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CITY OF SANTA ANA

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November 16, 2021

Via E-mail

Orange County Board of Supervisors
333 W. Santa Ana Blvd.
Santa Ana, CA 92701

RE: Agenda Item #16, Santa Ana Amory

Dear Orange County Board of Supervisors:

As the Mayor of the City of Santa Ana, I write to express my strong opposition to Agenda Item #16 because it seeks to unnecessarily re-open the Santa Ana Armory as a cold weather shelter for the County of Orange. Based on information I have received, it appears the County of Orange plans this re-opening as early as next week and will be providing cold weather shelter beds for up to 80 individuals.

While I recognize there may be a need for the County of Orange to open a cold weather shelter at this time of the year, I oppose the County's selection of Santa Ana for such a shelter, once again. In the past, the County operated two cold weather shelters; one in Santa Ana and one in Fullerton, both at National Guard Armories. The Fullerton Shelter has been closed since March 2020 when the Governor activated the National Guard.

Currently, the City of Santa Ana is already home to the County-operated Central SPA shelter located on Yale Street, which operates at a self-imposed 250 bed capacity and is routinely at that capacity. Notably, this figure is well below its full, built out capacity of 425. The City of Santa Ana, in conjunction with the Salvation Army, operates a 75 bed shelter in Santa Ana and has contracted with the Illumination Foundation to provide an additional 100 beds. Of these 175 beds, over 40 are regularly available for any homeless individual with ties to the City of Santa Ana who is in need. This illustrates that while the Central SPA may need a cold weather shelter, the City of Santa Ana does not.

According to the 2019 Point in Time Count, there were 1,596 unsheltered individuals in the North SPA, 1,827 in the Central SPA and 538 in the Southern SPA. According to records provided by the County of Orange, there are a total of 1,205 emergency shelter beds in the North SPA, 1,495 emergency shelter beds in the Central SPA and 163 emergency shelter beds in the Southern SPA. In total, according to County records, there are a total of 3,024 emergency shelter beds. The City of Santa Ana understands that solving the homeless issue will require many collaborative efforts, and the City has always been prepared to shoulder its responsibilities as it pertains to this problem. Again, I do not oppose the operation of a cold weather shelter

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to assist those in need, but I do oppose the cold weather shelter placement in the City of Santa Ana as it appears other communities could readily become County partners in sharing this responsibility. However, the County did not even appear to seek options other than Santa Ana, much less consult or communicate with the City beforehand.

Historically, Santa Ana has had little or no input into the manner of operation of the cold weather shelter program by the County or its agents, or even whether the County elects to operate the program each year. The County runs this program through permission of the State of California, not the City of Santa Ana. This hardly seems like the necessary cooperative actions needed to jointly address this problem.

As proposed, the cold weather shelter will house up to 80 adult clients. As I understand it, clients are to be transported to and from the shelter by bus using pick up sites in various locations within the City of Santa Ana. To this point, even though the County contract with its proposed vendor clearly states the pickup locations will be addressed jointly with the City, the City has had no input in shelter operations nor pick up locations or times.

The proposed shelter site is located next to Delhi Park and Delhi Community Center. Delhi Park is a 10-acre open space with recreational fields, playgrounds, handball courts, and restrooms. As this is one of Santa Ana's biggest parks, it is utilized by a large number of residents. The Delhi Community Center is a full-service community center that serves as a gathering place for local residents and organizers.

The shelter's impacts, in the past, on Delhi Park, and indeed Santa Ana as a whole, are significant. Because the Armory is available to clients only during the night-time hours, and even though shelter rules prohibit clients from walking off the property, clients regularly spend day-time hours in and around Delhi Park and in Santa Ana generally. This discourages residents and their families from using both the park and Community Center for their intended purposes. Even more broadly, and based on past experience, there is a near certainty that clients of this shelter will remain somewhere in Santa Ana during daytime hours when the shelter is closed, thereby increasing the homeless population in Santa Ana and further straining the City's ability to effectively serve individuals experiencing homelessness.

Lastly, I am aware the City of Santa Ana has been home to a cold weather shelter for many years. However, last year, based on COVID-19 restrictions placed by the State, the cold weather shelter was not allowed to operate in the armory (current proposed location). What we all should have learned is the cold weather shelter DOES NOT have to operate in an armory. It does not have to operate in the Santa Ana Armory. In 2020-2021, the shelter was operated from a 9,135 square foot store front operated on a 0.59 acre parcel of land. It was operated successfully and safely.

A routine review of available parcels in the County of Orange revealed 71 retail/commercial locations and 49 industrial properties in the size range between 8,000 and 15,000 square feet, ready for rent, lease or purchase. Any of these locations in various areas of the County of Orange would be suitable to operate as a cold weather shelter. This simple search illustrates that the County could put this cold weather shelter in any other city it chooses. The County could return the cold weather shelter to the North SPA or it could actually place it in the South SPA, where it has NEVER been and where it would fill a substantial need. The proposed County of Orange cold weather shelter simply does not have to be opened and operated within the City of Santa Ana, and I renew my strenuous objection to the proposed opening.

Sincerely,



Vicente Sarmiento
Mayor

C: Santa Ana City Council