

HOUSING WITH A HELPING HAND



DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Sibley Simon of the 180/2020 project and the Homeless Services Center wants to build 60-100 housing units where the River Street Shelter buildings exist at present.

Up to 100 units proposed for chronically homeless

By Jessica A. York

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SANTA CRUZ » As Santa Cruz has made strides in housing some of its chronically homeless citizens, some efforts have continually come up short for a fraction of its longest-struggling and most visible population.

Sibley Verbeck Simon, a self-described “social entrepreneur,” is leading the charge in a new

“permanent supportive housing” effort, which remains in the conceptual stage.

Simon’s proposal is to build 60 to 100 “tiny studio” rentals, combined with security, 24-hour on-site case managers and a plethora of neighboring physical and mental health services on city-owned property next to the Homeless Services Center.

The development would include units less than 350 square feet and including kitchenettes

and Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant bathrooms for single adults. Tenants, due to their disabling conditions, would be unlikely have their own vehicles, lessening parking supplies issue, he said. They would have dedicated communal space inside and outside the building, he said.

“Part of the definition of chronically homeless is having a disabling condition. But, the majority of those individuals we

can support out in the community and have someone checking up on them, helping them with the transition,” said Simon, board treasurer for the Homeless Services Center. “However, there are individuals who are homeless — we all have encountered some of them — who have a combination of mental health, physical disability, major substance use issues that means they need more support to be successful. Some of them for just a period of time, and then they can go on to be successful more

Units

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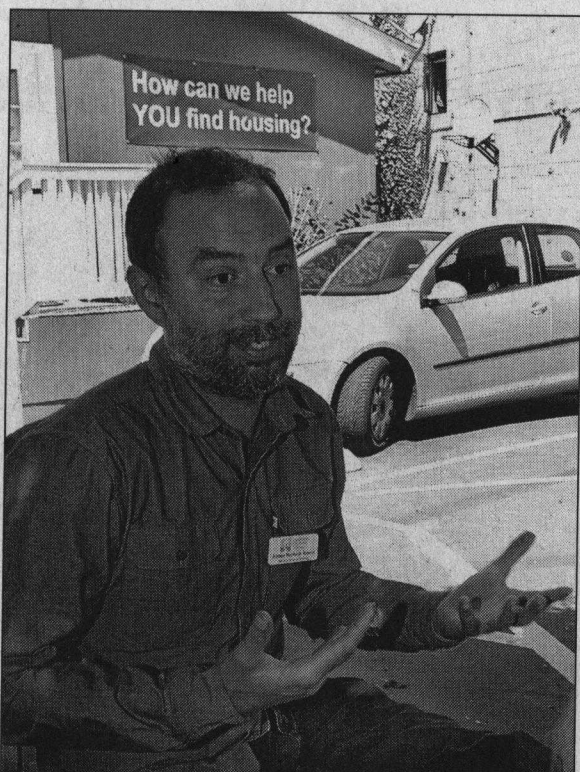
independently, and some of them permanently.”

The aging 32-bed River Street Emergency Shelter would be demolished, then incorporated as an independent tenant in the new building, as proposed. Simon is aiming to submit a formal design to the city Planning Department by the end of the year. Knowing that homeless-related solutions in Santa Cruz are often a topic of hot debate, Simon said he expects to go through a full public process once a project design is finalized, and has already begun preliminary outreach to service providers, government representatives and community members. Simon, who can be reached by email at sibley@180santacruz.org, said his intention it not to compete for local community funding dollars, though federal Section 8 housing vouchers will offset tenants’ rental costs.

“This is housing for the homeless individuals who really have no other choice and who really need a lot of supportive services along with the housing in order to get off the streets,” Simon said. “This isn’t a population that we get somebody off the streets and suddenly there’s going to be more. It’s once in a while, there’s somebody who’s been homeless who falls to this level of need or who has mental health issues and loses whatever support network they have and becomes homeless.”

Project funding primarily would come from the nonprofit investment fund Simon manages, New Way Homes, with construction by his Envision Housing, a mission-driven development company he co-founded.

The housing project



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Sibley Simon of the 180/ 2020 project and the Homeless Services Center hopes to build 60 to 100 units on the Homeless Services Center site through the affordable housing development company he co-launched.

would lean heavily on the neighboring Homeless Services Center and other campus partners for support. Other on-site entities include family housing, emergency housing, a cafeteria, mail room, a recuperation center, dental services and more. The center’s director, Phil Kramer, said his agency would plan to scale up existing institutionalized services to support the newcomers and provide new housing options for those who need more than a once-a-week case manager’s visit. Kramer formerly served as the 180/2020 Initiative’s director and has seen first-hand the struggles in connecting people with permanent supportive housing in the community.

“This setting helps just from a practicality standpoint. Proximity is a big thing. Having the clinic here, having other experts

that we can draw on. Right here, we have this network of support to really meet the needs of this population,” Kramer said.

Simon said the project, if realized, may not only extend the lives of homeless individuals who have a lifespan cut short by an average of 20 years, but improve nuisance conditions in Santa Cruz’s downtown.

The project is still assembling capital funding resources and New Way Homes is working with the Monterey Bay Housing Trust on pre-development financing. That housing trust partnership was formed in 2016 between the Monterey Bay Economic Partnership and Housing Trust Silicon Valley to provide loans for affordable housing in the Monterey Bay region, including Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties.