

**The ACLU's recent press release on homeless-related issues:
John Pietig, City Manager, responds (6Feb2017)**

To the Laguna Beach Community:

Today, the American Civil Liberties Union continued its misguided effort to disparage the compassionate, effective, and best-in-county efforts by the City of Laguna Beach to address the needs of the homeless in our community. In a letter to the City Council, which was also released to the press, the ACLU mischaracterized both the City's efforts and the nature of the litigation, while asserting a laundry list of wide-ranging "settlement" demands.

The City does not believe that press releases are a proper means for resolving the ongoing dispute, and is disappointed that the ACLU would resort to such tactics. The issues raised in the litigation have been appropriately framed before the Court and the parties are now awaiting important rulings. In the meantime, the City has been engaged in discussions with the ACLU, overseen by the assigned magistrate judge, to determine whether an agreeable resolution is possible. Unfortunately, the ACLU's demands thus far remain unreasonable.

Apparently dissatisfied with the results of its efforts in court, the ACLU has now brought the dispute back to the media as it did at the outset of the litigation. In August 2015, the ACLU asserted that the purpose of the lawsuit was to force the City of Laguna Beach to unilaterally provide permanent supportive housing – basically, dedicated apartments along with services such as mental health care and case management. That position was – and remains – unsupported by the law, counterproductive, and bad policy.

In stark contrast, the efforts that the City has taken are both effective and unique in Orange County. Laguna Beach still operates the only municipally-funded homeless shelter in the county and has done so continuously since 2010. That shelter provides not only a heated, cooled, and safe place to sleep, but also restrooms, showers, meals, laundry facilities, sleeping mats, blankets, computer and Internet access, a secure storage area, a safe environment, case management services, and transportation to and from downtown. The shelter's staff focuses on meeting the needs of the homeless in our community, including those with disabilities.

Since 2015, no fewer than 44 formerly homeless individuals in Laguna Beach, including five of the first seven plaintiffs in the ACLU's lawsuit, have been placed in permanent supportive housing operated by non-profit organizations, due in large part to the shelter and its dedicated and compassionate staff. The City also works in collaboration with governmental partners, nonprofit organizations, and members of the local community to offer a wide array of supportive services to homeless persons in the City.

The efforts of the Laguna Beach Police Department to serve the homeless community, while maintaining public health and safety, are similarly praiseworthy. The City was one of the first in Orange County to designate a dedicated Community Outreach Officer to focus almost exclusively on homeless-related issues and outreach efforts and recently funded another such position.

Community Outreach Officers work closely with public and non-profit social service organizations, law enforcement agencies, and the criminal justice system to connect individuals with much needed services such as mental health and substance abuse services, short-term shelter, and long-term housing. Community Outreach Officers work to ensure and improve the quality of life for all housed and unhoused residents of Laguna Beach by training officers regarding mental health and homeless issues and by lawfully enforcing state and local laws intended to preserve and protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the City's residents and visitors. The LBPD has also implemented Project Homecoming through which more than 80 formerly homeless individuals have been reconnected with their families and loved ones all around the country.

The City is proud of our community's unparalleled efforts to assist those who find themselves homeless in Laguna Beach. We believe that those efforts go above and beyond what the law requires, and we will continue to defend those efforts in court.