



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
AGENDA LETTER**

**Agenda Number:**

**Clerk of the Board of Supervisors**  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

**Submitted on:**  
**(COB Stamp)**

**Department Name:** Community Services  
**Department No.:** 057  
**Agenda Date:** June 10, 2025  
**Placement:** Departmental Agenda  
**Estimated Time:** 60 minutes  
**Continued Item:** No  
**If Yes, date from:** N/A  
**Vote Required:** Majority

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**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Department Director(s): Jesús Armas, Community Services Director  
Contact: Joe Dzvonik, Assistant Director, Housing and Community Development  
**SUBJECT:** **2025 Annual Homelessness Update**

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**County Counsel Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

**Other Concurrence:**

As to form: N/A

**Auditor-Controller Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

**Recommended Actions:**

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Receive and file a presentation on homelessness in the County of Santa Barbara to ensure compliance with State of California and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirements, including:
  - i. Local, State, and Federal funding to address homelessness overview;
  - ii. Community Action Plan to Address Homelessness Year 4 Progress Report;
  - iii. 2025 Point in Time Count and Housing Inventory Count;
  - iv. Encampment Resolution Strategy Year 3 Progress Report;
- b) Determine that the above-recommended actions are not a project that is subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(5), finding that the actions consist of administrative activities of government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

### **Summary Text:**

This report provides an overview of recent trends in local, state, and federal homelessness funding; results from the 2025 Point in Time (PIT) Count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC); and update on the Community Action Plan to Address Homelessness (HCAP) and system usage data; a Year 3 update on the Encampment Resolution Strategy; and projections for future funding, services, and projects.

### **Discussion:**

In 2021 the Board of Supervisors adopted the Community Action Plan to Address Homelessness (HCAP). Staff returns annually to provide a progress update on this plan in addition to a summary of the activities being carried out by the Homelessness Assistance Programs team.

The HCAP has been instrumental in creating a community-wide framework for homelessness response among housing service providers. The success of this coordinated effort can be seen by the information shown in Table 2, with a 25% decrease in unsheltered, non-vehicular homelessness and the 61% increase in sheltered homelessness during the 2025 PIT count as compared to the 2022 count.

In the midst of a changing landscape, there are good news items to report. In 2024, county and city agencies, in partnership with service providers, helped transition 1,368 people into permanent housing. La Posada and Hope Village marked their one-year anniversaries this past spring, and the County Encampment Response Team launched an unprecedented countywide strategy in partnership with New Beginnings Counseling Center's Safe Parking Program and the City of Santa Barbara to address vehicular encampments. The Good Samaritan Shelter's Culinary Program expanded into south County and began operating out of a newly renovated kitchen at Hedges House of Hope in Isla Vista. As that culinary program expanded employment opportunities for people exiting homelessness, Buena Tierra opened its doors, providing permanent supportive housing for 60 formerly homeless households.

Despite these successes, our efforts did not result in an overall decrease of people living unhoused throughout the County. As funding for homelessness response decreases while the overall numbers continue to increase, a transition in how we view our role in addressing homelessness as the Community Services Department (CSD) is necessary.

Clearly, it is widely recognized that many economic, social, and political factors converge to influence the ability of any particular community to foster an environment where housing can be attained and maintained by the majority of its residents: income and cost of living disparity, inflation, exorbitant property values, lack of affordable housing, drug proliferation and addiction, and behavioral health and social services availability, to name a few. While CSD is designed to respond to homelessness with programs generally created to serve as a "back up plan" for the social service network when it is not sufficient, CSD is not designed to address any of the significant drivers of homelessness identified above. Rather than establishing a goal to "reduce overall homelessness," it is more realistic and therefore more likely achievable to set a goal of making homelessness less frequent, brief, and supported by a network where the number of people exiting homelessness is at least equal to or greater than the number of people entering homelessness. In other words, the goal should be to "eliminate chronic homelessness and achieve functional zero." Staff will return to the Board in the first quarter of calendar year 2026 with information on how to approach achieving this aspirational goal.

