

January 15, 2014

A message from Venice Community Housing Executive Director, Steve Clare:



Steve Clare with Free Storage Venice volunteers, Jack Prichett and Barbara Milliken & FSV client

Free Storage Venice is not only needed during cold winter months, it is needed all year around.

On December 11, 2013 Councilman Mike Bonin, in a letter to the Venice Neighborhood Council, announced that he was instructing City crews to conduct regular and comprehensive clean-ups of “materials” on Venice streets and sidewalks. This is commonly referred to as the City’s “Bag and Tag” program. He also announced his support for a voluntary storage program because “it will help people in need; it will encourage people to seek assistance; it will keep our streets and sidewalks blight free; and it will protect the City legally.” [The

city was recently enjoined by a Superior Court Judge from removing personal property from streets and sidewalks unless it is believed to be abandoned.]

VCH is seeking the support of Councilman Mike Bonin and Venice Neighborhood Council to obtain the Senior Center building (which is no longer used as a Senior Center and now vacant) at Pacific & Westminster as a permanent resource for the unhoused to provide storage and other services. Now that the existing facility is full, none of the goals identified by our Councilman can be fulfilled unless a larger, permanent location is identified. The benefits to both the unhoused and the Venice community of a large scale permanent program that can receive and store a large quantity of property are many and obvious:

- Providing a safe and accessible storage option for our unhoused neighbors will allow them to safeguard their property and enable them to attend to important matters with the knowledge that their property is safe and protected from the weather.
- Helping people get their personal property off the public rights of way will reduce blight and unsanitary conditions and make the community healthier and more attractive for everyone.
- A year around voluntary storage program will reduce the need for a Bag and Tag program because there will be less clutter to deal with.
- A permanent location will provide another point of contact for social service referral and delivery to our unhoused neighbors.
- And most importantly, as Councilman Bonin has stated: Helping our most vulnerable neighbors is “the right thing to do.”

At their last meeting on December 16, 2013, the Venice Neighborhood Council considered this issue, took public comment and suggestions for other locations for the program. Eight locations were identified, including the Westminster Senior Center. After public comment and full discussion by the Board, the VNC voted to recommend the Senior Center to Councilman Bonin.

At this time, Councilman Bonin is still investigating all of the options that may be available. We continue to advocate for the Westminster Senior Center for the following reasons:

- It is conveniently located nearby where most unhoused people in Venice live and congregate.
- Because it is close by and convenient, homeless people will be encouraged to take advantage of the program;
- Locations further inland would require homeless to travel through other neighborhoods and along the Abbot Kinney commercial corridor;
- The Westminster Senior Center is large enough (over 2800 square feet) to accommodate a lot of property, and if fully utilized could actually make a significant impact on reducing blight in our community;
- The Center is large enough to also store property that the City confiscates in its Bag and Tag program, rather than transporting it downtown to store as it does currently. This would make it much easier for owners of confiscated property to reclaim their belongings;
- The Senior Center has bathrooms which can be made available to those in need, and depending upon funding and staffing, could be available during evening hours. (At this time, the beach bathroom facilities, the only public facilities in the area, close at sundown);
- The Senior Center is large enough to accommodate other social service providers for outreach and referral services;
- The Senior Center is located next to a dog park and a secondary highway (Pacific Avenue) and the closest residence is 135 feet away from the Center. While there is no place in Venice that everyone in our community would support, this location is minimally intrusive and most convenient of all those considered by the VNC at its last meeting and provides the greatest opportunity to seriously address a needs of both the housed and unhoused members of our community.

If you agree that the Westminster Senior Center is a good location for a permanent program, please contact Councilman Bonin mikebonin@lacity.org and let him know that you support a permanent voluntary storage program at the Westminster Senior Center. If you have concerns about this location or would like to suggest an alternative location, please contact VCH at info@vchcorp.org.