

LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

[Administrative Code - Location of Navigation Centers for the Homeless]

Ordinance amending the Administrative Code to require the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to open a Navigation Center within six months in each of two Supervisorial districts where no Navigation Center currently exists, and to open at least one Navigation Center within 30 months in each Supervisorial district where no Navigation Center currently exists; and affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act.

Existing Law

Local law requires the City and County of San Francisco (the "City") to open and operate no fewer than eight Navigation Centers, which are temporary, low-barrier-to-entry shelters that, through case management and social service programs, aid in moving homeless people off the streets and into permanent housing or transitional or stable supportive housing that eventually leads to permanent housing.

Navigation Centers must comply with a variety of operational requirements. Among other things, they must: serve no more than 100 clients at a time, offer showers, bathrooms, and places to store client's belongings, allow clients to keep their pets with them, provide access to health services, including mental health services, drug and alcohol treatment, and harm reduction interventions, and offer intensive case management to help connect people to housing.

Local law requires the City to locate Navigation Centers in areas accessible to homeless people, and when selecting a site for a Navigation Center, to give first priority to unused or vacant sites owned or controlled by the City, second priority to sites owned or controlled by the City that are being used for other purposes but could feasibly be converted to Navigation Centers, and third priority to private property or property owned by other, non-City public agencies, that could be leased or acquired by the City. Local law does not otherwise impose any limits or requirements with respect to the location of Navigation Centers.

Amendments to Current Law

The proposed ordinance would require the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing ("HSH") to open a Navigation Center within six months in each of two Supervisorial districts where no Navigation Center currently exists, and to open at least one Navigation Center within 30 months in each Supervisorial district where no Navigation Center currently exists.

After selecting a site where a Navigation Center may be located, but before approving the opening of a Navigation Center on that site, the Director of HSH, in consultation with the member of the Board of Supervisors who represents the district in which the identified site is located, would be required to conduct a thorough community outreach process with neighboring residents and businesses, neighborhood associations, and merchant associations on the site selection. The community outreach process must consist of no fewer than three community meetings.

The ordinance would allow the City to operate at least one Navigation Center to meet the needs of each of the following populations: persons with alcohol dependency; homeless persons between the ages of 18 and 29 (transitional-aged youth) who have experienced street homelessness; transgender and gender non-conforming individuals who may be experiencing homelessness; and individuals who live in cars and recreational vehicles.

The ordinance would also require HSH to adopt Fair Share Siting Criteria to inform the selection of sites for Navigation Centers that consider the fair geographic distribution of Navigation Centers among communities as well as communities' needs for services, the efficacy of service delivery, and the social and economic impact of Navigation Centers on their surrounding areas.

Background Information

San Francisco faces a significant challenge in its efforts to assist people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The 2017 San Francisco Point-in-Time Count estimated 7,500 individuals experiencing homelessness, with approximately 4,400 of those individuals living unsheltered, on any given night. The length of the City's shelter waitlist has grown steadily since 2014, and consistently there have been more than 1,000 people waiting to access a 90-day bed.

The Navigation Center model was first piloted in March 2015 to provide a low-barrier, service-rich alternative to traditional homeless shelters, with the goal of transitioning people off the streets and into longer-term solutions. Since then, HSH has opened eight Navigation Centers, six of which are still in operation as of April 2019. According to HSH, 46% of clients who access a Navigation Center "exit" homelessness, which is defined as obtaining permanent housing, securing temporary housing, or being reunified with family or friends through the Homeward Bound program. Between March 2015 and February 2019, 3,606 different individuals were served by a Navigation Center.

Navigation Centers have been opened in only three out of the eleven Supervisorial Districts, even though 1) the Board of Supervisors has declared there to be a "shelter crisis" in the City and County of San Francisco, 2) the Navigation Center model has proven to be successful, and 3) there is a significant number of people experiencing homelessness in every Supervisorial District.

Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., which both have significant levels of people experiencing homelessness, have mandated that at least one shelter be opened in every Council District and Ward, respectively. Similarly, New York City has adopted “Fair Share Criteria” that require the city to consider fair and equitable geographic distribution when siting homeless shelters and services. San Francisco currently has no such policy requiring geographic equity when siting shelters or Navigation Centers.

Homelessness is a public health issue that impacts the entire City of San Francisco, not just select parts of the City. The current distribution of shelters and Navigation Centers is densely concentrated and does not provide geographic equity, preventing San Francisco from providing resources on a city-wide scale.

n:\legana\as2019\1900514\01353137.docx