### The Future of Homelessness Response

While keeping the HCAP at the center of our planning, staff is looking ahead to the shifting fiscal landscape and is prepared to refine and emphasize sustainability for those programs that have proven effective while moving toward a more expansive approach to prevention and retention.

### Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Rehousing (PDR)

The most cost efficient and compassionate way to address homelessness is to prevent it. Achieving long-term reductions—and reaching functional zero—requires investing in social systems that make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.

To that end, staff are working with national leaders like the Cleveland Mediation Center to train providers and community partners in best practices for housing-focused prevention. Over the past year, the Continuum of Care convened strategic workgroups to develop a formal PDR strategy. These efforts are evolving into an implementation plan that will be brought to the Board for review in the coming year.

### Safe Sleeping Program

One of the key challenges in resolving encampments is identifying safe, available, nearby and temporary places for individuals to move. To address this, a tent-based “Safe Sleeping” program pilot near large encampments has been considered. These programs have mixed success rates and are heavily dependent on the availability of permanent housing solutions, appropriately trained service providers, and acceptable, appropriate locations.

However, the use of tents to “house” people is likely not a suitable psychological progression to housing and existing tent-based programs have reported low housing rates. Prioritizing and investing in a program of this nature at a time of unknown future funding availability is not recommended by staff at this time due to its relatively high cost when considering there is a greater need to invest in prevention and longer-term housing solutions.

Should the Board support initiating such an effort, staff suggests it be structured as a pilot project. The pilot would offer a sanitary, secure environment where residents could stabilize and access services. This test setup would include 10–15 insulated tents, lighting, sanitation, and mobile storage at an estimated startup cost of \$75,000–\$100,000. Service provision for a four to six-month pilot could cost an additional \$300,000–\$400,000. If directed, staff would release a request for proposals to refine operations and costs and return to the Board with recommendations.

### Maintaining Encampment Resolution Gains

Between October of 2023 and October 2024, the County led a coordinated effort to resolve over 100 encampments in the Santa Maria Riverbed, involving 120–150 individuals. This effort included collaboration with the County San Luis Obispo County, the City of Santa Maria, multiple county and city departments, law enforcement agencies, service providers and community-based organizations.

Outcomes included:

- Over 100 individuals connected to case management and housing support.
- Removal of 150+ tons of debris and hazardous waste.
- Dozens of animals treated or rehomed by Care4Paws and SLO Animal Services.
- Restoration of the riverbed as a safe and clean recreational area for the local community.

To sustain these results and prevent re-encampment, staff proposes co-funding a City Ranger position in partnership with the City of Santa Maria and the County of San Luis Obispo. Later this month, a Memorandum of Understanding outlining this plan will be presented to the board for approval.

### **Background:**

When compared to 2024, the 2025 PIT Count reveals that unsheltered homelessness across the County decreased by 17% (this does not include those living in vehicles), while the number of people living in shelters increased by 22%. The PIT Count also indicates that vehicular homelessness, or the number of households living in vehicles, spiked by 35% in comparison to 2024, contributing significantly to the overall 15% increase in PIT numbers.

In a separate analysis using more comprehensive data, and entirely distinct from PIT Count information, our Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) indicates that, while the total annual number of individuals experiencing homelessness in all of Santa Barbara County grew to 4,457 individuals, an increase of 2.9% (124 individuals) from 2024, the growth rate of homelessness has slowed significantly over the past three years. For comparison, 2023 saw an 11% increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness from the previous year, while 2022 saw a 17% increase from 2021. Finally, HMIS data also reveals that 1,369 people transitioned from homelessness into permanent housing throughout the calendar year of 2024.

Combining the data insights provided by both the PIT Count and HMIS, we see that the significant investments approved by our Board for interim shelters, permanent supportive housing, encampment resolution efforts, and street outreach have achieved one significant part of our overall goal: to slow the growth rate of homelessness, substantially reduce unsheltered, non-vehicular homelessness, and increase the success rate of transitioning our unhoused community into housing through expansive shelter and service availability across the County.

