

EDC wants help in dealing with homelessness

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County is trying to get a handle on homelessness by creating a continuum of care for those in need.

Daniel Del Monte, deputy director of the Community Services Division of the county's Health and Human Services Agency, was at last week's South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting painting a bleak picture about housing and homelessness.

He spoke about the desire to create a homeless coordinator position. While a dollar amount was not talked about at the March 21 meeting, it will be on a future council agenda.

Barton and Marshall hospitals, the cities of South Lake Tahoe and Placerville, and El Dorado County are each being asked to contribute \$20,000 a year for the homeless coordinator position. The hospitals have said yes. The county wants a two-year commitment from every entity.

Hospitals suffer financially when homeless people choose to use the emergency room when a doctor would suffice, or if when what they really need is mental health services, or even a warm place to stay.

"The primary purpose of the homeless coordinator is to provide proper administrative support, strategic planning, HMIS administration and capacity building for our partners. Counties who invest in their continuum of care receive significantly more money than El Dorado County has received," El Dorado County CAO Don Ashton told *Lake Tahoe News*. "If successful, funding the homeless coordinator will bring in more federal money to manage the homeless population. By establishing a multi-agency MOU and partnership with the

county, city of Placerville, Marshall Hospital, Barton and the city of South Lake Tahoe, we could share the cost and share in the benefit. We haven't discussed specific deal points, but conceptually any additional funding the county realizes as a result of the homeless coordinator would be shared based on a formula between the West Slope and East Slope."

Del Monte pointed out how California has about 40 million residents, with housing for 25 million.

"From 2007 to 2015 was the lowest eight-year economic development period in the last 60 years. It comes at a time when the state population is at its highest," Del Monte said.

On one slide in the PowerPoint presentation De Monte posed the question: What can be done to increase person centered housing options?

The answers:

- Regions strive to create system responses to housing crises.
- Responses that can help to prevent individual from becoming homeless.
- Responses that maximize the ability to get homeless individuals rehoused with needed supports.
- One that maximizes self-sufficiency for each individual based upon their unique needs.
- One that produces the best results for the individual and the community.

However, how to accomplish those goals was never revealed. Nor were they explained further to get through the government-speak. And the council members, other than Mayor Wendy David, were not very engaged in the presentation.

The thrust behind the continuum of care is to find housing quickly and then provide the support network so the person doesn't return to the street.

Del Monte said in El Dorado County it costs \$47 a day for supportive housing, up to \$155 for a detox facility, \$115 for jail, \$850 for a bed in a psychiatric facility, and \$4,000 a day at Barton Memorial Hospital for a 24-hour psych stay.

A continuum care approach is supposed to lower the costs of helping someone – and provide them with actual help.

Del Monte said the homeless coordinator would be used to leverage state and federal money. He said that person would manage the system.

He admitted, "Ultimately we will need more housing and more services."