

Report to St. Marks Social Justice Advocacy Team on April 7, 2017 tour of  
San Francisco Navigation Center (John McCormack)

**DRAFT**

Background – San Francisco is an iconic American city with a combined city/county population of 870,000 persons. Unlike Sacramento, it has a combined city and county government. San Francisco is the center of a major metropolitan area of over 11 million persons and each city in this metro area has its own unique homeless problem. As with Sacramento, San Francisco has a major problem with homeless encampments. The 2015 PIT – Point in Time count estimated 6,700 homeless persons on the streets of San Francisco on any given night with 3,550 of these unsheltered and living on the streets. This reality stands in opposition to the reality of San Francisco and the greater Bay Area- Silicon Valley being the digital brain trust for the world's economy, with millions of affluent, well-educated residents with legitimate expectations of safety, wealth and mobility.

On April 7, 2017, Steve Skiffington and Shireen Miles of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral and John McCormack of St. Marks United Methodist Church visited the San Francisco Navigation Center at 1950 Mission Street in the heart of the Mission District of San Francisco. We went as representatives of our separate congregations and Sacramento ACT. The center area is ½ block from the Mission Street - Richmond to San Francisco Airport BART station and is densely populated. Walking from BART to the center, within one block, you encounter seedy street corners and alleys where drugs are being dealt and multi-million dollar condos, part of a gentrification process driven by the need for high income housing for Silicon Valley workers.

This navigation center, opened in March, 2015, is the first of its kind in San Francisco and is on the site of a former elementary school sold to the City of San Francisco. It conducts monthly tours from 1:00 – 2:00 pm on the first Friday of the month to highlight this model concept. Our tour was lead by Emily Cohen of the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. Emily is a USF graduate who began volunteering in the Tenderloin, worked with Americorp, has done a number of years of work in homeless programs and has post-graduate education in urban housing policy. She reports to Sam Dodge, Dept. CEO, who knows Ryan Loofbourrouw. Emily mentioned that Cindy Cavanaugh and Emily Halcon, Sacramento County and City Homeless Coordinators, recently visited the center, which is owned by the City and County of San Francisco and is 2 years old in its current iteration. It was kick started by an anonymous \$3 million donation, from a benefactor tired of seeing homeless persons suffering in tent encampments on the street. The center is modeled on the Safe Haven Program in New York City.

To open the center, \$600,000 was capitalized for new trailer buildings, remodeled bathrooms and showers, ADA accessibility, etc. The city contracts with Episcopal Community Services (ECS) of San Francisco, a 501© 3 charity <http://www.ecs-sf.org/> which then sub-contracts with a second agency. It also partners with the nearby Mission Neighborhood Centers, Inc, a 501© 3 <http://mncsf.org/home/> . All staff at the facility are ECS employees.

The general rationale of the San Francisco navigation centers is to make existing shelters more like low barrier (triage) centers and not make navigation centers more like basic emergency shelters. The mission of the centers is housing-focused, welcoming and to provide short term shelter.

Guests are selected from chronically homeless persons living on the street who meet vetting requirements. Staffers go to the camps and offer space by invitation only. Guests have 24 hour in/out privileges and leave freely during the day and night hours but cannot bring in visitors and must pass through a secure entrance area and office. The facility is staffed 24/7. Guests are allowed to stay for one month or until permanent shelter is found. Also, the nearby residential center allows persons to sign up for shelter.

The center is low to no barrier and based on restoring and maintaining dignity for formerly homeless persons who are used to street abuse. "Partners, Pets and Possessions" are allowed. While pets are allowed, the pet cage is underutilized as guests prefer to keep pets in their living areas. Guests may bring in possessions which are stored in large metal container buildings. The center meets all federal and state anti-discrimination guidelines and thus allows persons who are single, married, straight, gay, trans, etc. Couple are allowed to sleep together with no questions asked as long as other guests are not affected. Some undocumented immigrants are guests but paperwork to house them is more complicated and the vetting process is longer.

During guests' tenure, they are provided wrap-around services and case management. Initial vetting includes enrollment by county benefits workers in Medi-Cal, Medicare, Cal Fresh, SSDI and other vital benefit services. Guests are also connected to employment services through county EDD. A public health clinic is on site each Friday from the San Francisco County Dept. of Public Health. Opioid abuse is a key issue for some guests, so health management is vital.

