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Homelessness task force looks towards future: Permanent, affordable housing on tap

By Zachary Horner | zhorner@sanfordherald.com 8 hrs ago



The S3 Housing Connect task force made presentations to both the Lee County Board of Commissioners and Sanford City Council this week, and while much about the last year was celebrated, their main focus was looking forward.

Task force chair Jeffrey Rawlings, Sanford Community Development Manager Karen Kennedy and Terry Allebaugh with the N.C. Coalition to End Homelessness were among the people to share thoughts on S3's current progress.

Rawlings, who works with Johnston-Lee-Harnett Community Action, spoke about the need to get more permanent housing. The emergency shelter put in place near the end of 2017 was a positive step, but finding more permanent, affordable housing was just as important.

“What we’re aiming to do in our committee is close the gap there,” Rawlings said. “We’ve made some great strides so far, and we are looking to do much more in the community as well. It’s something to be very proud of.”

Allebaugh, who has been working with the task force on a contract basis, echoed Rawlings’ concerns, saying that permanent housing without regard for the homeless person’s past was the next step. Several of the shelters in Sanford have requirements for people to be able to stay there.

“Nobody deserves to be homeless,” Allebaugh said. “They may have made mistakes, people may have challenges, but nobody deserves to be homeless. So let’s not exclude people from shelters because they may have been drinking. Let’s figure out the solution to remove those barriers so those homeless people are also housed.”

Wayne Eric Chew gave a preliminary report on the Jan. 31 point-in-time count conducted by S3. He said volunteers counted a total of 102 homeless people in Lee County, 51 each sheltered and unsheltered. Chew said the more than 30 volunteers gave him hope for the future of the task force.

“They’re passionate and they’re working hard to solve the problems that come with homelessness,” Chew said. “The amazing thing for me was to see Democrats and Republicans working together, men and women of all ages working together on one mission.”

Rachel Picard, who has been interning with the task force, gave a brief presentation on S3’s website and shared with both the commissioners and the city council that her work inspired her to want to pursue homelessness nonprofit work as a career, a commitment that was praised by both boards.

Both Commissioners Chair Amy Dalrymple and Sanford Mayor Chet Mann applauded the work done by the task force.

“It’s a problem that we don’t want to have in Lee County, but it’s certainly something that’s not unique to this county,” Dalrymple said. “It’s just going to take some hard work. I’m just really encouraged by what we’re hearing tonight. We’ll continue to support you, and hopefully this year at this time we’ll have a much better report.”

Mann said, “Thank you for helping us eliminate hopelessness and homelessness. We can’t be a city that focuses only on economic growth and ignore the needs of the people that are homeless.”

City Councilman Charles Taylor, who is a member of the task force, suggested that the council consider including it in its yearly budget like other nonprofits, something that will likely be discussed at the council’s upcoming retreat.

S3 will continue to have monthly meetings and committee meetings. For more information, visit s3housingconnect.com.

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