

# Understanding a Housing Navigation Center for Fremont

## Frequently Asked Questions

*This document was developed by the City of Fremont. Updated August 7, 2019.*

### Navigation Center Overview

- **What is a Navigation Center and how will it operate?**

A Navigation Center provides a clean, safe, calm and flexible environment that allows selected homeless persons to rebuild their lives and intensely focus on finding stable permanent housing.

- **What is the difference between a shelter and a Navigation Center?**

Traditional shelters are intended for people to have a safe place to stay off the street and out of the elements. Families with children are often the first priority to be sheltered, while there are fewer opportunities for singles. Many who are at traditional shelters are waiting for special supportive housing opportunities to become available. Supportive housing has a subsidy attached to it to pay for rent and comes with on-going support services. Because there are relatively few supportive housing “slots” available, individuals may stay at traditional shelters for longer than 6 months. Traditional shelters offer differing levels of supportive services, depending on their staffing and expertise.

The Navigation Center serves adults and is an innovative approach in helping clients transition off the streets and into housing using a rigorous case-management and housing navigation approach. It also lessens the barrier to admittance, allowing clients to bring their partners, pets, and most of their possessions in with them. Those entering a Navigation Center, know they have a limited stay at the site and therefore are committed to focusing their energies on seeking and preparing for permanent, sustainable housing.

- **What is the primary focus of a Navigation Center?**

To transition vulnerable, unhoused residents into more stable housing with the ultimate goal of ending their homelessness once and for all.

- **Where are the staff reports to previous City Council meetings regarding the topic of homelessness?**

- [April 17 2018- Staff Report 3422 - Homelessness Study Update](#)
- [July 17 2018 – Staff Report 3536 - Homelessness Study Update](#)
- [September 18 2018 – Staff Report – 3579 – Declare a Shelter Crisis](#)
- [April 16 2019 – Staff Report – 3713 – Shelter Crisis Resolution](#)
- [June 18 2019 – Staff Report – 3791 – Update on Strategies and Priorities to Address Homelessness](#)
- [July 9 2019 – Staff Report – 3829 – Evaluation of Potential Sites to Locate Housing Navigation Center](#)

Live and previously recorded City Council meetings can be [viewed](#) online.

- **Will there be community meetings regarding the development of a navigation center?**

Yes, there will be three community workshops in August.

- [Wednesday, August 14, 2019 from 5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.](#) at Harbor Light Church, 4760 Thornton Ave.
- [Saturday, August 24, 2019 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.](#) at Harbor Light Church, 4760 Thornton Ave.
- [Monday, August 26, 2019 from 5 p.m. – 8 p.m.](#) at Fremont Teen Center, 39770 Paseo Padre Pkwy.

These workshops will provide community members an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the navigation center model. Staff will be available to receive feedback and answer questions.

- **What has been the public input process for selecting a site?**

All members of the public have had an opportunity to speak during the agenda item of a housing navigation center at City Council meetings. The public can also e-mail questions or feedback at [hnc@fremont.gov](mailto:hnc@fremont.gov). The City will host two community outreach workshops in August for additional public input.

## Navigation Center Participants

- **How will participants in a Navigation Center be vetted?**

Participants are vetted using a standardized assessment process whereby the provider reviews different domains and community priorities including length of time homelessness, vulnerabilities such as health-related needs, etc., as well as City and community prioritized “hot spots” or individuals that score as the ‘most vulnerable’ on the Coordinated Entry priority list, also known as the By Name List. Part of the assessment will review whether the client has the capacity to live in dorm-style living. The Council will have an opportunity to weigh in on additional requirements for entry.

- **How will clients be selected to participate in the Navigation Center?**

Fifty percent will be selected from proximity to the Navigation Center (half from that district) and 50% from the Tri-Cities By-Name List (see question below).

Fremont, Newark and Union City have worked cooperatively in serving the Tri-City homeless population. The City of Newark is providing their portion of HEAP funding towards the Navigation Center project and Union City’s CareVan Program serving homeless families and singles sleeping in their cars, accepts many participants from Fremont.