However, the other important part of our goal, to achieve an overall decrease in homelessness, did not occur. The overall increase, particularly in the vehicular homeless subpopulation, tells us that greater effort to better understand and address this segment of the homelessness spectrum is needed. While our \$8 million California Encampment Resolution Fund (CERF-3) investment, and partnerships with the New Beginnings Counseling Center and the City of Santa Barbara, are designed to understand and address vehicular homelessness, these efforts only began in earnest over the past few months. Additionally, because people tend to initially revert to living in their vehicle when they lose their housing, this upward trend in vehicular homelessness highlights the growing need for a more comprehensive and robust prevention, diversion, and rapid rehousing (PDR) program as the centerpiece to our strategy moving forward.

As the one-time COVID-era funds approach depletion, staff suggests it is appropriate to realign the County's strategies to sustain the interim shelter operations and outreach programs developed during the past several years. Specifically, the realignment should be in the direction of more effective and less costly long-term solutions, with PDR as the critical focus to address and prevent future growth in homelessness, with additional consideration to establishing a new perspective on our community goals with respect to addressing precarious housing situations.

In spite of financial and programmatic challenges, it is important to put the homeless population in context. While a population of 4,457 individuals is much too high, it represents about 1% of the

County population. This is not to intended to diminish the significance of the number of individuals experiencing homelessness. Instead, it is to suggest that it represents a level that can be positively impacted.

### Funding Overview

All homelessness funding managed by the CSD is either "recurring" — regularly appropriated but not guaranteed — or "non-recurring," tied to one-time pandemic or other special initiatives. Based on this operating assumption, of the \$73.6 million in CSD homelessness funding procured since 2020, 55% is non-recurring and unlikely to be renewed, while 45% is recurring. An additional \$18 million, mostly through Behavioral Wellness, also supports homelessness services.

Since 2020, CSD more than doubled its homelessness budget, mostly due to COVID response funding, and these funding resources will be depleted over the next 24 months. The impact may be that all funding available to the Homelessness Assistance Program is reduced by nearly 50% if new funding sources are not identified and procured.

**Table 1 Recurring vs. Non-recurring Funding**

Funding Source	Amount Administered by CSD since 2020	Percent of Total CSD Homelessness Funding
Recurring Total	\$33,246,543	45%
Non-recurring Total	\$40,392,768	55%
Total	\$73,639,311	100%

While this reduction is potentially significant, the pandemic-era funding did enable staff to pilot innovative solutions, build stronger partnerships, and identify which programs perform best and should move forward and which programs should be reduced or eliminated. As mentioned earlier, outside of sustaining successful programs, new funding must be focused to help people before they lose their housing (prevention) and in the development and retention of permanent housing solutions.

### Point in Time Count and Housing Inventory Count

The Point in Time (PIT) and Housing Inventory Counts (HIC) are federally required annual surveys conducted each January to assess homelessness and available housing resources. As the lead agency for the Santa Maria/Santa Barbara County Continuum of Care (CoC), the County oversees these processes, the results of which guide much future state and federal funding towards homelessness. In 2025, the CoC partnered with SB ACT and over 400 volunteers to conduct the PIT count. As the name implies, the PIT offers a snapshot of a single point in time and should be viewed alongside more reliable, real-time data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

During the evening of January 21 and morning of January 22, 2025, a total of 2,436 people experiencing homelessness were counted, representing a 15% increase from 2024 and a 24% increase from 2022. Expansion in bed capacity and outreach led to a 61% increase in the number of people sheltered on the night of the count since 2022. This shift is seen as a positive trend, as shelters provide access to critical services.

Table 2 Sleeping Location Trends

Living Situation	2022	2023	2024	2025	% Change Since 2022
Sheltered*	595	685	787	958	+61%
Unsheltered-Outdoors**	692	591	622	516	-25%
Unsheltered-Vehicles	675	611	710	962	+42%
(Unsheltered* + Vehicles) Unsheltered Total	1367	1202	1332	1478	+8%
Total	1962	1887	2119	2436	+24%

\* Living in an emergency shelter or transitional housing facility.

