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# Santa Rosa to close one homeless shelter, enlarge the other

## Santa Rosa council breaks former mayor's pledge, votes to expand southwest facility

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

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Four years after Santa Rosa opened a homeless shelter in the city's southwest area with a promise to limit it to 80 beds, a new council has broken that pledge.

The council unanimously agreed Tuesday to close its 40-bed homeless shelter off Sonoma Avenue and add those beds to the Samuel Jones homeless shelter on Finley Avenue. It could save \$211,000 a year and is one of more than a hundred cost-cutting measures the city is implementing to offset a projected \$23 million budget deficit for the budget year that starts in July.

"Yes, (former mayor) Mike Martini made that promise, but we are in extraordinary times right now," said Councilwoman Jane Bender, responding to audience members who recalled the promise made on the council's behalf in 2005.

The promise to limit the size of the southwest shelter was in part to quell neighborhood fears that the homeless would bring added crime, litter and other problems to the rural neighborhood. Talk of consolidating the two shelters arose last September as the city's projected budget deficit continued to balloon.

Neighbors, while conceding their fears about the 80-bed shelter had not materialized, initially objected to the proposed increase. None of the neighbors, however, showed up Tuesday to oppose the expansion.

Mild opposition was voiced by attorney David Grabill, who heads the Housing Advocacy Group, and Roseland resident Duane De Witt, both of whom urged the council to find the money to keep the Brookwood shelter open in the face of a potential growing homeless population if the national and local economies continue to worsen.

"We don't know where the bottom of the recession is," said Grabill.

De Witt said squeezing 120 people into the former 17,000-square-foot National Guard building — plus an additional 18 beds available on particularly cold winter nights — "will be too crowded."

Both suggested the city pursue community-minded benefactors or find other sources of

funding to keep Brookwood open. Mayor Susan Gorin suggested Grabill and De Witt lead the community fund-raising effort.

City housing manager Nancy Gornowicz said consolidating the 120 beds at the Finley site should reduce the city's operational costs from \$771,000 to \$560,000, a \$211,000 annual savings.

Both shelters are operated by Catholic Charities under a contract with the city.

The Brookwood shelter site, formerly the offices of the state Board of Equalization, was purchased by the city's Housing Authority for \$730,000 in 2002 and the city spent more than \$200,000 converting the 5,000-square-foot building.

Outside the council's discussion Tuesday, City Housing Director David Gouin said the city's seven-member Housing Authority will decide whether to sell the building or lease it to non-profits to provide some type of transitional housing or single rooms for the homeless.

Asked if the nearly \$1 million the city spent to purchase and renovate the property was a bad investment, Gouin said, "I don't think any of us saw the drop in revenues coming."

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