- **What is the By Name List?**

Alameda County has moved to a Coordinated Entry System, where each homeless person completes a coordinated entry assessment about their personal situation and need for assistance. Certain factors (questions) are weighted more heavily, based on client need. For example, if an individual is disabled or has chronic health conditions, or is elderly or has

young children etc., they may receive a higher score indicating that they are more vulnerable on the street than someone else.

Individuals who are most vulnerable have their names rise to the top of the By Name List for prioritized placement into permanent supportive housing. Each geographic area of the county receives the names of those in their specific area (Fremont, Newark and Union City) who are most in need of housing. The list is dynamic which means that as new assessments are done, the individual's position on the list may change.

- **Will people who use drugs or alcohol be admitted?**

Navigation centers do not allow drug or alcohol use. Clients cannot and should not use on site. Many navigation centers and service providers employ a [harm reduction model](#) where those participating in the program will not be evicted for use and client referrals will not be limited to only those that are clean and sober. Services to support recovery will be offered and encouraged for those that have a substance abuse problem.

The Navigation Center will follow a "[housing first](#)" approach that prioritizes permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues. Additionally, Housing First is based on the theory that client choice is valuable in housing selection and supportive service participation, and that exercising that choice is likely to make a client more successful in remaining housed and improving their life.

- **Will people who are dealing with mental health issues be admitted?**

Mental illness cuts across all socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. Homeless persons with mental health issues will be accepted into the Navigation Center. Support services will be provided to help participants seek appropriate medical care and interventions. With appropriate medication (when needed) and a wide range of services tailored to meet their needs, most people who live with mental health challenges can significantly reduce the negative impacts of their condition and find a satisfying measure of achievement and independence.

- **What percentage of the general population suffers from mental illness, and can people with mental illness lead successful and productive lives?**

[One in 5](#) American adults experience some form of mental health challenges in any given year. Across the population, [1 in every 25](#) adult is living with a serious mental health condition such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or long-term recurring major depression.

Despite the chronic and long-term nature of some mental disorders, with the proper treatment, people suffering from mental disorders can live productive lives and be a vital part of their communities. Between 70-90% of individuals have significant reduction of symptoms and improved quality of life with a combination of pharmacological and

psychosocial treatments and supports.

Additionally, there is substantial evidence that once an individual with mental illness is living in permanent housing, many of their symptoms improve or reduce. The stress and fear associated being unsheltered, can exacerbate otherwise manageable conditions.

- **What will happen if someone is violent at the Navigation Center or violates other rules?**  
Violence is not permitted at the Navigation Center, and a participant can be removed from the Center should violence occur. The operator will work closely with Fremont Police Department if support from law enforcement is needed.
- **What is the policy on visitors at the Berkeley STAIR Center? Can someone who is staying at the STAIR Center have guests? If guests are allowed at the STAIR Center, what are BACS thoughts on prohibiting/limiting guests?**

Guests are allowed to visit during non-quiet hours (quiet hours are generally 10 pm to 6 am). Visitors are restricted to the outside areas of the center and the community room. Visitors are not allowed in the sleeping bungalows. Sometimes the families or children of a participant may come to visit. There is not a limit to the number of visitors a person may bring in at one time but we have never had a client bring more than 3-4 people max. On average the number of visitors per day is 3-4 people max from clients – most visitors are from other jurisdictions/government/social services sector.

## Navigation Center Logistics/Operations

- **Who will operate Fremont's Navigation Center?**  
A Request for Information was solicited by the City and sent to five potential service operators. Two highly qualified agencies submitted proposals. After a response to written questions and interviews, with six raters from the City Manager's Office, the Police Department, Human Services Department, Community Services Department and two community members. Bay Area Community Services (BACS) has been selected to be the potential operator of the housing Navigation Center, if the City Council decides to move forward with this project at a location, which has yet to be determined by the City.

