

"Safe Stay"

A Homeless Shelter Community for Our Unhoused Neighbors

Revised 9/1/2022

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How many homeless people are there in Tuolumne County?

The most recent Point in Time count from January of 2022 reports the number of unsheltered people in Tuolumne County to be 266. These types of counts in rural communities are problematic and it is widely accepted that the information is incomplete. Cal SAWS data specifically related Cal Fresh benefits for Tuolumne County shows over 500 people without a home address. Members of the community who are on the frontline of homeless services conjecture that the number of our community neighbors who are unsheltered in Tuolumne County is likely near 800. Tuolumne County Health & Human Services staff have severely limited options for emergency and transitional housing options as a part of case management for the homeless in Tuolumne County.

2. What is a Pallet Shelter?

Pallet Shelters is an organization that creates scalable & affordable shelters. (palletshelter.com) The shelters can be assembled in an hour, offer a locking door & window, air conditioning & heat, bed & mattress, shelves, & a charging port. Cabins are 64 square feet and 104 square feet and will house 1-2 people. The county owns 7 recreational trailers that will be available at the site for use. There will also be an outdoor shaded area with tables and chairs as well as a small building for indoor meetings and meals. The safe stay community is intended to be an interim solution between unsheltered homelessness and traditional shelter or housing. Therefore, the facilities will be temporary as well, as compared to a traditionally constructed, permanent shelter.

3. Is the Safe Stay Pallet Shelter a campground?

No but there may be allowance for a "brief-stay" in a tent. People will not be permitted to sleep in their cars or personal RV's at the site.

4. What is a "Safe Stay Pallet Shelter Community"?

A "Safe Stay Pallet Shelter Community" is a legal & managed interim shelter setting with lower-barrier entry for our unhoused neighbors to stay in a safer and more sanitary environment, without the risk of being arrested or cited. These areas are bound by code of conduct and good neighbor policies and have on-site sanitation and food services. Tuolumne County Health & Human Services Agency staff will provide occupants with onsite case management and connections to County behavioral health services, connection to benefits like Ca/Fresh, Ca/WORKs, Medi-Cal, linkages to bridge housing, and flexible funding to help support individuals' transition into permanent housing. Ultimately, these sites should be considered as steppingstones to stabilize and support individuals on a pathway to permanent housing. The community will be planned, functional and attractive with space for outdoor and indoor gatherings as well as two small private office spaces to be used for client case management.

5. Why Pallet Shelters instead of greater effort put forth to develop more permanent housing options?

There are great efforts on the part of County staff and local developers to create more affordable workforce housing. The process of development is time consuming and construction for a shovel-ready project could take several years. Pallet Shelters projects are rapid and scalable, meaning a pallet shelter community can be planned and built within a few months. It allows those who are homeless to be sheltered quickly. The use of Pallet Shelters to provide rapid housing has fast become a viable option for providing emergency housing throughout the United States. Specific to California, several sites have been built in Los Angeles County as well as Chico, Fresno, Isla Vista, Lompoc, Oakland, Redondo Beach, Riverside, Sacramento, San Gabriel, San Jose, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, Torrance, and Westlake.

6. What are the benefits of a Safe Stay Community?

Stable housing that people can afford, with appropriate services and support is what ends homelessness. Safe Stay communities can afford us the opportunity to provide immediate safe and hygienic locations for our neighbors experiencing homelessness to live and access services. They also provide a consistent location for service providers and outreach workers to engage on a more regular basis with residents. Additionally, some of the broader community benefits anticipated by having this safe space community include a reduction in trash and debris, the mitigation of environmental and health hazards including reduction of wildfire risks, and the ability to restore land previously occupied by scattered encampment sites to its intended use. A Safe Stay Community also supports the efforts of law enforcement in moving campers off private & public lands, when allowable, to a safe shelter site.

7. Where is the County looking to site the Safe Stay Community?

The Tuolumne County Commission on Homelessness, formed and appointed by the Board of Supervisors, recommended three County-owned properties to staff for further investigation and evaluation as to their viability to host a Safe Stay Community. This recommendation came after an Ad Hoc Committee from the Commission investigated all County-owned properties and a list of Ca/Trans-owned properties as to their viability to host a Shelter Community. On August 2, 2022, the Board of Supervisors accepted a staff recommendation to locate the site off High School Road in Jamestown in a parking area that used to host the administration buildings at the now closed Harvard Mine Site. This site was not a part of active mining.

