

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

THE HOMELESS

A big homeless shelter could go in this historic downtown Sacramento building

[BY THERESA CLIFT](#)

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Councilman Steve Hansen is proposing that the city open a homeless shelter at Capitol Park Hotel, one of the downtown residential hotels. It would be open for a year, with up to 180 beds. He talks about the plan on Wednesday, April 17, 2019. **BY [PAUL KITAGAKI JR.](#)**

Sacramento Councilman Steve Hansen is proposing the city open a homeless shelter in the Capitol Park Hotel – the historic residential hotel near the heart of a revitalized downtown area.

Capitol Park, at the corner of 9th and L streets, offers single-room occupancy units, or SROs. About half of the rooms are vacant, and the hotel’s roughly 90 tenants will receive relocation assistance, Hansen said.

The shelter could open this fall, and stay open for a year before Mercy Housing transforms it in to permanent supportive housing, Hansen said.

Hansen selected the hotel for a shelter site partly because it could house more people than other proposed shelters in large tent-like structures in parking lots. It could also possibly take children, Hansen said. It’s also close to public transit and services.

“This site is perfect because it meets all the basic criteria but also is large enough we can get some economy of scale out of it and really help the most vulnerable people on the streets get stable and get into housing,” Hansen said.

The City Council is set to vote Tuesday to fund the purchase of the property for about \$10 million, which Mercy Housing would repay, Hansen said.

Like its Railroad Drive shelter in north Sacramento, the city would also fund services at the shelter, such as medical and mental health care, as well as help getting state identification cards and removing other barriers people face in finding permanent housing. Some of the services could be offered in the vacant storefronts on the ground floor of the hotel – a similar model to Mercy Housing’s development at 7th and H streets, Hansen said.

The city has not yet selected a service provider, and does not yet know how much that component will cost, Hansen said.

Shelter guests will likely be allowed to bring their partners and possessions, but may not allow them to bring pets like they can at Railroad, Hansen said.

The city has a list of about 100 people who have been living in the downtown core for years who would be first to get in the shelter.

“Our neighborhoods and businesses, everybody is desperate for anything that will work and this is a really viable path to get people help, reducing the anxiety and concerns of the residents and neighborhoods,” Hansen said. “I think this will be something people are excited about.”

The Downtown Sacramento Partnership, which represents downtown businesses, supports the shelter, as long as certain requirements are met, said Michael Ault, the partnership’s executive director.

“This is the right model for addressing homelessness, matching supportive housing with key services to raise people out of homelessness,” Ault said in a text message. “It’s also superior to the existing SRO units, which fail to offer necessary services along with housing and don’t offer all of the basic amenities which individuals need. Strong management and oversight of the location will be critical to its success, with regular communication with downtown partners and city representatives.”

Downtown business owners often complain about homeless people defecating on sidewalks outside their businesses or causing other issues.

The hotel's current 90 residents are mostly low-income seniors, many disabled or formerly homeless, who pay \$575 a month for a room with a bathroom, said Irene Henry, who owns the hotel under a limited partnership.

Henry and her late husband bought the hotel in 1978, and it became a residential hotel in the late 1980s, she said. Now she's ready to sell.

The residents have been told they'll have to leave eventually, but they do not know when, Henry said.

"They don't know if it'll be a year, two years, or what," Henry, 69, said Wednesday while loading up a vending machine in the hotel's lobby. "They ask me all the time."

The shelter may open with fewer than 180 beds, which could leave some rooms for the current residents to stay at the hotel a little longer, Hansen said.

After about a year of operating as a shelter, the property would undergo roughly a year of renovations to get it ready to become permanent supportive housing, said Rick Sprague of Mercy Housing, which is supportive of the shelter idea.

[The county has applied for No Place Like Home funds](#) from the state to help fund the permanent housing component and expects to hear back this month, said Kim Nava, county spokeswoman.

Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency would, which oversees the downtown SROs, would partner with the city on the project. SHRA officials declined comment on this story because the proposal was not yet public.

Mayor Darrell Steinberg in December [asked all eight council members](#) to find sites for at least 100 shelter beds with services in each of their districts. So far, Councilman Jay Schenirer has proposed sites at the [Florin light rail station](#) and a lot [near X Street and Alhambra](#). Councilman Jeff Harris has proposed a [Cal Expo-owned site](#) at the southeast end of Ethan Way. Those three shelters, which would have 100 beds each, all still need

state or federal approval before tent-like structures could be ordered and erected.

Steinberg said the Capitol Park shelter might be able to open faster than the other proposed shelters because it does not require a large semi-permanent tent-like structure to be erected.

“The advantage of using existing housing, whether they be motels or existing housing complexes, is that they can be readied quickly for the urgency of the moment,” Steinberg said. “The time lag is one of the most difficult challenges here in trying to provide real hope to the community.”

Steinberg hopes people can stay at each of the shelters for an average of four months before moving on to more permanent housing.

Bob Erlenbusch, executive director of the Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness, said he likes that the Capitol Park shelter would provide guests privacy and possibly include children and families.

“Putting children in a Sprung tent would just be totally inappropriate, but this building lends itself to be repurposed to do just that,” Erlenbusch said. “This is more like apartments, so I think it lends itself to housing different populations that generally are vastly underserved.”