BACS is the operator of the Berkeley Stair Center, Oakland's two Navigation Centers, and was also selected to be the operator for a Navigation Center in Hayward. BACS anticipates being able to quickly replicate existing services and ramp up operations. BACS has extensive experience providing navigation services for persons experiencing homelessness. BACS has operated in Fremont since 1974. BACS South County Wellness Center, which is on Grimmer Boulevard, is a drop-in site for homeless adults and adults living with behavioral health challenges and housing insecurity. The site offers showers, meals, and will soon offer laundry services, as well as housing navigation assistance, employment assistance and a variety of counseling and support group programs.

- **What are the rules of conduct for a Navigation Center?**

Rules may vary based on the service operator, but generally any act of violent behavior, or use or sale of illegal substances may subject a person to expulsion from the site.

- **Navigation Centers have low-barrier thresholds for entry. What does that mean?**  
Low-barrier entry is a way to accept people who do not easily come indoors. Our most vulnerable community members may be isolated and not easily trust others. They may have previously sought services without successful outcomes. They may also have mental health or substance use challenges or have suffered from trauma in their lives or on the street. These characteristics are not determinants of being accepted into a low-barrier program. Participants, however, need to participate and adhere to community rules of conduct/expectations.

- **What about garbage; will the Navigation Center be unsightly and a magnet for shopping carts and garbage?**  
The Navigation Center will provide enough secured storage for each participant and limit what participants bring into the Center. It is often a very personal process for individuals to divide out what is no longer valuable to them. Additionally, shopping carts are often used because they are mobile and unhoused people are often moved and forced out of areas, a place to stay and store items in the Center will alleviate the need for a cart.

The Operator of the Center will be responsible for maintaining the area around the Center to ensure that sidewalks and streets are clean and walkable.

- **If participants are allowed to bring their pets to the Navigation Center, how will they be cared for?**  
Participants are responsible for the care and supervision of their pets, just as they were when they were living outdoors. Pets must be under the control of their owner at all times.
- **What is the plan to feed participants at the Navigation Center?**  
Generally, the operator of a Navigation Center provides one meal per day for participants, and staff work with participants intentionally on sourcing food so that they learn the skills towards long-term self-sufficiency. A refrigerator and microwaves are offered for food storage and heating of food
- **If Navigation Center participants are unemployed, how are they expected to purchase their own food and basic needs?**  
Homeless persons have access to a variety of income sources. They may collect General Assistance (GA) through Alameda County Social Services, and older adults may be receiving social security. Some may have Veteran's benefits or be on unemployment, and some may have qualified for Cal Fresh (food stamps). Many that are permanently disabled collect SSDI Disability payments through the Social Security Office.
- **What type of buildings will be used for the Navigation Center? What will a navigation center look like aesthetically?**  
The Navigation Center proposes to use double wide portable buildings, commonly found on

school sites in our city and used every day by hundreds of Fremont students. With appropriate landscaping these buildings, while portable and temporary in nature, can be made attractive with trellising and landscaping. Attractive fencing and landscaping can offer privacy for participants and screening of the Center from local residents. The State does not regulate the design or specifications for Navigation Centers

- **How much will it cost for the Navigation Center to be built?**

The City of Fremont is currently developing conceptual plans including a detailed cost plan, which will provide estimated costs for development of a Navigation Center at both the City Hall (rear parking lot) and Decoto Surplus Property sites. Staff will present these estimates at a City Council Meeting in September.

## Navigation Center Location

- **Does a Navigation Center need to be near social and health services?**

Many homeless persons get around town by using bicycles and public transportation and very few have automobiles. A Navigation Center needs to be located near good transportation lines (bus and BART) that will get people to areas that have social services and medical services. It is important for Navigation Center participants to independently and successfully travel to services. The Navigation Center is preparing and supporting clients back into a housed lifestyle, which includes learning to independently access needed services. Case management services will also be provided on site.

- **Does a Navigation Center need to be near grocery stores, food establishments and other amenities?**

A Navigation Center supports the transition for individuals from living on the street to re-enter housing and residential communities. Close proximity to amenities like grocery stores, banks, food outlets, supports this transition and decreases obstacles in maintaining daily needs. The Center provides one meal per day and intentionally helps participants source ongoing basic needs as part of the plan.

- **Does a Navigation Center need to be close to public transportation?**

It is beneficial for a Navigation Center to be near bus stops or a BART station as many unhoused residents are on foot or use bicycles.

- **Is locating a Navigation Center in an industrial area the best location to assist the homeless getting rehoused and back into mainstream society?**

Industrial areas are the least protested location for Navigation Centers; however, such a site may be difficult for Navigation Center participants, if it is remote from transportation services. Many homeless persons do not have cars. Navigation Center participants can greatly benefit from being in or near a neighborhood environment, which is where they will live once they are permanently housed.

- **Why not choose a larger location to serve more people?**

The Navigation Center, as proposed, is designed to serve up to 45 adult persons, for a short

term of 6 months or less. This model has an intense focus on housing placement, a high staff to participant ratio to build trust and focus on individual housing readiness. It is more costly to operate, but the success rates have been higher than for traditional shelters that often serve a larger number of participants.

- **How was the criteria for selecting a site, selected?**

At the June 18, 2019 City Council Special Meeting - Work Session, City staff presented the proposed site selection criteria for a potential Navigation Center. A combination of factors were considered to develop the criteria: the physical space required to support a Navigation Center setup, (based on the STAIR Center model), accessibility to transportation and food services, connection to utility hookups, and environmental suitability.

Below is an excerpt from the June 18, 2019 Study Session staff report:

Initial Screening Criteria

*The proposed initial screening criteria listed below will be used for the property search at a macro level to identify City-owned sites that could be viable for establishing the navigation center and operating it for up to five years. The list of sites will be determined based on these minimum threshold conditions to determine eligibility and rule out easily identifiable impediments that would eliminate them from consideration. Proposed Initial Screening Criteria – disqualifying factors for City-owned properties*

- Sites less than 16,000 square feet
- Site with a slope greater than five percent (area of buildable footprint)
- Developed parkland
- Not immediately available
- Not available for a period of up to five years
- Currently have approved and funded projects by Council

Navigation Center Development Goals and Criteria

*To assist in the evaluation of City-owned properties, staff recommends using the following goals and criteria in determining viability and development feasibility of each site, including the one proposed by Niles Discovery Church. Divided into three overarching goals – accessibility, physical suitability, and environmental suitability – staff recommends the following criteria.*

Goal Criteria

Accessibility

- Within 0.50 miles of food services
- Within 0.50 miles of bus stop
- Bus service with access to BART

Physical suitability

- Utility connection points about property

Environmental suitability

- Located outside of a fault trace zone
- No known significant environmental issues exist

Additional points

- Frequency of bus service

- *Bike lane networks near sites*
- *Certain environmental constraints*
- *Proximity to other services and agencies*
- *Site context and surrounding uses*

For the full methodology, please read the June 18, 2019 City Council Special Meeting-Work Session [Staff Report](#).

- **What other sites are being considered for a housing Navigation Center and what criteria is the City using to select potential sites?**

City staff reviewed all City-owned properties, of 1/3 acre or more, excluding developed parkland. Multiple sites were evaluated using a criteria approved by Council on June 18, 2019 (see question above). Of the 11 City sites that scored highest against the criteria, Council voted, on July 9, 2019, to move forward with further exploration of:

- City Hall rear parking lot on Liberty St. and Capitol Avenue
- City surplus site on Decoto Rd. and Fremont Blvd., next to Reagan's Nursery.

For more information regarding the site evaluation and recommendation, please refer to the [July 9, 2019 Staff Report](#).

- **Shouldn't a navigation center be close to the police station so that an officer could respond quickly if there is an incident?**

Police operate within [patrol zones](#) in the community. When a public safety call comes in, officers are notified by dispatch and those closest to the incident respond. It is not the practice of the Police Department to deploy officers from a central location, like the Police Station, to respond to all calls. It is more effective that they respond while already out patrolling the neighborhoods.

