security guards on site at all times. Staff will maintain frequent communication with the Whittier Police Department for immediate response to incidents, and an assigned Area Lieutenant will also serve as an ongoing liaison should police assistance be required.

HOW DOES A NAVIGATION CENTER DIFFER FROM A SHELTER?

A Navigation Center provides comprehensive services to its clients, including health and wellness resources, employment assistance, substance abuse services, and counseling, whereas traditional homeless shelters only provide beds. Case Managers will work directly with clients to connect them to stable income, permanent housing, and, most importantly, self-sufficiency. The Navigation Center will have detailed management, operations, and security plans in place, and

housing and services will be available by referral only to Whittier residents experiencing homelessness.

Tailored, wraparound services will be provided by The Salvation Army, an experienced non-profit service provider with significant experience and the necessary credentials in working with homeless clients in the Whittier area. The Salvation Army will conduct detailed client registration, intake, and referral to appropriate service agencies. Once registration is complete, the Navigation Center will be responsible for client care and transportation needs.

WHEN WILL THE WHITTIER NAVIGATION CENTER OPEN?

Upon completion of the necessary government entitlements, environmental clearance, building permits, construction of improvements, and program implementation, the Navigation Center may be ready to open by late 2020 or early 2021.

WHAT CURRENT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS IN WHITTIER?

The City of Whittier is actively engaged in a range of coordinated efforts and active collaboration among community organizations, churches, service clubs, and concerned citizens dedicated to overcoming homelessness in our community. A Whittier Consortium on Homelessness was also established in 2015 to assist those who are currently without a place to call home and help the community further its collective outreach efforts.

The City of Whittier works with Whittier First Day to provide transitional bridge housing with on-site supportive services to 45 individuals in the City. Services include: on-site meals, clothing, 12 step meetings, education, training, employment assistance, transportation, on-site health clinic, health screenings, mental health services, and case management.

The Whole Child, also located in Whittier, has provided children, adolescents, and families in the community with affordable, culturally-sensitive, and professional mental services for over 40 years. Services include: free parenting education in English and Spanish, child abuse prevention, anger management classes, substance abuse help, and counseling for teens.

In addition to the providers named, other important regional partners include PATH and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA). The City offers a complete list of homeless resources available at www.cityofwhittier.org. Similarly, 2-1-1 is a comprehensive informational and referral system linking Los Angeles County residents to community health and human services and support. 2-1-1 connects hundreds of people every day to shelters, food, low-cost counseling, subsidized child care, employment services, and a range of services for individual and family self-sufficiency. The County also offers a Homeless Incentive Program encouraging landlords to rent their available units to Section 8 voucher holders experiencing homelessness, and operates LA-HOP.org, an outreach portal designed to allow residents to initiate an outreach referral and connect a person experiencing homelessness directly to local services.