

Temporary Services Shelter (TSS) and Homelessness in Bellflower

Question and Answer

Q. Why is the City building a TSS to serve homeless persons in Bellflower?

A. Two reasons. First, the City's residents made it clear they want the City Council to address the growing homelessness crisis in Bellflower. A Citywide survey conducted in October 2018 showed that 74% of our residents said it was the most serious problem in Bellflower. In short, it's a clear mandate from the community to fix this crisis.

Second, the City settled a homelessness-related federal lawsuit filed against the city by a homeless advocate group and, in the settlement, (*The Catholic Worker of Orange County v. City of Bellflower*) Federal District Court Judge David O. Carter ordered the City to build a TSS for 50 persons.

Q. Why the hurry? Why can't we study this problem further?

A. Judge Carter ordered the City to complete a plan for the creation of a TSS by December 31, 2019. In order to meet the Court Order, the City must move forward immediately.

Q. Why can't the City just handle the problem without building a shelter?

A. A decision made by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, *Martin v. City of Boise*, generally prevents cities, including Bellflower, from enforcing so called "anti-nuisance" regulations against homeless person(s) for camping, loitering or sleeping outdoors, unless the city provides temporary emergency shelter for the homeless population. Over the past few years, the City of Bellflower has tried many methods with multiple organizations to solve this problem in our community. We have contracted with two non-profit entities, CityNet and Kingdom Causes, to identify and assist the homeless in finding shelter that can assist the homeless with their challenges and struggles. Though these efforts have been very effective in determining who is from Bellflower and who is not, and determining the root causes of why people are homeless, it is still not legal to enforce our anti-camping, loitering or prohibitions on sleeping outside and is the main reason why our community continues to observe our homelessness crisis in our sidewalks, our parks, our streets, around businesses and near our homes.

Q. Will the TSS attract the homeless from other cities to come to Bellflower?

A. No. The only homeless people that will be allowed to be housed and supported in the TSS are those who can show proof they are from Bellflower, or have a prior connection to Bellflower. Everyone else who is homeless and not from Bellflower will not be provided help or access to the TSS.

Q. Will this facility actually only be for homeless people with roots from Bellflower?

- A. Yes. The only homeless people that will be allowed to be housed and supported in the TSS are those who can show proof they are from Bellflower, or have a prior connection to Bellflower. Everyone else who is homeless and not from Bellflower will not be provided help or access to our TSS.

Q. Will the TSS house criminals and persons with mental illness?

- A. No. The TSS will be a “low barrier” shelter, and only those referred to the TSS by LA County Sheriff, CityNet, or other City-approved service providers, may bring persons to the TSS. Persons with warrants or who have knowingly committed crimes will be arrested. Upon arrival at the TSS, the on-site administrator will also conduct background checks through the local courts for felony and warrant systems and check the sex offender registry in order to keep the location safe.

With regard to persons with mental illness, it is important to remember that persons who show that they may cause harm to themselves or others will NOT be admitted. However, persons who may show signs of mental illness, but who are able to follow the law and behave within the guidelines set by the City and service provider for the TSS, may be admitted.

Q. Would the construction and operation of a TSS reduce our property values in the surrounding neighborhood?

- A. To date, that has not shown to be true. Our TSS will be a safe, clean, supervised and guarded facility by experienced homeless facility operators. Orange County cities that have opened TSS facilities over the past couple of years have found that their TSS facilities have actually enhanced their neighborhoods due to improved TSS building conditions and added area security.

Q. Why does the City want to build a TSS at 8833 Cedar Street?

- A. The City undertook an extensive property search process to identify a location for our TSS, which resulted in six (6) different locations that became candidates to be our TSS site. Once each property was evaluated for size, zoning, costs and accessibility, the Cedar Street location was selected. This is all described in detail in a presentation conducted recently during a City Council meeting that can be accessed at the following link:

www.bellflower.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?BlobID=33559.

Everyone can also visit the City's website and follow the links under "Latest News."

Q. Why can't the City build a TSS at the old Stater Brothers site (17220 Lakewood Boulevard)?

- A. There are three reasons why the old Stater Brother site is not a good candidate for establishing a TSS. First, it is privately owned and the property-owner is in negotiations with a retailer. Second, that property is too big to be a TSS and the property-owner would not allow a subdivision of the site. Finally, it is too expensive as the cost of leasing the site was quoted at \$1.85 per sq. ft. at 20,000 sf = \$37,000 per month – which is more than triple the cost of leasing the Cedar Street site.

Q. Why can't the City build the TSS at the former K-Mart site at (10460 Rosecrans Avenue)?

- A. There are three reasons why the old K-Mart site is not a good candidate for establishing a TSS. First, it is privately owned and the property-owner would not allow a subdivision of the site of less than 20,000 sq. ft. Second, the cost of leasing that site was quoted at \$2.20 per sq. ft. That rate would make the monthly rent \$44,000 – which is nearly quadruple the cost of leasing the Cedar Street site. And, last, the owner of the site is seeking a commercial tenant only.

Q. Will homeless persons be entering and leaving the TSS when they feel like doing so?

- A. No, there will be no walk-in or walk-out privileges at the TSS, they will be transported in and out via vehicle. Homeless persons may be granted access to the TSS only upon referral by LA County Sheriff's Department, CityNet, or other service approved by the City. The referrals will be limited to homeless persons who can demonstrate a legitimate connection to the City of Bellflower (for example, previously had a home here or went to school here). We have spent the past year learning who Bellflower's homeless people are – so, we are very clear on who may and may not enter the TSS.

Q. Can you ensure that the TSS and surrounding neighborhoods be safer?

- A. Yes. In fact, the homeless persons who currently live and exist in the Cedar Street neighborhood will be referred to the TSS and will no longer be able to camp or loiter in the neighborhood, as they currently are doing. If they refuse to accept entrance into the TSS, they will be given the option of going to another location to live or going to jail. They will not have the option of remaining homeless and camping or loitering in Bellflower. Because of that, the neighborhood will be safer.

Additionally, the contractor who will be operating the TSS facility, Mercy House, will provide 24-hour security, supervision, metal detectors and transportation for those staying in the TSS. Mercy House will also provide security sweeps on the neighborhood blocks adjacent to the TSS, just like it has in other cities it operates in with great success. Upon establishment of the TSS facility, the neighborhood will definitely be safer and better supervised than it is now.

Q. Why has the City done such a poor job of notifying local residents of its plans?

- A. We did a very poor job, initially, and we apologize sincerely for that error! However, please know that City Council and staff are committed to keeping your neighborhood fully informed of future plans regarding the TSS and its operations.

Q. How can I help the homeless who will be provided help in Bellflower's TSS facility?

- A. A lot of people in our community have expressed an interest in helping our homeless once the TSS opens. Many have asked if they will be able to feed them, donate clothes, cut their hair for interviews, and other examples. It's an example of how our community is stepping up to help, and we are very excited to hear that. We will soon share how those who want to help the homeless, will be able to help them.

We hope this Q & A is helpful. If you have any follow up questions, please contact the City Manager's Office at (562) 804-1424, ext. 2278.