- **Shouldn't a navigation center be close to a hospital in case there is a medical emergency?**

Both paramedics and fire engines respond to medical emergencies. Fire engines operate out of [11 fire stations](#) strategically located throughout the community to be able to respond to service calls as quickly as possible in a health emergency when time may be of the essence. Both City Hall and the Decoto Surplus property have a fire station located 0.80 miles away. Should emergency transportation be required, ambulance transportation will be made immediately available.

## Public and Community Safety

- **What about the safety of children who are walking by a Navigation Center?**

With increasing numbers of homeless persons in our communities, it is not uncommon for all of us, even children, to see or walk by homeless persons on the street almost every day. Encounters with homeless persons are generally uneventful, like encounters with any other person in the community. Many homeless persons, are parents themselves, with similar concerns for children, though they may no longer be living in a family structure.

In a Navigation Center, participants are supervised 24/7 by trained staff. Participants are focused on their own tasks of daily living. Some participants work, others will be tending to personal matters and some will be off site exploring housing options with their Housing Navigators.

Participants in a Navigation Center create their own community and in many ways become self-regulating. They learn to support each other and re-enforce with each other, the importance of following the rules.

- **Will the Navigation Center create a magnet effect and attract other homeless people to the area?**

Participants may come and go as they please but cannot have overnight guests. Guests are limited to the community room and outside sitting areas of the site. Additionally, there are no external services offered at the Center, so there is not a reason for others who cannot receive services to gather in proximity to the Center. If people do come, staff will redirect them to the Drop-in/Wellness Center for the Homeless where they may obtain food and services. Experience with existing Navigation Centers demonstrates that Centers are not a magnet to additional homeless people coming to the area.

- **Will we see an uptick of crime with the creation of a Navigation Center?**

There is no correlation between the opening of a shelter or Navigation Center and an increase in crime. Crimes perpetrated by the homeless are often against other homeless individuals or quality of life crimes, i.e. sleeping/camping outside, petty theft for amenities, or trespassing because they do not have a place to call their own. A safe place to stay would alleviate the impetus for these crimes

- **What are the crime rates of homeless in Fremont?**

Homelessness in and of itself is not a crime, so there is not mechanism to give crime rates of our non-housed community. Currently Fremont's biggest crime trend is auto burglaries, which is not driven by Fremont's homeless population. The Fremont Police believes Fremont will be safer as a result of the navigation center because it will house 45 community members every six months who don't currently have shelter. Helping people out of homelessness makes our entire community safer.

## Navigation Center Success Rate

- **What is the success rate of the Stair Center in Berkeley?**

In Alameda County, the Berkeley STAIR Center is an innovative and extremely successful example of a Housing Navigation Center. It has been in operation for less than a year and 82 of the 99 (82%) individuals exiting the STAIR Center are reported to have moved into permanent housing. The average stay has been four months. Hayward is also in the process of opening a Center with the same provider and operating model. The concept is it is temporary in nature and intended to quickly prepare individuals to move into more permanent housing.

The City of Oakland Navigation Center (Housing Fast Support Network) had an 88% permanent housing success rate last year.

- **According to the SF System Wide Exit Performance Report (March 2015 - February 2019), there were 46% of Total Successful Exits (with only 14% of their clients exiting to “Permanent Housing.”) It has been presented to us that the Berkeley Navigation Center “reported” an 84% success rate. How could such a large discrepancy exist?**

The San Francisco Navigation (NAV) Centers switched their program model in 2016/2017 to one where stays are limited to 30 days, unless you had already been identified as priority 1 (i.e., Public Supportive Housing eligible). In San Francisco, this means you have to have been homeless for 13 years or longer, plus have some medical needs, etc. Very few people in the encampments met this criterion, so very few stayed for as long as it took to get housing. Therefore, the SF Navigation Center became more like a shelter than a Navigation Center. Before this switch, the San Francisco Navigation Center was consistently reporting ~75% exits to permanent housing. (Berkeley’s STAIR exit rate is 82%, not 84%—so right on track with the original Navigation model).

“Regular” shelters in the Berkeley have about a one-third exit rate to permanent housing. By this metric, the new SF Navigation Center model still outperforms Berkeley’s current shelters.

