

One of the letters we received posed the question, “**Is this being done for the community or to the community?**” I’ve thought a lot about that question. It’s a question born of real frustration, and it deserves an honest response.

When something feels sudden — especially something this significant — it can absolutely seem like it’s being done to you. But I see it differently. San Rafael has always taken responsibility for those who need help, especially those who cannot advocate for themselves. That’s who we are.

I’ve worked on homelessness for nearly 20 years. Here’s a photo of my boys, now 26 and 23, marching with me on B Street in 2007 or 2008 to urge our elected officials (long before I was on the council) to address homelessness. Although this feels sudden, this work didn’t appear overnight. We’ve been pushing toward solutions, this type of solution, for years.

Everyone involved — city staff, service providers, partners — is genuinely trying to do the right thing. And while criticism comes with public service, being called negligent or deceitful in this case is simply misplaced. As long as people sleep outside, especially on a night like tonight, I will advocate for what is right and humane.

After years of searching, and working closely with the County and State, this is the site that can safely support cabins, services, and eventually permanent housing. I truly believe it is the location that can bring people out of the doorways and streets and into stability.

And I want to be candid: I am tired of hearing, “I support helping the homeless, **but...**” That “**but**” is how we end up helping no one while the suffering continues. My goal is not to impose something on your neighborhood; it’s to bring order, services, and oversight to people who are currently living unsheltered. You should be proud to live in a community that cares.

This project aims to help some of the most vulnerable people in our city — people sleeping in tents, cars, or along the creek. I cannot accept that as normal. If we can offer a bed, warmth, stability, and a path forward, then we must. Compassion and accountability can coexist. We can hold both truths at once.

I know this has caused stress, so much anger. and disappointment for some. I'm sorry for the way this landed. Our intention has never been to offend or make anyone feel like your rights have been taken away. Our commitment is to create stability, safety, and dignity — for those moving inside, and for the broader community.

Lastly, I also want to address some of the language used publicly about our homeless neighbors. It has shocked and saddened me. I think about what our children hear — not just our policy debates, but our tone. I want to model empathy, dignity, and responsibility, even when it's uncomfortable.

So back to the question:

This is not being done to the community.

It isn't even being done for the community.

It's being done with the community — rooted in humanity, guided by safety, and driven by our shared responsibility to care for one another.

We can debate this, and we can disagree, but at the end of the day, we are talking about where people sleep, eat, and try to rebuild their lives. I believe we can come together around solutions grounded in compassion. That is the example I want to set.

We need beds — not more boulders. We need solutions, not delays or lawsuits. This project is about doing what's right, not what's easy. I'm not going to model avoidance or cruelty. I'm going to model responsibility and humanity.

San Rafael doesn't walk away from hard problems. We step up. We put our funding and decisions behind our values. We take care of the people who live here — housed or unhoused.

After years of work, this is the site that is physically feasible, financially viable, and designed to transition people indoors and eventually into permanent housing. It is the ideal location — not because it's politically convenient, but because it's the one that meets the requirements for safety and success.

We want the Merrydale Interim Shelter Cabins to work for everyone, and we are committed to working with you. From lessons learned from many similar programs, and our own experience rooted in the data, will guide our commitment to you:

- 24/7 on-site staff
- Security presence
- Case managers and behavioral health support
- Strict guest and behavior rules
- Good sanitation and property management
- Direct line of communication with neighbors

We have people's lives on the line, we have to act now, and we are committed to its success.

Thank you.
