



*A Critical Zoom Meeting with City Leaders On
The State of Poverty and Homelessness in Petaluma*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, July 19, 2021

Petaluma – In June 2021, Petaluma Community Relations Council (PCRC) hosted a Zoom meeting with Petaluma City leaders about poverty and homelessness in Sonoma County. The meeting focused on steps Petaluma is taking to prevent an increase in poverty, and address the needs of a burgeoning number of unhoused in our community.

During the meeting it was noted that an estimated 2,700 people are without shelter county-wide; and as many as 300 are unhoused in Petaluma.

In an effort to raise city-wide awareness, PCRC decided to tape that June 3, 2021 meeting, and make it available to all of Petaluma’s residents – equal stakeholders in the future of our city.

Participants included Elece Hempel, Executive Director of Petaluma People Services Center; Chuck Fernandez, CEO of Committee on the Shelterless (COTS); Petaluma City Council Member, Kevin McDonnell; and Brian Miller, Deputy Chief of Police, Petaluma Police Department.

The discussion covered a number of factors leading to homelessness, including childhood trauma, poverty, mental illness, chronic drug and alcohol abuse, and the combined impact of job loss during the pandemic, and prohibitive costs of housing. Additionally, civic leaders addressed factors inhibiting access to currently available shelter.

One month later Petaluma launched a project called SAFE (Specialized Assistance for Everyone), intended to offer the assistance of trained volunteers to respond to calls for assistance not requiring sworn officers. This group would also provide immediate and permanent assistance by establishing stabilization for those without shelter, including in cases where domestic violence, mental illness, and substance abuse have contributed to homelessness.

“The City of Petaluma and specifically the Petaluma Police Department remain committed to improving the quality of life for ALL of our community members,” said Deputy Police Chief Brian Miller. “We are focused on working collectively through an extensive outreach first model where we strive to build partnerships, provide resources, and treat everyone equally with dignity and respect. Together we can all work to provide those in need help, while keeping the entire community safe and healthy.”

Rabbi Ted Feldman, Chair of PCRC, remarked, “We are all morally challenged by the issues facing the unhoused in our community and it is vitally important that Petaluma’s residents understand what is and can be done to help. This conversation is a step in that understanding.”

To gain a greater understanding of Petaluma's rising poverty rate, and what some are now calling a crisis that can no longer go ignored, PCRC and City Leaders are urging the public to watch this video, [*"The State of Poverty and Homelessness in Petaluma"*](#)

Petaluma Community Relations Council Steering Committee:

Rabbi Ted Feldman, Chair

Elece Hempel

Faith Ross

Phyllis Tajii

Lou Zweier

Peggy Sebera

Carole Barlas

Robert Tomaszewski

Erica Stuart/Coordinator

PCRC is a nonpartisan alliance of representatives from faith-based and volunteer organizations, city government, and Petaluma residents, who since 2016, engage in continued dialogue, advocating for a shared message of unity.

PCRC's mission is to serve as a coalition of individuals and groups, promoting the values of respect, appreciation and understanding of diversity among all people in our community. By fostering positive human relations, we identify and confront discrimination, respond to the needs of our community, and serve as a source of information and advocacy.