8. Did County staff “rework” the site selection scoring numbers submitted by the Commission on Homelessness?

No. Staff conducted their own scoring process and presented those results side by side to the Board of Supervisors. It is important to note that the scoring matrix was subjective with a range of options for assigning an evaluative score. The scoring spread from the Commission on their top two recommended sites was only two points which on a scale of 1-100 is nearly negligible.

9. What staff efforts are undergoing related to the development of the High School Road site as an emergency shelter?

Staff from Facilities (fencing, water, sewer, power), Community Development (code & ordinance compliance, environmental factors), Transportation (Dial-a-Ride and fixed route possibilities), Health & Human Services (coordinated entry & person-centered service plans), Roads (road improvements), IT(phone & internet access), County Counsel (advice on compliance with entry and participation requirements), and the County Administrator’s Office (Mine Trust, Water Board, On-site management procurement process) are all working on various aspects of development related to their scope of expertise in an effort to develop a conclusive project plan to the Board of Supervisors.

10. Are “visibility and adjacency” criteria from the site scoring matrix intended to evaluate sites for how “out of sight, out of mind” the locations are?

Yes and no. Sites were evaluated on how visible they were to the public and what properties they were adjacent to, but also what could be private and dignified for those living in the shelter.

11. Is the mine site hazardous?

While there are hazardous areas on the mine property, the County owns approximately 429 acres of land and will only be utilizing approximately 3 acres for this project that is paved, was the parking lot of the administration buildings, and was not a part of mining operations.

12. How will you keep people away from hazardous areas?

Fencing will be installed to limit access to areas that may be dangerous and there will be on site management 24/7 to ensure safety and security for the shelter site and adjacent areas.

13. Is the drinking water at that site potable?

The water that will be used at the site is supplied by Tuolumne Utilities District and is not well water. There is currently water service to the property, it’s potable and safe.

14. What about fire prevention?

The site will follow defensible space requirements. Each shelter will have a fire extinguisher. The flow requirements for the nearby hydrants have been tested and are in compliance. There will be a designated smoking area and no campfires or open flames will be allowed onsite.

15. What will be the emergency protocols?

The same as they are everywhere, call 911.

16. Will people be allowed to walk, loiter, or camp on High School Road and along Highway 108?

If the area is open to the public, then all laws related to activity in that area apply. Safe Stay can’t restrict a person’s rights related to public spaces. If unlawful activity takes place, people witnessing that activity should be encouraged to call law enforcement.

17. What about all the neighbors to that property?

There are five residential buildings on High School Road. Only one of these houses has a direct line of site (unobstructed view) to the proposed site. This residence is on the mine property, owned by the county, and has been vacant since the mine was in operations. All efforts will be made to ensure the cleanliness and safety of this neighborhood. Consideration is being given to the costs related to improving the road.

18. Why was the process of selecting a site so hasty?

The process for investigating and evaluating sites for an emergency shelter has been in motion for over a year with more specific efforts by members of the Tuolumne County Commission on Homelessness, a citizens’ group, since December of 2021. Their efforts were endorsed by all five members of the Board of Supervisors and their progress was reported out publicly.

19. Has the Jamestown site been evaluated as a potential for other projects in the past?

Yes. In 2000 the site was under consideration for the location of a juvenile detention center. At that point, since the mine site was not fully mitigated and reclaimed, it was decided to pursue other locations. In 2020, the site was under consideration to be developed as a homeless campground. There have been efforts to sell the property to interested parties as well. It has been recommended that this site be evaluated for other potential uses related to increasing housing capacity in Tuolumne County.

20. None of the sites that the Tuolumne County Commission on Homelessness recommended to staff are very close to services and walking on the highway is dangerous, has this been considered?

Tuolumne County Transit has committed to establish public transportation routes from the Pallet Shelter Community to other locations in the community. It is intended that the pick-up and drop-off location would be at the Safe Stay shelter alleviating the need for residents to access services by walking on the highway. Many services will be provided to residents on-site.

