

# Understanding a Homeless Navigation Center for Fremont

## Frequently Asked Questions

*This document was developed by the City of Fremont.*

### Navigation Center Overview

- **What is a Navigation Center and how will it operate?**

A Navigation Center provides a clean, safe, calm and flexible environment that allows homeless persons to rebuild their lives and intensely focus on finding stable permanent housing.

- **What is the difference between a shelter and a Navigation Center?**

Where traditional shelters are intended for people to have a safe place to stay off the street and out of the elements, the Navigation Center is an innovative approach in helping clients transition off the streets and into housing using a rigorous case-management and housing navigation approach. It also lessens the barrier to admittance, allowing clients to bring their partners, pets, and most of their possessions in with them.

- **What is the primary focus of a Navigation Center?**

To transition vulnerable, unhoused residents into more stable housing with the ultimate goal of ending their homelessness once and for all.

### Navigation Center Participants

- **How will participants in a Navigation Center be vetted?**

Participants are vetted using a standardized assessment process whereby the provider reviews different domains and community priorities including length of time homelessness, vulnerabilities such as health-related needs, etc., as well as City and community prioritized “hot spots” or individuals that score as the ‘most vulnerable’ on the Coordinated Entry priority list. Part of the assessment will review whether the client has the capacity to live in dorm-style living.

- **How will clients be selected to participate in the Navigation Center?**

Fifty percent will be selected from proximity of Navigation Center (if in Niles then half Niles homeless, if in Irvington then half from that area) and 50% from the Tri-Cities By-Name List (see question below).

- **What is the By Name List?**

Alameda County has moved to a Coordinated Entry System, where each homeless person completes a coordinated entry assessment about their personal situation and need for assistance. Certain factors (questions) are weighted more heavily, based on client need. For example, if an individual is disabled or has chronic health conditions, or is elderly or has

young children etc., they may receive a higher score indicating that they are more vulnerable on the street than someone else.

Individuals who are most vulnerable have their names rise to the top of the By Name List of those who need permanent supportive housing. Each geographic area of the county receives the names of those in their specific area (Fremont, Newark and Union City) who are most in need of housing. The list is dynamic which means that as new assessments are done, the individual's position on the list may change

- **Will people who use drugs or alcohol be admitted?**

A Navigation Center, and many service providers, employ a harm reduction model. Substance users will not be screened out, but they will be discouraged from using on site. Services to support recovery will be offered and encouraged.

- **Will people who are dealing with mental health issues be admitted?**

Homeless persons with mental illness will be accepted into the Navigation Center. Support services will be provided to help participants seek appropriate medical care and interventions. With appropriate medication (when needed) and a wide range of services tailored to meet their needs, most people who live with mental illnesses can significantly reduce the impact of their illness and find a satisfying measure of achievement and independence.

- **What percentage of the general population suffers from mental illness, and can people with mental illness lead successful and productive lives?**

[One in 5](#) American adults experiences some form of mental illness in any given year. Across the population, [1 in every 25](#) adults is living with a serious mental health condition such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or long-term recurring major depression.

Despite the chronic and long-term nature of some mental disorders, with the proper treatment, people suffering from mental disorders can live productive lives and be a vital part of their communities. Between 70-90% of individuals have significant reduction of symptoms and improved quality of life with a combination of pharmacological and psychosocial treatments and supports.

Additionally, there is substantial evidence that once an individual with mental illness is living in permanent housing, many of their symptoms improve or reduce.

- **What will happen if someone is violent at the Navigation Center or violates other rules?**

Violence is not permitted at the Navigation Center, and a participant can be removed from the Center should violence occur. The operator will work closely with Fremont Police Department should support from law enforcement be needed.

- **Who will operate Fremont’s Navigation Center?**

A Request for Information was solicited by the City and sent to five potential service operators. Two highly qualified agencies submitted proposals. After a response to written questions and interviews, with six raters from the City Manager’s Office, the Police Department, Human Services Department, Community Services Department and two community members. Bay Area Community Services (BACS) has been selected to be the potential operator of the housing Navigation Center, if the City Council decides to move forward with this project at a location, which has yet to be determined by the City.