No illegal drugs or alcohol are admitted on site per a harm reduction program, but use does occur off-site. Guests caught with substances or alcohol are counseled by social and mental health workers to attempt to improve their lives and correct personal problems, but are not barred from admittance unless arrested for a serious crime.

In keeping with maintaining dignity, there are no meal lines. Guests are fed through a partnership with Meals on Wheels at an in-house dining room and kitchen, with assistance from paid staff. There are no security guards but illegal drug dealing does occur in the area and there was a recent shooting at a Walgreen's across the street. There is a San Francisco Police sub-station very close by.

The center contains several dorm rooms hosting a total of 75 occupants. The goal is to move each guest to permanent housing from these navigation shelters. Based on than occupancy of approx. 75 people and projected turnover, each navigation center opened translates to a need for 300 – 400 additional permanent housing units.

The center works closely with neighborhood groups to minimize NIMBY issues. Close collaboration between all stakeholders maintains a tranquil environment for guests, staff and neighbors.

Building on the success of this first center, the City of San Francisco opened a second center in June of 2016 at the Civic Center Hotel and is 3 blocks from this center. The Civic Center site is currently a privately-owned residential hotel and will be demolished for permanent supportive housing. A third site will be opened at the central waterfront area and a fourth in the SOMA neighborhood. Information on these centers can be found on the San Francisco Dept. of Homelessness and Supportive Housing website <[DHSH.sfgov.org](http://DHSH.sfgov.org)>, 27B Van Ness, San Francisco, CA 94102, (415) 252-3232, [DHSH@sfgov.org](mailto:DHSH@sfgov.org). Questions can be directed personally to Emily Cohen, [Emily.Cohen@sfgov.org](mailto:Emily.Cohen@sfgov.org).

MAYOR EDWIN M. LEE  
City & County of San Francisco



Department of Homelessness &  
Supportive Housing

Jeff Koslosky  
Director

## San Francisco Navigation Centers: A housing focused, welcoming, short-term shelter model

### Background

San Francisco faces a significant challenge of homeless people living in encampments. The 2015 Point-in-Time count estimated that 6,700 people experience homelessness in San Francisco on any given night. 3,500 of those people are unsheltered living on the streets.

### Program

The Navigation Center, which opened in March 2015, is a successful program designed to shelter and house San Francisco's highly vulnerable and long-term homeless residents who are often fearful of accessing traditional shelter and services. The Navigation Center provides these otherwise unsheltered San Franciscans room and board while case managers work to connect them to stable income, public benefits, health services, shelter, and permanent housing.

Navigation Centers are different from traditional shelters in that they have few barriers to entry and an intensive focus on housing placements. Unlike traditional shelters, people with partners, pets and possessions are welcome at Navigation Centers. The purpose of a Navigation Center is not just to provide a safe place to stay and a warm meal, but is to support a person in changing their lives by making lasting connections to housing and social services.

The Navigation Center model is supported by a collaborative team of City departments—The Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, Human Services Agency, Department of Public Health, and San Francisco Public Works. Due to its relatively small size, high staffing level, and coordinated City response team, the Navigation Center maintains a tranquil environment for clients, staff, and neighbors.

### Success

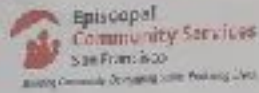
The Navigation Center has been highly successful in serving people who have barriers to a traditional shelter. Since opening the Mission & Civic Center Navigation Centers have brought over 1,300 highly vulnerable people off the streets, and 68% of these guests have moved to housing.<sup>1</sup>

### Building on the Success

The City is building off the success of the first Navigation Center by opening additional sites to expand the number of people brought in off the streets, increase the number of people connected to benefits and stable housing, and diversify the neighborhoods served. The second Navigation Center at the Civic Center Hotel opened in June 2016, and the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing is in the process of opening a third site in the central waterfront area on Port property and a fourth in the SOMA neighborhood.

As of April 2017.





**MNHC**  
Mission Neighborhood Resource Center

## Navigation Center

A joint project of Episcopal Community Services,  
Mission Neighborhood Resource Center,  
San Francisco Interfaith Council and the  
City and County of San Francisco.





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