21. Is there consideration for the impact the location of this shelter site will have on the community in which it is located?

Yes. It is recognized that most people would rather not have this shelter located near where they live or do business. It is also recognized that homelessness affects some areas in Tuolumne County more than others and that having those who are unsheltered living in a designated and supported area would be healthier for the entire community than have illegal and unmanaged encampments in random and numerous locations. It is necessary to have a site in an area close to services and support, which limits locations in the County. Further, the County has limited land holdings which restricts location options.

22. Our area of the County already has a lot of affordable housing and poor people, shouldn't it be another community's turn to carry the load?

To keep the shelter site affordable, using County-owned property makes the most sense. The County does not own many parcels and only a few of what it does own are sites that would work to host a shelter site. The table below shares recent census data about median income in some of the specific communities of Tuolumne County.

<i>Median Household Income Data from 2019 US Census</i>		
<i>Region/Area</i>	<i>Median Income</i>	<i>Compared to Tuolumne County</i>
<i>United States</i>	<i>\$65,712</i>	<i>109%</i>
<i>Tuolumne County</i>	<i>\$60,108</i>	<i>100 %</i>
<i>Soulsbyville</i>	<i>\$70,981</i>	<i>118%</i>
<i>Twain Harte</i>	<i>\$67,306</i>	<i>112%</i>
<i>Jamestown</i>	<i>\$45,547</i>	<i>76%</i>
<i>Sonora</i>	<i>\$42,446</i>	<i>71%</i>
<i>Columbia</i>	<i>\$38,250</i>	<i>64%</i>
<i>Groveland</i>	<i>\$20,406</i>	<i>34%</i>

23. The County General Plan, in Chapter 2.e.d, states that no area shall have an over concentration of very low-, low-, or median-income housing.

This section in the General Plan is not related to homeless shelters. It is about applications for housing projects. There is a legal distinction between emergency shelters, transitional housing, and other types of housing.

24. What are the costs related to this Safe Stay Community?

Cost for each shelter is about \$10,000. Total costs for the build-out of the community is still being investigated but is likely to be near \$1,000,000. Tuolumne County is eligible for multiple grants which will become the funding sources for most of the expenses. It is the goal to limit the need for contributions from the County by seeking all available grant sources from the State and Federal governments. There are efforts underway to build collaboration and partnership with local governments and philanthropic agencies to create a community solution to the community problem of homelessness.

25. How come a more complete proposal was not submitted to the Board of Supervisors?

Until the Board of Supervisors gave direction on locating an emergency shelter, specific planning and cost estimates could not take place.

26. Can these services to the homeless in our community be for local community members only and not people coming from out of town to benefit from our community's homeless programs?

This is a complicated question that doesn't have a simple answer. In general, services are provided for people who meet the criteria for the service. There will be requirements that must be met to reside in the Safe Stay Community. It is unlikely that one of those requirements will be proof of residency in Tuolumne County, after all, how would a homeless person prove their county of residence when they are homeless? If somebody is receiving service from another community, they will not be able to participate in services in Tuolumne County.

27. How large will the community be?

Initially, plans for 33 Pallet Shelters and 7 Recreational Trailers, and a "brief-stay" tent area are being considered. These accommodations could house up to 75 people.

28. Will the community provide restrooms, showers, or laundry facilities?

Yes. The Safe Stay community will provide onsite restrooms, showers and laundry facilities which will be regularly serviced to ensure proper sanitation.

29. What utilities will be available?

Water, electricity, & sewer/septic and garbage. Water is through Tuolumne Utilities District. Electricity is at the site and has the needed capacity. There is also active sewer service at the site with Jamestown Sanitation District and conversations are in progress related to needed or increased capacity as well as costs.

30. Will there be on-site garbage collection?

Yes. The safe stay community will provide on-site trash receptacles that will be regularly serviced by a commercial waste management company. The on-site operator will be responsible for daily cleaning of the site and the immediate perimeter and ensuring that occupants pick up after themselves.

