

HOMELESS IN PARADISE
February 22-28, 2019

PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE - Part 8



MOVE OVER, OSCAR! “HOMELESS BY THE BAY” WINS BEST PERFORMANCE AWARD

By Wanda Sue Parrott

COMPARING last week’s “Homeless by the Bay” town hall in Seaside’s Oldemeyer Center to Sunday’s upcoming glitz-and-glam Oscars seems like a stretch, but is it?

If you missed it, here’s a nutshell recap.

After a panel introduced the topic at the 6 p.m. event hosted by Seaside City Councilmen Jon Wizard and Dave Pacheco, the public hearing began as participants responded for a 3-minute limit per person.

A fifth of the estimated 160 attendees spoke until time ran out at 7:40 p.m.

Speakers ranged from long-winded grizzled elders to one fast-talking girl of 10.

Topic was a potential homeless shelter in a mobile unit that once was a health clinic behind the Monterey County Department of Public Social Services at Broadway Ave. and Noche Buena St. in Seaside.

Oh boy, did they expound. Whew!

The Oscar-like event was topped by an eloquent expostulator who incited theatrical filibuster with his show-stealing soliloquy against a three-minute—or any length-- time limit!

Back to the issue:

To Open A Peninsula-Wide Homeless Shelter In Seaside?

To qualify for its share of the already well-publicized \$12.5 million in HEAP continuum of care funding, should Seaside convert the unused unit into a homeless shelter?

Only a few weeks remain to decide, or lose the share of money allocated to Seaside.

“Yes!” The first man at the podium declared vociferously that “I agree such a shelter is needed.” But his message spelled out N-I-M-B-Y, meaning “Not in my back yard!”

He was not alone. Others voiced the same opinion in varying expressions of emotion, from vague fear to vitriolic venom, as more than one mature citizen recalled Seaside as it was before Fort Ord closed.

“I was a kid... that area was known as The Pit... there was drug deals going down... there were shootings... dead bodies were lying all around... what’ya wanta do? Bring back what the city worked so hard to clean up and get rid of?”

Other opinions cited in these paraphrased multiples included:

“Use the building, but since it is mobile, move it somewhere else, like Marina or Fort Ord.”

“Why does Seaside always end up with the homeless problems? Let one of the other cities of the Peninsula open a shelter and take responsibility for a change.”

“Use the mobile unit specifically for homeless women.”

Most speakers talked generally, but three women focused on housing homeless women.

Gathering For Women On The Red Carpet

I was the first speaker to mention Gathering for Women.

My topic was twofold, starting with the comment that the mobile unit is on County of Monterey property that happens to be located within the city limits of Seaside; therefore, Seaside is not the owner of the property in issue.

Second, the mobile unit could be converted into a dorm-like facility in which partitions could be put up to give 30 or 40 guests a warm, safe sleeping space sort of like a communal “tiny house village” under one roof, with a cot, room for their belongings, and a sense of privacy, while also sharing a common room and bath facilities.

Tiny homes as a possible alternative to the old mobile unit were brought up by several speakers at the town hall, and this is a hot topic at the Veterans Transition Center in Marina, where inclusion of tiny homes in their property was featured recently in the *Monterey Peninsula Herald*:

<https://www.montereyherald.com/2019/02/15/veterans-transition-center-to-hold-event-for-tiny-house-planning-design-in-marina/>

Women without adequate shelter often stay at Gathering for Women all day, having lunch, showering, engaging in conversation and other activities, until closure at 4 p.m.

By partnering with the County of Monterey and City of Seaside, Gathering for Women could further expand its services to the 600 (current estimate) homeless women of the Monterey Peninsula.

On the drawing board are plans for possible overnight shelter for both women and their dogs; visit at:

www.gatheringforwomen.org or 831-241-6154.

Women Without Adequate Housing

Next speaker about Gathering for Women was Kelli J. Keane, 86, “Advocate for Senior Women without Adequate Housing,” a term she used when appearing in public a few years ago during the formative years of Gathering for Women.

A formerly homeless woman who lived in her van, Keane helped establish Gathering for Women and the One Starfish Safe Parking Program, in which women are now allowed to sleep in their vehicles at participating houses of worship across the peninsula.

One Starfish helped Keane find housing.

According to Catherine Thoeni, executive director of the Coalition of Homeless Service Providers, a keynote speaker at the Homeless by the Bay town hall, and administrator of the continuum of care HEAP funds

distribution, 37 percent of the 2,837 homeless persons in Monterey County were women in 2017. <https://www.chspmontereycounty.org/>.

Eighty-three percent of these women lived in Monterey County prior to becoming homeless.

Statistics are now being compiled following the 2019 Point in Time Homeless Census & Survey taken in January.

Gathering For Women

Third woman to speak on behalf of Gathering for Women was interim executive director Kate Daniels Kurz, who had only been on the job for a few days following the sudden resignation of former executive director Jennifer Dalton.

Statistics of interest to Seaside City Council included this 2018 Year in Review:

Individual women served in 2018: 932.

Meals served: 10,237.

Showers: 1,900.

Number of Clothes Closet visits: 4,492.

Number of case management visits: 1,627.

Most histrionic comments shouted from the podium were: “It sounds like it’s already a done deal!” to which councilmembers Wizard and Pacheco said nothing was already decided. They invited everyone, hecklers included, to the Seaside City Council meeting on Thursday, February 21, 7 p.m. at Oldemeyer Center, 986 Hilby Ave., Seaside, not at City Hall, where council’s decision will be further discussed and voted on by, as councilmember Pacheco stressed, taking public opinion into serious consideration. <https://www.ci.seaside.ca.us>.

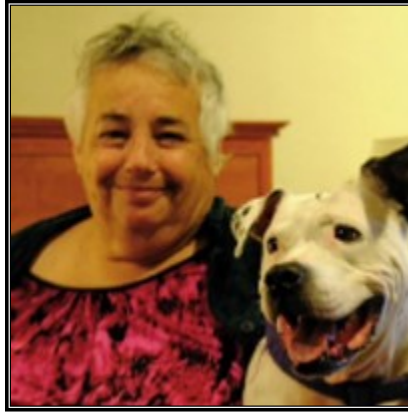
Homeless Women And Their Dogs

Friends of Homeless Women will feature “Homeless Women and their Dogs” at the meeting, Wed., Feb. 27, 2019, 10 a.m., St. Mary’s by the Sea Episcopal Church, 146 12th Street, Pacific Grove. Panelist Evangelina Ochoa will represent Gathering for Women. <http://fundforhomelesswomen.org>.

Noticeably absent at the town hall were homeless people like CeliaSue Hecht, 69, professional writer who lives in a van with her dog Cici, 12. CeliaSue was hospitalized and has since had breast cancer surgery. She needs a warm, safe place to stay during recovery. If you can help, contact cshechtwriter@gmail.com or call 702-225-8206.

(continued)

Photo courtesy of homeless journalist CeliaSue Hecht, shown here with her dog Cici:



*They say dogs aren't allowed in heaven,
So I asked a preacher one day
If he'd say one small line for this brave pal of mine,
And here's what the preacher did say:
Dog is just God spelled backward...
(from a song by Robert Russell Weiss)*

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