

COVID-19 Needs Action

April 9, 2020

Members of the City Council

Mayor

Inundated by a virtual tsunami of largely redundant and repeat emails /notifications from city hall and your offices, it becomes ever more difficult to discern what has actually been done to alleviate our crisis vs merely talking about it.

Here are, therefore, some of the actions we expected to be well on their way by now:

(1) Emergency appropriation – or nominal fee, temporary lease – of the former post office from Alston Way to Kittredge St, and its repurposing for homeless shelter-in-place and isolation housing, including services.

Given the urgency, yet our city's demonstrated lack in the experience, expertise and decisive leadership required to handle such task expeditiously; it would have to be contracted out as a turn-key project. (Ideally, COVID-19 or not, this task should have already been implemented well before winter season - instead of spending scarce financial resources on police overtime, chasing the homeless from place to place without providing any meaningful alternatives.)

(2) Request from and coordination with the University to provide shelter-in-place and physical distance housing including basic services. Keep in place for at least 4 more months using existing empty dorms and other forms of student housing for:

(a) students that have no home, and

(b) students that for various reasons cannot go home, but are still on the street, or in co-ops and other group housing that don't provide for physical distancing. After all, it's the University that invited these students with implied promises as to the availability of housing in Berkeley.

And finally, for:

(c) homeless but otherwise self-sufficient persons were it not for the lack of a roof over their head and a bed with some basic services. As it stands, they can't even wash their hands as they are being told to do.

Such housing would be in addition to the living quarters as quarantine facilities the University set up for 42 students.

(3) Request and get line for field hospital(s) to increase the number of ER and ICU beds in our local hospitals by moving patients with milder COVID-19 symptoms, as well as patients with relatively minor ailments into field hospitals set-up by either the state or federal agencies, the National Guard, or the US Army. Such requests should be put forth for the following:

(a) jointly with the university for a field hospital on Edwards Field, with auxiliary facilities under the stadium's bleachers;

(b) jointly with Alta Bates and the School Board for a field hospital on the Willard School baseball field, in light of the close proximity to the hospital, with some auxiliary services at the school.

(4) Renting, at discounted rates, of empty hotel rooms and market rate housing for temporary quarantining and as shelter-in-place, physical distancing housing, again for the homeless and unrelated residents in crowded GLA's and co-ops. Financing would come from housing fees supposedly collected from market rate housing developments. Though not planned for this purpose, we are now facing a crisis that requires extraordinary means to fight the spreading of a fast moving virus.

If you did all this, without telling us, great - except for the latter part.

If not, put your mere talk and oratories aside, rise to the challenge and quickly move forward with the kind of concerted action this crisis requires.

After all, a city whose commitment to endless process of how to plan and build anything is greater than its commitment to decisive action, and whose mayor and council members seem to surround themselves with people who agree with them, and no one else, who can't sit down with anyone who holds a differing opinion – which is both shortsighted and limiting - is no match for an extremely efficient and fast moving virus.

What we need, and should thus expect, are clear Directions, quick Decisions, and a real Plan: The longer we wait, the more people we will put at risk!

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