31. Will the facility be fenced?

Yes. The site will have security fencing/gating to ensure that access in and out of the site can be supervised as well as to limit access to other parts of the property that may not be safe. The on-site operator will be responsible for monitoring the access points, and ensuring that only registered occupants, service staff, County staff, and emergency personnel have access.

32. How long will the site be in operation?

The safe stay community is intended to be an interim solution to addressing unsheltered homelessness in the County. It is anticipated that initial occupancy will be 24 months, with extensions considered as needed.

33. Who will be operating the shelter site?

The County will contract with an experienced shelter operator(s) for daily operational responsibilities. That operator will be responsible for 24/7 operations, supplies, regular cleaning and maintenance of the site, safety, and security services (to include adjacent areas), managing entry and exit from the site, engaging with occupants, providing social activities and on-going data collection and reporting. The site operator will also be responsible to coordinate food service to include three meals a day and making snacks and water available. There will be no on-site cooking allowed.

34. How will food be provided?

The on-site operator will be required to provide daily meals, snacks, and water to all occupants. This could be through the provision of pre-packaged, non-perishable food and/or partnerships with food preparation services, non-profits, churches, civic groups, and local food banks. The site will not have kitchens and cooking by occupants will not be allowed. Personal kitchen appliances will not be allowed. Accommodations will be made for individuals who can't participate in the regularly scheduled mealtimes.

35. Who will be staying at the site and how is access managed?

Access to the sites is by referral only through the County Health & Human Services Agency. All residents must agree to participate in the County Coordinated Entry Service to the Good Neighbor & Code of Conduct Agreement which are still under development. These agreements will state that there is no onsite drug or alcohol use. There are no walk-up referrals to the site and currently the community is designed for adults only (no minor children). HHSA will develop person-centered case plans to include services provided by Social Services, Public Health, and Behavioral Health. HHSA has a wide array of services and an extensive service referral network that will be employed as it relates to the individual needs of participants. These services include job training, health coaching, addiction recovery support, mental health support, among others. Priority will be given to Women and Veterans. Many of the funding sources require compliance with low-barrier and/or "Housing First" priorities. County staff is working with County Counsel to determine what kinds of expectations for behavior and participation can and cannot be required.

36. Will people be allowed to bring personal items and pets?

Yes. To reduce barriers to people's ability/willingness to enter shelters, pets will be allowed on site and provisions for storage of personal belongings will be made, although efforts will be made to support people with de-cluttering to prepare for movement into permanent housing. Personal storage will not be outside the shelters and safety standards for pedestrian areas will be maintained. Pet policies will be established and enforced by the on-site operator that will include rules around restraining the animals, care and feeding, and cleaning up after them.

37. How long will people be allowed to stay at the shelter?

The safe stay community will have a goal of moving people out of the site into other longer-term shelter programs or housing as soon as possible. However, people will not be "kicked out" after a predetermined length of stay, so long as they are complying with rules and engaging with service team members.

38. Will vehicles & bikes be allowed onsite?

Yes. A designated parking area for operative vehicles and bicycles will be onsite. Residents with cars will have to comply with the terms of a parking agreement.

39. What is the protocol for contagious disease?

Protocols recommended by the Tuolumne County Public Health Department will be followed.

40. Were all the members of the Board of Supervisors aware that the High School Road site was being considered as a possible host site for the Safe Stay shelter?

Yes. All board members were informed by staff several weeks before the August 2, 2022, Board meeting that the High School Road site was the highest scored site by staff and that staff would be making a recommendation to develop the site as an emergency shelter.

41. Who are the stakeholders who have contributed to the plans for this Safe Stay Community?

The following entities have contributed to the plans for the County's first Safe Stay Community: The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, The Tuolumne County Administrator and staff, The Tuolumne County Commission on Homelessness, Tuolumne County Health & Human Services Agency, Tuolumne County Community Development Department, Tuolumne County Office of Emergency Services, Tuolumne County Sheriff, City of Sonora Manager, City of Sonora Chief of Police, Amador Tuolumne Community Action Agency.

42. Why were letters of support from various County departments and community agencies included in the August 2, 2022, presentation to the Board of Supervisors?

The efforts to develop an emergency shelter require collaboration. The letters were intended to show how broad the work group on this project is as well as communicate the support for the project from those who will be involved at the shelter.