

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #30



### MONTEREY'S ALMOST-MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION:

*To grind or not to grind up asphalt?*

By Wanda Sue Parrott

**TO GRIND OR NOT** to grind up asphalt? That fork in the road (symbolized by the highway clipart shown above) confronted Monterey City Council at its meeting on May 5, at which time the issue was tabled until May 19.

The two-weeks served as a Help Needed campaign, message of which was: “The City of Monterey is in a quandary. Affordable housing for low-income families and homeless people is needed desperately, but help is also needed to manage such projects.”

The city, in a time-constrained “use it or lose it” position, has nearly \$1 million (\$962,407) available in federal HUD (the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. If usage is not okayed by June 30, the funds will be withdrawn.

### Pieces Of The Money Pie

While \$1 million represents a vast sum of money to a transient man who sleeps in a tent or sleeping bag, or homeless woman who lives in her car, it can be a relatively insignificant amount for institutions and organizations responsible for housing, temporarily sheltering, and otherwise feeding and caring for the large numbers of needy persons in an area like the Monterey Peninsula, where property costs continue to soar despite downturns in the economy.

According to Carl Braginsky, HR/Grant Specialist with the Salvation Army Monterey Peninsula Corps, “The Salvation Army has been aware for weeks of this funding amount and the city's interesting dilemma in having a \$900 K purse of unspent funds. There have been communications between Rick Marvin of the city's housing office and The Salvation Army on at least a couple of occasions. This purse of \$900 K cannot be spent on ‘services’ but must be spent, by my understanding, on capital improvements/purchases, targeted neighborhood upgrades and the like, according to HUD regulations.

“Our response to Mr. Marvin was that the Salvation Army is not now in a position to increase our current housing inventory, so we would not be able to help develop a new housing option in either Seaside or Monterey, particularly on such short notice. The fact of the matter also is that \$900 K is not enough money to support a meaningful property purchase, let alone sustain an on-going budget to manage services for the homeless.

“I might suggest that the peninsula cities do a better job of coordinating their funding and efforts towards regional planning for services to our homeless neighbors ... If the \$900K were leveraged with other funds/assets from other sources/localities, to be used for developing permanent supportive housing for the homeless, that would appear to me to have been a more meaningful way to use the money. [carl.braginsky@usw.salvationarmy.org](mailto:carl.braginsky@usw.salvationarmy.org)”

Following the May 5 meeting, the community-at-large accessed the basic message (paraphrased below) from media reports and broadcasts of the city council meeting on Channel 25.

### **Help! City Seeks Partner**

“A partner with social-service expertise is needed by the city to help spend the money. There isn’t much time!” the message said. “Are you interested in partnering with the city? If the June 30 deadline passes and the city loses the funds, approximately only \$180,000 will be made available in federal funding starting next year.

“Since these block-grant funds must be used specifically for development of and improvements to low-income/affordable housing and other social programs addressed toward helping the needy, a cap exists on how the funds can be spent.

“If no viable alternative is presented by May 19, the money that could go a long way toward helping get homeless people, especially elderly women, off the streets, will be approved for grinding up asphalt on the streets and HUD will, thus, enable the city to keep the funding so desperately needed by those now spending their nights in cars or sleeping bags.”

Public protests and comments from council members at the May 5 meeting resulted in tabling the item until May 19.

### **Outside City Limits Is Okay**

The City of Monterey can use the funds outside the city limits, as long as Monterey residents will be beneficiaries.

Carl Braginsky says of the Salvation Army in Seaside, “We are pleased to receive from the City of Monterey about \$25 K per year, given to help Monterey residents with rental assistance, in order to prevent homelessness.”

Under consideration at the May 5 meeting was one 8-unit building in Seaside. Anyone aware of a commercial property such as a motel or room-and-board, bed-and-breakfast or apartment building facing tax delinquency and/or other for-sale conditions and located within the definition of “Monterey Peninsula” boundaries was encouraged to contact Monterey City Manager Michael McCarthy at 831-646-3760, [mccarthy@monterey.org](mailto:mccarthy@monterey.org) or council member Timothy Barrett at 831-277-9505, [digistream@live.com](mailto:digistream@live.com).

The implicate message ended: “Have you ever tried to sleep on asphalt, intact or ground up? It ain’t comfortable! If you can help resolve this quandary, speak up. Pronto! If you wait until the May 19 council meeting, you might be too late.”

### **The Ultimate Answer**

So, what happened on May 19? To grind or not grind up asphalt?

Rick Marvin presented a revised proposal to the nearly million-dollar question and Monterey City Council approved it 4 to 1.

In lieu of grinding up asphalt and making other infrastructure repairs to low-income neighborhoods, \$62,500 of the CDBG money will repair and improve Community Housing Services, 599 Pearl St., Monterey, a non-profit agency that has served homeless/runaway youth for the past 20 years; \$450,000 will go toward

rehabilitating units in Marina to become transitional housing for veterans and veterans' families; \$95,000 will purchase deed-restricted ownership units.

Announcement was made that a 4-unit property had become available in Seaside. Reyes Bonilla, director of Shelter Outreach Plus, stated his non-profit is ready, willing, and able to partner with Monterey, to which councilmember Timothy Barrett said:

“Metaphorically speaking, the doors have swung open and people have walked through to engage with the city.”

Also, metaphorically speaking, we think Monterey took the right fork in the road.

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