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NTC homeless housing plan draws critics

By Ronald W. Powell
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The recommendation to place from 75 to 100 housing units for the homeless on Naval Training Center grounds is leaving friends and foes feeling left out in the cold.

The Naval Training Center Reuse Planning Committee, an advisory group to the City Council, arrived at the decision last week after nearly two hours of sometimes passionate debate.

To assist the homeless in achieving self-sufficiency, the housing would serve individuals and families who are employed, in job training or enrolled in education classes.

Opponents, like City Councilman Byron Wear, argued that housing for the homeless has no place on the 400-plus acres in Point Loma that the city expects to gain ownership of next year.

Monsignor Joe Carroll, president of the St. Vincent de Paul homeless assistance agency, says Wear is right — at least in regard to the committee's decision.

Under the committee's conceptual land-use plan, the 75 to 100 units would be mixed in with 250 or more market-rate housing units on 35 acres. Some of the market-rate housing would sell for \$175,000 and above.

Another 75 to 100 units would also be built in as yet unspecified locations in the city.

Carroll says the recommendation does not work in the best interests of the homeless. He favors a \$20 million plan offered by his organization and a coalition of other homeless agencies — called Maritime Park — that would have provided 406 housing units for homeless individuals and families on the 35 acres.

Maritime Park would serve more 1,100 people and use 26 existing buildings at the training center. It would include economic development programs and support services to assist residents.

Consultants for the city judged the coalition's plan financially sound.

Last week, the committee considered the proposal, but quickly dismissed it.

The plan it approved will not work, Carroll said.

He predicted that it would be difficult to obtain financing to build 75 units for the homeless on training center property. If units are built off the base, he said, a lack of transportation would prevent residents from receiving the training and services they need.

Before the plan is submitted to the federal government, a binding agreement must be signed by the City Council and representatives of local homeless agencies. The agreement is a declaration that the land-use plan addresses some pressing needs of the homeless community.

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development reviews base reuse plans to determine whether the homeless are adequately served. Its determination

is based, in part, on the needs of the homeless in a community against a city's economic needs in developing former military property.

By the city's own estimates, there are 3,400 homeless children and adults in San Diego without shelter. Carroll says the committee's plan comes up short.

"I don't think they are fulfilling the requirement of the law," he said.

includes the training center, said during the meeting that housing for the homeless is incompatible with the Loma Portal and Point Loma communities. It is a bad fit as well, Wear said, alongside market-rate housing and a Navy housing development that are planned on property.

"I think it would have a negative effect on the entire area," said Wear, who plans to oppose the committee's decision when the reuse plan goes before the City Council next month.

Rep. Brian Bilbray, R-Imperial Beach, has declared his opposition to the committee's recommendation. He successfully worked last year to obtain a change in federal law so that homeless service providers would not have priority over other reuse options.

"It was my belief then, as it is now, that homeless housing should not be included in reuse plans" at the training center, Bilbray said.

A city consultant estimated that the city faces a \$35 million to \$70 million gap between expected revenues when the property is developed and the cost of rehabilitation, demolition, streets and utilities and other costs to revitalize the base.

The same consultant, Gerald Trimble, said a market-rate housing project, rather than homeless housing, would generate more revenue to help finance development of the training center property.

After the vote, Golding said she thought the number of homeless units recommended by the committee was too high.

"I think 50 (homeless units) would be a better number," said Golding, who did not vote with the majority.

Golding and the City Council will have an opportunity to change the land-use plan when reviewing the development ideas from the committee next month.

Two public information meetings on the reuse plan will be conducted this week. The first is tomorrow from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Community Concourse, 202 C St., and on Wednesday from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Rick Engineering Co., 5620 Friars Road.

The reuse committee meets at 9 a.m. Wednesday at the concourse to put the final touches on its plan, which the City Council must approve before submitting it to the federal government. Ultimately, the secretary of the Navy must give consent to the plan before ownership of the land can be transferred to the city.