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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fremont's Multi-Pronged Approach to Homelessness
City Explores Housing Navigation Center

Fremont, Calif. –May 2, 2019–Homelessness is a growing societal issue for Fremont and a regional concern for the Bay Area and beyond. Since a City Council Study Session held on April 17, 2018, where staff presented extensive background defining the scope and urgency of the homeless issue in Fremont and some proposed strategies for Council consideration, the City has accomplished the following:

- Expanded the Warming Center model to a seasonal Winter Shelter, operating daily from November 21, 2018 until March 21, 2019 and offering a warm place to sleep while providing showers and meals.
- Partnered with Bay Area Community Services (BACS) to open a Drop-in Day/Wellness Center for the Homeless, which provides prevention and early intervention, as well as holistic wraparound services for people who are housing insecure and dealing with chronic physical/behavioral health diagnoses that are untreated.
- Increased staffing to address aspects of homelessness by adding four new positions: homeless services manager (recruitment underway), crisis intervention specialist, code enforcement officer, and park ranger.
- Allocated resources for bi-weekly cleanups throughout Fremont on community concerns reported around encampments.
- Secured 20+ units at the Islander Motel on Mowry Avenue to temporarily house homeless individuals.
- Utilized an Alameda County grant to fund a Mobile Hygiene Unit in partnership with the City of Newark.
- Formed a Mobile Evaluation Team, which includes police officers and mental health clinicians, to serve those suffering from mental health crisis including the homeless.
- Exploring a safe parking program for individuals and families who have been displaced and are temporarily homeless, living in their vehicles, and need a safe place to park and sleep overnight.
- Adopted and then modified an Emergency Shelter Ordinance to declare a shelter crisis under California Government Code Section 8698 et seq. This allows for state funding to assist local jurisdictions with the homeless crisis, and for more short-term and temporary places for homeless residents to safely sleep such as in a Housing Navigation Center.

Last year, the City began to explore building a temporary Housing Navigation Center for transitional homeless adults at multiples sites in Fremont. In February, conversations with Niles Discovery Church began. A Housing Navigation Center is a facility that transitions those experiencing homelessness into permanent housing, stabilization, and self-sufficiency through coordinated services. These centers—which are different from traditional homeless shelters—provide a clean, safe, calm and flexible environment which allows homeless persons to rebuild their lives and intensely focus on the job of finding stable permanent housing. Navigation Centers are not walk-in centers and participants are accepted into the center, after outreach and intake, generally staying six months or less, before finding a permanent placement. Comprehensive wraparound services including health and wellness resources, employment/benefit assistance, substance abuse services and intensive case management and Housing Navigation are provided by an experienced non-profit service provider with significant credentials in working with the homeless. Housing Navigators work with participants, one-on-one to connect them to stable income, and permanent housing through advocacy, landlord liaisons and extensive housing search. Navigation Centers are supervised and staffed 24/7 and also provide hygiene services (toilets, showers, and laundry), one meal a day, and storage for participant belongings. To operate any future Navigation Center, the City would need to select a partner. That process started in April when the City issued a Request for Information. Interviews with respondents are in progress.

“Fremont is actively engaged in finding solutions to help some of our city’s most vulnerable homeless residents find safe housing options,” said City Manager Mark Danaj. “While the City is exploring multiple sites to build a future Navigation Center, I want to assure the community that no formal agreements have been approved at any particular site. This is not a done deal. A substantial amount of work would need to take place before such a project would be ready for City Council consideration.”

City staff will go before the current City Council at a future Council meeting in early June to update the Council on the City’s overall homelessness work plan, review progress to date, and seek any further Council direction specific to the creation of a Navigation Center in Fremont including a review of potential sites. All community members are welcome to participate in the conversation.

In Alameda County, the Berkeley STAIR Center is an innovative and extremely successful example of a Housing Navigation Center. It has been in operation for more than a year and 78 of the 94 (82%) individuals exiting the STAIR Center are reported to have moved into permanent housing. The average stay has been four months. Hayward is also in the process of opening a center with the same provider and operating model. The concept is it is temporary in nature and intended to quickly prepare individuals to move in to more permanent housing.

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