\*\*Living on the street, outdoors, in a tent, or in another place not meant for human habitation.

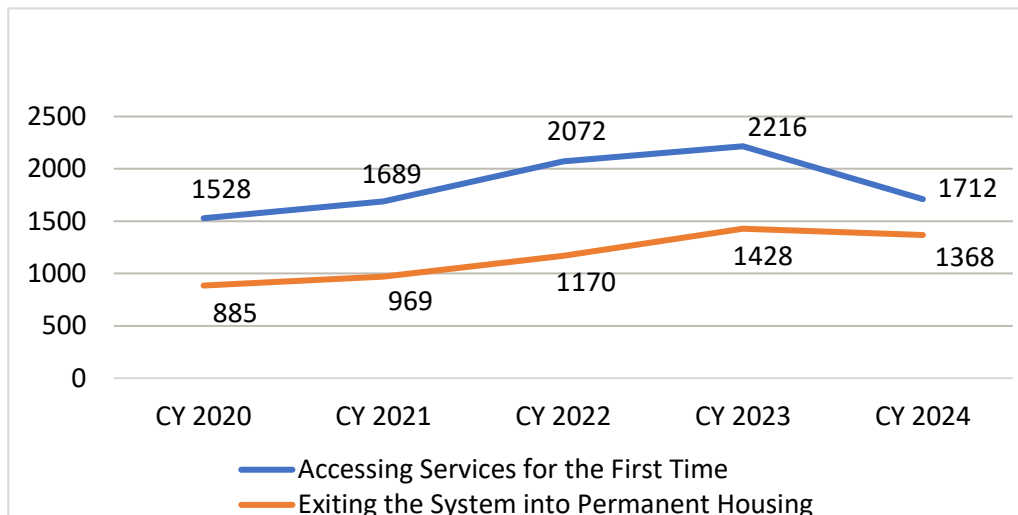
Understanding first-time homelessness is essential for addressing broader housing trends, particularly as many individuals initially shelter in vehicles before seeking help. County and community partners have traditionally focused on those “least likely to apply” for services—such as people with chronic homelessness, substance use disorders, or complex support needs. However, first-time vehicular homelessness also fits this category, as these individuals may not recognize their situation as homelessness or know about available services. By expanding education and collaborating with non-traditional partners, HCD can better reach and support this overlooked group in re-housing efforts.

Other notable demographic shifts include:

- **Families:** In 2024 the number of households with children counted during the PIT was 125. In 2025 this number grew to 146, a 17% increase. Many of the families counted were living in vehicles.
- **Veterans:** The number of veterans listed on the by-name list decreased an impressive amount from 90 in 2024 to 51.
- **Transitional Aged Youth (18-24):** In 2024 the number of youths counted during the PIT was 78. In 2025 this number nearly doubled to 127. Nearly all this growth is in the vehicular homelessness category.
- **Seniors:** The 2024 PIT showed 34% of the total people counted were over the age of 55. In 2025 the percent grew to 37%. To put this in context, approximately 26% of people living in Santa Barbara County are over the age of 55.

Over the past two years, the gap between first-time service users and those exiting homelessness has narrowed. In HMIS, someone is considered experiencing homelessness for the first time when they have not accessed services over the past 2 years. When these numbers align, and the back log of unhoused individuals is addressed the County will reach "functional zero"—where entries equal or fall below exits and a person’s experience of homelessness is brief.

