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Federal Officials Approve Use of Transit Hub to Shelter Homeless

A plan to shelter the homeless during El Niño rainstorms at the unused Santa Ana Transit Terminal in the Orange County Civic Center has been approved on an interim basis through June by the Federal Transit Administration.

The approval was delivered by letter today, two days after the Orange County Transportation Authority made the request on behalf of the County. The County opened escrow last month to buy the property from the Orange County Transportation Authority; a proposed lease for the interim use was sent last week to OCTA and required federal approval.

“The County is committed to doing all we can to help get people out of the rain and sheltered during the El Niño rainstorms that we know are coming,” Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Lisa Bartlett, Fifth District, said.

Board of Supervisors Vice Chair Michelle Steel said the interim use would be available while the County completes the purchase of the building, expected this spring. “This will provide a small but important amount of relief during the rains,” she said.

Earlier this month, [Supervisor Andrew Do](#), First District, directed county staff to work with its federal lobbyists and OCTA to find a faster solution to using the abandoned bus terminal. Supervisor Do praised today's action, but acknowledged it's only one part of the county's comprehensive response to homelessness.

“This emergency shelter will help alleviate suffering in the short-term, and Orange County staff are working with Mercy House to begin preparations of the bus terminal site,” said Supervisor Do, who persuaded his colleagues to create a County “homeless czar” to better coordinate existing assistance programs.

Supervisor Todd Spitzer, Third District, has supported efforts to provide another shelter option for the homeless, many who live in the Civic Center amid government buildings. “We have a moral and ethical duty to protect the homeless, and to provide a safe and clean place for our county employees and the citizens who come to the Civic Center for services,” he said.

Supervisor Shawn Nelson was the first Board member to pose the idea of sheltering the homeless at the unused terminal. The Board last year approved a new multi-service center for the homeless in Anaheim but it won't be ready until later this year. “We are doing everything we can to help our homeless residents, one step at a time. This step represents one of many in our commitment to that effort,” he said.

The County also finalized a contract Friday with non-profit shelter operator Mercy House to secure emergency shelter beds and transportation services for those caught outside during rainstorms, which could hit again as early as this weekend. The County will continue to use National Guard armories in Fullerton and Santa Ana for night-time shelter and other services, including meals, showers and medical services.

The interim lease with OCTA calls for the County to pay \$11,615 a month for emergency use of the terminal property. Providing meals or other services onsite is not permitted under the lease.

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