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## **Tiny house plan to cost \$10M: Samaritan House studies feasibility of constructing transition village for the homeless**

March 29, 2016, 05:00 AM By Bill Silverfarb Daily Journal Staff

A group of nonprofit agencies is studying whether it's feasible to build a tiny house village in San Mateo County for homeless people in transition similar to developments already built or proposed in Sonoma County.

The project is estimated to cost about \$10 million, or \$50,000 a unit, to house between 50 to 100 formerly homeless individuals who have graduated from the nonprofit agency's Safe Harbor Shelter.

The current cost to build multi-story, multi-family structures is approximately \$500,000 a unit.

Tiny house communities have come online in Petaluma and San Francisco and Samaritan House Chief Executive Officer Bart Charlow is leading a local charge to bring the concept here.

The county's Housing Authority is funding a feasibility study being conducted by Samaritan House, MidPen Housing and the Mental Health Association.

When the study is complete by the end of the year, the agencies "will be in a better position to seek funding and zoning approvals for the project," Charlow wrote in an update to members of the Board of Supervisors Monday.

The goal is to get the homeless off the streets into safe and controlled environments at a cheap price on unused land.

Samaritan House is proposing a two-year transitional model to prepare participants for the workforce.

The tiny houses would be flexible in scale and design, could be built quickly at a lower cost and durable. They won't be like the "trailer based, one-off, portable, off-the-grid models that many are enamored of," Charlow wrote in the update to the board.

The village would have to fit in with the surrounding neighborhood and be close to public transportation.

The biggest challenge is finding the buildable land.

Many homeless people housed at the agency's Safe Harbor Shelter in South San Francisco need transitional housing after completing a six-month stay.

It can take someone 18 to 24 months to find housing even when looking out of the county, Charlow said.

Besides, Charlow said, there is not enough affordable housing in the area to support individuals who are transitioning out of homelessness.

The average rent for a one-bedroom in San Mateo County now rents for \$2,575 a month, a 52.3 percent increase in four years, according to the Housing Authority.

Samaritan House is hoping to secure 2 to 3 acres of land to build the village on and will need a minimum of an acre of buildable land. It would need the right zoning and hopefully walking distance to grocery stores and other services.

The village would be a “value to the community for decades to come and solves immediate problems today,” Charlow said Monday.

Regionally, Sonoma County has been ahead of the game by at least 20 years, he said, when it comes to allowing for the communities.

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