

### **On Back Ground**

I've been on the Venice Neighborhood Council's ad hoc Committee on Homelessness for almost three years now. I was invited to join the Committee because my frequent contributions in the Free Venice BeachHead about life unhoused, presented me as one with lived experience, who could add much needed on-the-ground context to the Committee's deliberations. I didn't join this committee because I have nothing to do with my time. Like all the other busy people who make up this committee, I am here because there is a value to adding many voices and perspectives to the conversation. We all want to implicate ourselves in generating the best solutions to the national crisis of homelessness that have seen a pronounced acceleration, settling here in this place we all love and call home.

### **We Are Here**

There are so many contributing factors responsible for this crisis in housing, which is quickly adding to the number of newly unhoused Venetians. Not being able to affect these myriad factors, this leaves our committee perpetually reacting to the effects of this crisis only on the back end, after a neighbor is left to sleep on the sidewalks. Of course, none of us were in any position of political significance when the policies that have generated these outcomes were being drafted. But we are here now, earnestly asking what are the best policy positions that can be implemented on the short, intermediate and long-term basis, to address the quality-of-life problems that arise when the community is burdened with such a high population of unhoused neighbors. From here we can arrive at a common vision of what success looks like, and then work backwards in implementation to make sure all the details are executed in the spirit of our common vision.

### **Short Term Goals**

Short Term here is defined as goals which can be planned, approved, and fully implemented in the next 12 months.

- More robust community input and oversight on the budget and appropriation process. Let's have the recipients of vast community resources tell us what they intend to do, and then develop true metrics to assure that the funds are being used efficiently.
- Fences in public spaces for the sole purpose of keeping people out, must come down. The parks belong to everyone, it never made sense when they were taken over by the unhoused at the exclusion of everyone else. This imbalance is not solved by fencing to keep the unhoused AND everyone else away from the public spaces.
- If tents and sidewalk dwelling is being used as a shelter solution, these cannot be left to stay up all day -- there must be a designated area (very much like how Third Ave btwn Rose and Sunset was), where if there is an impediment that prevents clearing sidewalks every day, clean and neat temporary dwellings that do not impede the public right of way can be erected on a limited basis.
- Local hiring must become more than just a PR buzzword. There must be intentional efforts among the service providers to attract, hire and retain unconventional candidates. Directing some of this intentional effort towards the unhoused population that these providers serve offers too many immediate benefits for local hiring to not be something that this Committee strongly endorses.

### **Intermediate Term Goals**

Intermediate here is defined as policy goals that can be planned, approved, and fully executed in the next three years.

- Let's really understand the true scale of vehicle dwelling here in Venice. Let's map out zones suitable for vehicle dwelling instead of leaving the current free-for-all. Let's also designate some unused city parking lots for safe overnight parking, providing some minimal services like charge stations, wi-fi, and referral to service providers for case management.
- Establish a permanent bridge housing facility to mirror the objectives of the current facility on Sunset. Providing short-term beds while case management is connecting clients to permanent housing solutions.
- Under the powers of Eminent Domain, buy commercial properties in Venice that are currently sitting unused and fast-track their conversion into low-income housing. Target properties where conversion can support the lowest per-unit cost, while avoiding the ones which may require more extensive rebuilding.

### **Long Term Goals**

Long term here is defined as policy goals that require more than five years to plan, approve and fully execute.

- Revisit the zoning restrictions that caused the number of property units to decrease, at the same time that population was rapidly growing. Updated zoning classification must allow for buildings to build higher, and for streamlined permitting of additional units on existing structures.
- Expand the pool of developers and housing authority agencies who are the recipients of housing development subsidies.
- Enable the formation of housing co-ops who can pool together and buy their rental units to shore up the shaky rental market.

### **A Modest Proposal**

After years in Venice, watching the cycle of transitional age youth come and go, and seeing the devastation that idleness can create in that age group, it has become necessary to develop a Makers' Lab in the community. Open to all, but geared in operation towards unhoused youth in their twenties, this lab seeks to offer tools for creating from as many lanes of creative expression as is practical under one roof. We seek the synergy of cross-discipline collaboration. This lab will feature a digital cafe for coders and app makers, musical recording and podcasting studio, stations for AV editing complete with software, access to 3D printing, innovation laboratory for hands-on creators. All this so we can interrupt the capture of drugs and alcohol that often result when no lanes of creative pursuit are readily available in the community.

The success of this Makers' Lab must be its proximity to the population it serves -- both geographically, and the proximity of the people operating this lab. We must draw talent from the pool of the population being served, as this talent will be most equipped to understand the needs of the Lab's users. Also, we are seeking members of the community with creative potential to direct toward the Makers' Lab, but there is no sticker on the forehead that reads "creative potential". It will be the staff who are among this population -- who can see past the short-term dysfunctionality -- to gauge readiness, then incentivize the minimal drug-free condition we seek among our makers.

This is an investment in community. From our best-case outcomes, there will be makers who develop creative products available to the commercial consumer. These proceeds going directly to the maker can be a clear indicator that there is value in that talent, and can encourage the maker to continue growing in that creative expression. Aside from these best cases, there can be makers who get the time and space to earnestly try a creative pursuit, then find out it doesn't align with their capacity. This is valuable insight that can help a young person to more clearly define and find their area of contribution to the community. This is the whole of our mission: to serve the community by giving our children something other than drugs and alcohol to fill their time.