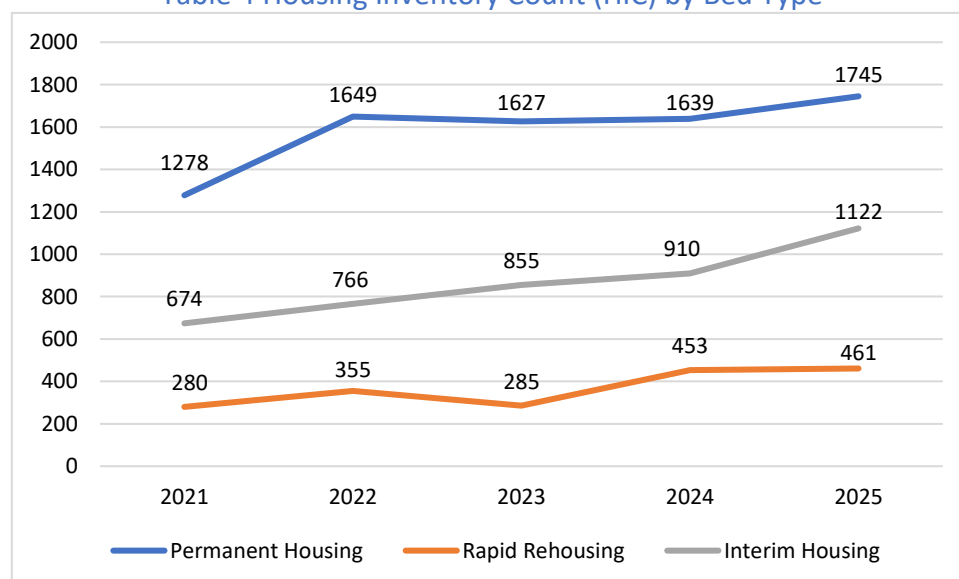
Table 3 First-time Entries into HMIS vs Those Exiting to a Permanent Housing Solution



Although the total number of unhoused individuals counted in the January 2025 PIT increased, HMIS data shows a decline in first-time access to homelessness resolution services. This may be due to effective prevention efforts, such as training and retention funds that help people remain housed. It may also reflect a lack of awareness about available services, especially among those unfamiliar with the system. Little is known about the demographics and experiences of people living in vehicles locally, and they may not be engaging with services. To address this, staff will deploy a short survey through outreach workers in the coming months, with findings used to inform future responses.

The HIC, conducted concurrently with the PIT and which tracks all beds dedicated to people experiencing homelessness, includes interim beds, rapid rehousing vouchers, and permanent housing, is shown below in Table 4. To move closer to ending homelessness, the County must preserve interim beds and expand rapid rehousing and permanent housing capacity.

Table 4 Housing Inventory Count (HIC) by Bed Type



Achieving functional zero depends on increasing exits from homelessness beyond new entries and reducing the backlog of 2,745 individuals. To do so, we must expand housing options and

strengthen prevention with coordinated efforts across departments, jurisdictions, and organizations.

### Encampment Response Protocol Year 3 Progress Report

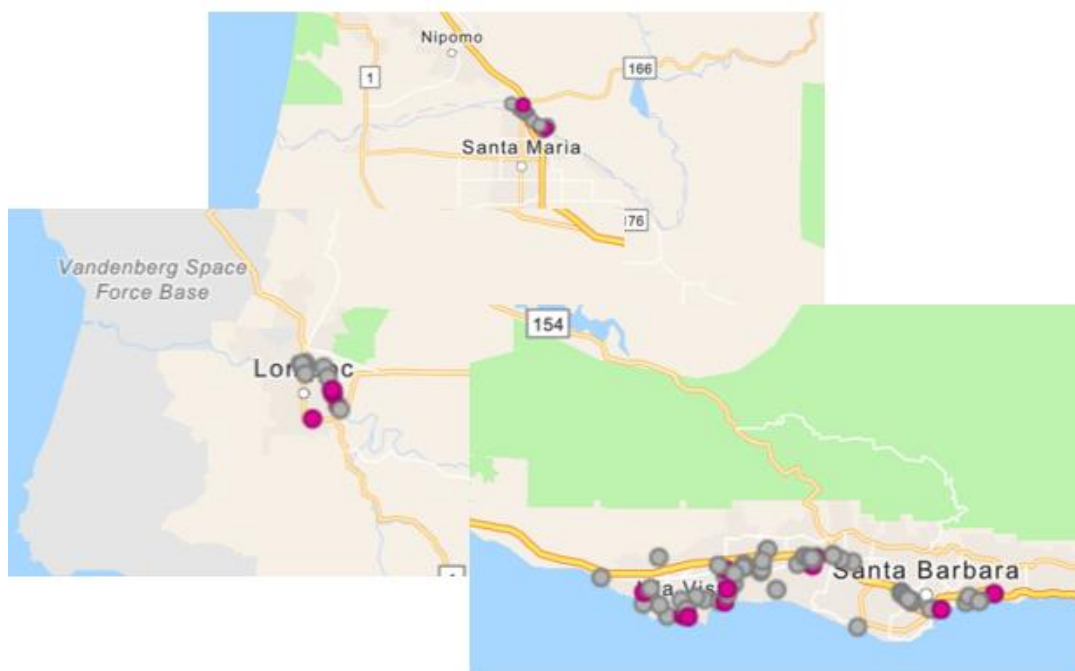
Initiated in 2021, Santa Barbara County's Encampment Resolution Strategy initially aimed to resolve 45 encampments on County-controlled land by August 2024. The approach emphasized coordination across agencies and services, supported by outreach, shelter, housing, and care.

