

# THE SACRAMENTO BEE

## **Sacramento mayor has a \$40.5 million plan to shelter nearly 800 homeless. But where?**

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Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg recommended on Tuesday a \$40.5 million proposal to fund 781 new shelter beds for two years, but not all of his colleagues on the City Council are on board.

The mayor's plan recommends opening tent-like Sprung shelters at the Florin light rail station parking lot in Meadowview and at the Cal Expo property with 100 beds each, said Emily Halcon, the city's homeless services coordinator who presented the proposal to the council at Steinberg's request.

The plan also includes a new 100-bed Sprung shelter at an undetermined location, and calls for two undisclosed Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency properties and three existing shelters be converted in to "low barrier triage" shelters. Lastly, it proposes a 54-bed shelter for women and children and a 12-bed shelter for 18- to 24-year-olds who are crime victims.

At low-barrier triage shelters, guests are not screened for drugs or alcohol, can bring pets, partners and possessions, and receive help finding housing.

Five council members spoke in support of the mayor's plan at Tuesday's council meeting, while three raised concerns.

City spokesman Tim Swanson said city staff will next bring back options for the council to consider and approve at a future meeting, taking into account the concerns and direction provided at the meeting.

The \$40.5 million for the shelters would include \$15.7 million in city funding, about \$12 million in state funds and about \$8 million in private funds Steinberg has raised or plans to raise. It's unclear where the remaining roughly \$3 million would come from. The money would also fund new city staff, increased police patrols and cleanups in the area of the new shelters, Halcon said.

The funding would cover the operation of the shelters through December 2020, or longer for shelters that are delayed in opening, Halcon said. The shelters would cost about \$18 million to operate each year beyond that.

Councilman Jeff Harris thanked Steinberg for the proposal.

"The mayor has really burned the candle at both ends to get private investment and public investment to get us to this state where we can make this significant push," Harris said.

Council members Allen Warren, Larry Carr and Angelique Ashby raised concerns about what happens if the city does not have the roughly \$18 million it would need after two years to keep the shelters open.

Ashby asked staff to come up with a less-costly proposal, and suggested some of the city money instead be used for police, fire protection, parks, libraries and other core city services.

"I don't think we should walk blindly into an \$18 million annual obligation," Ashby said. "I think that would be a critical mistake and the people that would

pay the most are the people housed in the units when we have to take it down.”

Steinberg assured members that additional money would materialize.

“We will find the money in two years,” Steinberg said. “I promise you that if I’m still in this seat for another term, that we will find the money to continue what is successful.”

Carr raised concerns about how the city will continue to keep up with the expense when Steinberg is no longer mayor.

“It worries me if we’re building a system based on one person, and if someone else is sitting in that chair, whether we’ll be able to duplicate that,” Carr said.

Carr said he opposes shelters being placed in “underserved areas,” and he feels that the Florin light rail station is an example of that, along with Railroad Drive in north Sacramento. Carr represents Meadowview.

“To dump them all in underserved areas, it just doesn’t seem fair,” Carr said. “And to put one on the very edge of District 8 (Carr’s district) and ignore Curtis Park and South Land Park and all the other places, I don’t think that was what we intended.”

Steinberg said areas that get shelters also see a reduction in homeless people on the streets and receive cleanup services.

“Your area is not immune from homelessness,” Steinberg said to Carr. “Meadowview is not immune from homelessness. Mack Road is not immune from homelessness. You’re dealing with it. So I could make the argument that to not put a shelter in your area would actually be a disservice to your constituents

because then there's no ability to outreach in a nearby geographical area to get people who are homeless off of your streets.”

In December, Steinberg asked all council members to find [sites in their districts for shelters](#) similar to the city's 100-bed triage shelter in north Sacramento on Railroad Drive. So far, only Councilman Jay Schenirer and Councilman Jeff Harris have publicly proposed sites — at the Florin light rail station and Cal Expo, respectively.

Steinberg said he still wants to see all council members propose sites, and that four of them need to be “ready to go” this year. He said he expects the council to vote on specific shelter sites.

All council members have identified potential shelter sites in their districts to staff, though some are not realistic, Assistant City Manager Chris Conlin said.

Warren urged his colleagues to announce potential sites.

“We all have to play a major role in this process,” Warren said.

The Railroad Drive shelter is in Harris' district, but the neighborhoods impacted are in Warren's, he said.

Since the Railroad Drive shelter opened last winter, 625 people had stayed there and 531 had exited as of Jan. 31, Swanson said. Of the 531 who exited the shelter, 194 people, or 37 percent, transitioned to either temporary or permanent housing, he said.

The 100-bed shelter is typically full or close to full most nights, Swanson said. The shelter costs about \$400,000 a month to run.

Ashby raised concerns about the shelter's cost, and about opening more shelters at the same cost.

"400,000 a month just to get 194 people housed to me just seems like a lot of money," Ashby said.

The city funding for Steinberg's plan would come from the city's Measure U reserve fund. City officials set that money aside in case voters rejected the increased Measure U sales tax in November, Steinberg has said.

Representatives from Sutter Health, nonprofit Sacramento Steps Forward, the Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness, Sacramento ACT, the Midtown Association and Downtown Sacramento Partnership spoke in favor of the proposal Tuesday.

Schenirer said he would like the council to vote on the Florin Road site March 26, as long as the Sacramento Regional Transit board and the community sign off.