BACS is the operator of the Berkeley Stair Center, Oakland’s two Navigation Centers, and was also selected to be the operator for a Navigation Center in Hayward. BACS anticipates being able to quickly replicate existing services and ramp up operations. BACS has extensive experience providing navigation services for persons experiencing homelessness. BACS has operated in Fremont since 1974. BACS South County Wellness Center, which is on Grimmer Boulevard, is a drop-in site for homeless adults and adults living with behavioral health challenges and housing insecurity. The site offers showers, meals, and will soon offer laundry services, as well as housing navigation assistance, employment assistance and a variety of counseling and support group programs.

- **What are the rules of conduct for a Navigation Center?**

Rules may vary based on the service operator, but generally any act of violent behavior, or use or sale of illegal substances may subject a person to expulsion from the site.

- **Navigation Centers have low-barrier thresholds for entry. What does that mean?**

Low-barrier entry is a way to accept people who do not easily come indoors. Our most vulnerable community members may be isolated and not easily trust others. They may have previously sought services without successful outcomes. They may also have mental health or substance use challenges or have suffered from trauma in their lives or on the street. These characteristics are not determinants of being accepted into a low-barrier program. Participants, however, need to participate and adhere to community rules of conduct/expectations.

- **What about garbage; will the Navigation Center be unsightly and a magnet for shopping carts and garbage?**

The Navigation Center will provide enough secured storage for each participant and limit what participants bring into the Center. It is often a very personal process for individuals to divide out what is no longer valuable to them. Additionally, shopping carts are often used because they are mobile and unhoused people are often moved and forced out of areas, a place to stay and store items in the Center will alleviate the need for a cart.

The Operator of the Center will be responsible for maintaining the area around the Center to ensure that sidewalks and streets are clean and walkable.

- **If participants are allowed to bring their pets to the Navigation Center, how will they be cared for?**

Participants are responsible for the care and supervision of their pets, just as they were when they were living outdoors. Pets must be under the control of their owner at all times.

- **What is the plan to feed participants at the Navigation Center?**

Generally, the operator of a Navigation Center provides one meal per day for participants, and staff work with participants intentionally on sourcing food so that they learn the skills towards long-term self-sufficiency. A refrigerator and microwaves are offered for food storage and heating of food

- **If the Navigation center is located at Niles Discovery Church, homeless persons will be subject to hearing the train whistle during hours of both day and night.**

Many homeless persons who currently reside outside, do so near both the train tracks and BART line, largely because these sites are not easily visible to the public. While the train whistle has been a concern of Niles residents for some time, it is likely not a major concern of homeless persons, who might willingly exchange listening to a whistle, for a place to have a roof, a bed, and a place to take a hot shower.

For Niles residents, however, the City has been working on a plan to improve safety at the train crossing and is working to have a quiet zone operational by 2020. While the City may be ready to do its portion of the work, implementation is dependent on cooperation from UPRR and CalTrans to approve agreements and build portions of the project that involve their infrastructure. UPRR has had funding constraints and staff cuts, so it is uncertain whether UPRR will be able to meet the proposed timeline.

- **Navigation Centers are unsightly, cheap buildings surrounded by minimal ugly fencing in accordance with state specifications.**

The Navigation Center proposes to use double wide portable buildings, commonly found on school sites in our city and used every day by hundreds of Fremont students. With appropriate landscaping these buildings, while portable and temporary in nature, can be made attractive with trellising and landscaping. Attractive fencing and landscaping can offer privacy for participants and screening of the Center from local residents. The State does not regulate the design or specifications for Navigation Centers

## Navigation Center Location

- **Does a Navigation Center need to be near social and health services?**

Many homeless persons get around town by using bicycles and public transportation and very few have automobiles. A Navigation Center needs to be located near good transportation lines (bus and BART) that will get people to areas that have social services and medical services. It is important for Navigation Center participants to independently and successfully travel to services. The Navigation Center is preparing and supporting clients back into a housed lifestyle, which includes learning to independently accessing needed services.