*-Response from Peter Radu, Homeless Manager for City of Berkeley. Prior to working for the City of Berkeley, Peter worked in San Francisco’s Housing Navigation Program.*

- **Where do participants go if they are not successful in completing the program or if they are not successful in finding permanent housing?**  
Unfortunately, a 100% success rate is not realistic. People may leave the program unhoused and return to where they were residing previously, in the Tri-Cities area. Some participants may move into residential treatment, rehabilitation programs or other “shelter” options.

## Facts about Homelessness

- **How many homeless are there in Fremont?**

Here are links to the 2017 Homeless Count Census and Survey Report:

- The Fremont Homeless Census and Survey Report:  
<https://fremont.gov/DocumentCenter/View/38652/Fremont-Homeless-Survey-2017>
- The Alameda County Homeless Census and Survey Report:  
<https://fremont.gov/DocumentCenter/View/38653/Alameda-Homeless-Survey-2017>

A new Point in Time Count was conducted in January 2019. Preliminary information for Fremont includes a total of count of 608 people experiencing homelessness in Fremont. This is a 27% increase from the 2017 figure of 479. Alameda County recently released aggregated data for the county showing a 43% increase in homelessness. A full report with

data specific to Fremont should be released in August.

- **What are the root causes of homelessness?**

Homelessness begins where relationships end. There is a common misconception that alcohol and drug abuse are the root causes of homelessness, however that is rarely the case. In most situations, multiple factors are at play.

- Simple economic issues are among the most critical factors contributing to homelessness. These include the lack of affordable housing, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and low wages. Many people are living so close to the edge of economic disaster that one financial setback, such as job loss, car troubles, illness, divorce, loss of a spouse with income, abandonment, or any unexpected expense can lead to the loss of their housing.
- Non-economic factors can also play a role in homelessness. These include psychological or physical disabilities, learning disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, medical conditions, drug and alcohol dependence resulting from unresolved traumas, history of childhood abuse, sexual abuse, or some combination of these.
- Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness among women, and 89% of homeless woman have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives.

\*Source:2017 HUD Annual Homeless Assessment Report Data

- **Where is the affordable housing that will help be a solution to the homeless problem?**

Fremont currently has 1000 units of affordable housing in the pipeline, at varying levels of affordability for those who make between 80%-20% of median income. Non-profit developers, who are receiving funding from Alameda County's measure A1 bond for affordable housing, must reserve 20% of the units being developed for those with incomes at 20% of median income.

However, homeless persons with disabilities or who are elderly frequently live on disability or social security based incomes, which are more often at 11% of median income. Even with the current pipeline units and A1 bond there will not be enough affordable housing for the current population of homeless or housing that will accept those with the least access to resources, without available subsidies. Groups in Alameda County are looking at potential additional tax measures that would help provide these necessary subsidies.

In addition to affordable housing, there is a system of care that works to end homelessness and helps participants access housing through flexible financial assistance and other mechanisms.

- **How many encampments are there in Fremont? What is the City's plan for cleaning up encampments?**

When the City identifies an "encampment", it can mean a shopping cart full of personal items, a group of inhabited vehicles, or a tent. Some encampments are "active" meaning a person or person(s) are known to be living there. As of June 14, 2019, there are 32 active encampments. This number fluctuates as people move or are asked to leave an area.

Community members may [report encampments](#), and abatement of an encampment is prioritized based on identifiable health or public safety hazards. Encampments are regularly scheduled for clean up through the City's Environmental Services Division.

Frequently, encampment dwellers who consider Fremont their home must move from one location to another as abatements take place. Availability of a Navigation Center would give some of Fremont's homeless an opportunity for a short-term place to stay and the hope of a more stable and permanent housing future.

- **How do I stay up to date on the navigation center and homelessness in Fremont?**  
For more information about Fremont's temporary Housing Navigation Center and resources for those experiencing homelessness, visit [www.Fremont.gov/Homeless](http://www.Fremont.gov/Homeless). You can also [subscribe to our homelessness mailing list](#) and receive updates via e-mail or text.