Over the past three years, the County secured over \$27 million in competitive funding to expand outreach, sanitation services, and used \$11 million of these funds to add over 200 interim shelter beds and expand permanent supportive housing projects. So far, over 1,100 encampments have been resolved across County, Caltrans, and railroad properties—408 of which were on unincorporated County land. From these efforts, 464 people entered shelter and 276 moved into permanent housing.

In Year 3 alone, approximately 400 encampments were cleared, including 182 on County land. Outcomes included 130 interim housing placements and 45 permanent housing placements. A regional breakdown of encampment clearances on county-controlled property includes:

- **South County:** 117 sites, including Montecito beaches, creeks, and Isla Vista.
- **North County:** 65 sites in the Santa Maria riverbed.
- **Mid County:** 45 sites on non-County property were cleared in partnership with Cal Trans and cities, with new efforts starting near Lompoc and Highway 246.

Contracted sanitation services logged over 2,800 hours and removed 340.6 tons of debris from County sites.



*Map of year 3 encampment removals; the pink dots indicate shelter/housing placements from encampments.*



The addition of new non-congregate shelter beds and focused encampment resolution efforts contributed to the notable increase in sheltered individuals in the 2025 PIT count. While outcomes show progress, challenges remain that will limit the continuing success of encampment resolution efforts to move people into shelter and eventually house them. These challenges include:

- **Limited long-term housing subsidies** restrict exit options from interim housing.
- **Undocumented individuals** face access and eligibility barriers.
- **Low shelter retention** is driven by rigid policies, transportation gaps, and lack of pet accommodations.
- **Insufficient facilities to address behavioral and other health-related and issues.**

#### Status Update on CERF programs:

##### CERF-2: Waterways

Since the inception of the CERF-2 program on August 1, 2023, the Good Samaritan Outreach team dedicated to waterways served 319 individuals and have housed 66 persons through April 30, 2025. Since April 2025, staff have been working closely with the City of Lompoc to address encampments on County-owned parcels in the Santa Ynez River. During the first phase of this effort, which was focused on parcels adjacent to Highway 246, 5 active encampments were resolved, and 5 abandoned sites/debris areas were cleaned. The team was able to place 6 of 7 individuals encamped in this area. The next phase of work will occur further north in the Santa Ynez River adjacent to River Park.

##### CERF-3: Vehicular Homelessness

Efforts conducted on behalf of the City and County of Santa Barbara to address vehicular homelessness by The New Beginnings Counseling Center CERF-3 outreach team served 242 individuals and have housed 91 persons since the program began in earnest in early 2025.

#### Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There is no fiscal impact associated with the Board receiving and filing this report.

#### Fiscal Analysis:

N/A

#### Contact Information:

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