- **Does a Navigation Center need to be near grocery stores, food establishments and other amenities?**

A Navigation Center supports the transition for individuals from living on the street to re-enter housing and residential communities. Close proximity to amenities like grocery stores, banks, food outlets, supports this transition and decreases obstacles in maintaining daily needs. The Center provides one meal per day and intentionally helps participants source ongoing basic needs as part of the plan.

- **Does a Navigation Center need to be close to public transportation?**

It is beneficial for a Navigation Center to be near bus stops or a BART station as many unhoused residents are on foot or use bicycles.

- **Is locating a Navigation Center in an industrial area the best location to assist the homeless getting rehoused and back into mainstream society?**

Industrial areas are the least protested location for Navigation Centers; however, such a site may be difficult for Navigation Center participants, if it is remote from transportation services. Most homeless persons do not have cars. Navigation Center participants can greatly benefit from being in or near a neighborhood environment, which is where they will live once they are permanently housed.

- **Why not choose a larger location to serve more people?**

The Navigation Center, as proposed, is designed to serve up to 45 adult persons, for a short term of 6 months or less. This model has an intense focus on housing placement, a high staff to participant ratio to build trust and focus on individual housing readiness. It is more costly to operate, but the success rates have been higher than for traditional shelters that often serve a larger number of participants

- **What other sites are being considered for a housing Navigation Center and what criteria is the City using to select potential sites?**

City staff is currently looking at all City-owned properties, of 1/3 acre or more, excluding developed parkland. Multiple sites are currently being evaluated. Evaluation criteria or guidelines for locating a Navigation Center will be presented to the Fremont City Council at a study session on June 18, 2019 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall, 3300 Capitol Avenue.

- **Are other sites being considered by the City in addition to Niles Discovery Church?**

Yes. At the July 18, 2018 Fremont City Council Meeting staff identified two potential sites, which are both, located in Irvington and include:

- Property adjacent to the future Irvington BART Station between Washington Blvd. and Main St.
- Property at the City's Maintenance Center on Osgood Road which would use an existing parking lot

Currently City staff is reviewing all City-owned properties with the exclusion of developed parkland.

## Public and Community Safety

- **What about the safety of children who are walking by a Navigation Center?**

With increasing numbers of homeless persons in our communities, it is not uncommon for all of us, even children, to see or walk by homeless persons on the street almost every day. Encounters with homeless persons are generally uneventful, like encounters with any other person in the community. Many homeless persons, themselves have had children, though they may no longer be living in a family structure.

In a Navigation Center, participants are supervised 24/7 by trained staff. Participants are focused on their own tasks of daily living. Some participants work, others will be tending to personal matters and some will be off site exploring housing options with their Housing Navigators.

Participants in a Navigation Center create their own community and in many ways become self-regulating. They learn to support each other and re-enforce with each other, the importance of following the rules.

- **Will the Navigation Center attract other homeless people to the area?**

Participants may come and go as they please but cannot have overnight guests. Guests are limited to the community room and outside sitting areas of the site. Additionally, there are no external services offered at the Center, so there is not a reason for others who cannot receive services to gather in proximity to the Center. If people do come, staff will redirect them to the Drop-in/Wellness Center for the Homeless where they may obtain food and services.

Experience with existing Navigation Centers demonstrates that Centers are not a magnet to additional homeless people coming to the area.

- **Will we see an uptick of crime with the creation of a Navigation Center?**

There is no correlation between the opening of a shelter or Navigation Center and an increase in crime. Crimes perpetrated by the homeless are often against other homeless individuals or lifestyle crimes, i.e. sleeping/camping outside or stealing amenities. A safe place to stay would alleviate the impetus for these crimes

## Navigation Center Success Rate

- **What is the success rate of the Stair Center in Berkeley?**

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 less 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 into more permanent housing.

The City of Oakland Navigation Center (Housing Fast Support Network) had an 88% permanent housing success rate last year.

- **According to the SF System Wide Exit Performance Report (March 2015 - February 2019), there were 46% of Total Successful Exits (with only 14% of their clients exiting to “Permanent Housing.”) It has been presented to us that the Berkeley Navigation Center “reported” an 84% success rate. How could such a large discrepancy exist?**

The San Francisco Navigation (NAV) Centers switched their program model in 2016/2017 to one where stays are limited to 30 days, unless you had already been identified as priority 1 (i.e., Public Supportive Housing eligible). In San Francisco, this means you have to have been homeless for 13 years or longer, plus have some medical needs, etc. Very few people in the encampments met this criterion, so very few stayed for as long as it took to get housing. Therefore, the SF Navigation Center became more like a shelter than a Navigation Center. Before this switch, the San Francisco Navigation Center was consistently reporting ~75% exits to permanent housing. (Berkeley’s STAIR exit rate is 82%, not 84%—so right on track with the original Navigation model).

“Regular” shelters in the Berkeley have about a one-third exit rate to permanent housing. By this metric, the new SF Navigation Center model still outperforms Berkeley’s current shelters.

*-Response from Peter Radu, Homeless Manager for City of Berkeley. Prior to working for the City of Berkeley, Peter worked in San Francisco’s Housing Navigation Program.*

- **Where do participants go if they are not successful in completing the program or if they are not successful in finding permanent housing?**  
Unfortunately, a 100% success rate is not realistic. People may leave the program unhoused and return to where they were residing previously in the Tri-Cities area. Some participants may move into residential treatment, rehabilitation programs or other “shelter” options.

## Facts about Homelessness

- **How many homeless are there in Fremont?**

Here are links to the 2017 Homeless Count Census and Survey Report:

- The Fremont Homeless Census and Survey Report:  
<https://fremont.gov/DocumentCenter/View/38652/Fremont-Homeless-Survey-2017>
- The Alameda County Homeless Census and Survey Report:  
<https://fremont.gov/DocumentCenter/View/38653/Alameda-Homeless-Survey-2017>

A new Point in Time Count was conducted in January 2019. Alameda County recently released aggregated data for the county showing a 43% increase in homelessness. Data specific to Fremont should be released in late July or August.



- **What are the root causes of homelessness?**

Homelessness begins where relationships end. There is a common misconception that alcohol and drug abuse are the root causes of homelessness, however that is rarely the case. In most situations, multiple factors are at play.

- Simple economic issues are among the most critical factors contributing to homelessness. These include the lack of affordable housing, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and low wages. Many people are living so close to the edge of economic disaster that one financial setback, such as job loss, car troubles, illness, divorce, loss of a spouse with income, abandonment, or any unexpected expense can lead to the loss of their housing.
- Non-economic factors can also play a role in homelessness. These include psychological or physical disabilities, learning disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, medical conditions, drug and alcohol dependence, history of childhood abuse, sexual abuse, or some combination of these.
- Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness among women, and 89% of homeless woman have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives.

\*Source:2017 HUD Annual Homeless Assessment Report Data

- **Where is the affordable housing that will help be a solution to the homeless problem?**

Fremont currently has 1000 units of affordable housing in the pipeline, at varying levels of affordability for those who make between 80%-20% of median income. Non-profit developers, who are receiving funding from Alameda County's measure A1 bond for affordable housing, must reserve 20% of the units being developed for those with incomes at 20% of median income.

However, homeless persons with disabilities or who are elderly frequently live on disability or social security based incomes, which are more often at 11% of median income. Even with the current pipeline units and A1 bond there will not be enough affordable housing for the current population of homelessness or housing that will accept those with least access to resources, without available subsidies. Groups in Alameda County are looking at potential additional tax measures that would help provide these necessary subsidies.

In addition to affordable housing, there is a system of care that works to end homelessness and helps participants access housing through flexible financial assistance and other mechanisms.