

PC Commissioners Set To Purchase Land For Resource Center

Posted: Nov 13, 2012 10:21 PM CST Updated: Nov 13, 2012 11:01 PM CST

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Panama City, Fla. -

After months of discussion and debate, it looks like the long awaited Community Resource Center is on it's way. Panama City commissioners voted unanimously to purchase property for the facility, as they look to address issues with the Rescue Mission and downtown vagrancy.

It was a vote was met by near universal approval by those in attendance Tuesday night, and one that commissioners have been waiting to make.

"We've had many, many meetings, we've looked at many, many sites," Mayor Greg Brudnicki said.

Tuesday they voted to purchase 70 acres of land along the Star Avenue corridor out near Highway 231 for the construction of a Community Resource Center.

"This is the right thing to do, and we need your leadership to move to the next level," said Emily Dowdy with the Homeless Task Force.

It's the culmination of months of work for the Homeless Task Force. They spent almost a year and a half gathering data and bringing in experts on homelessness.

"When we got Mr. Marbut in here, I think it was a great deal to bring him here," Mayor Brudnicki said. "He shed a lot of light on a lot of issues."

The land will cost the city about \$6,500 per acre - or \$450,000 - and will be paid for with the assistance of SHIP, or the State Housing Initiative Partnership. SHIP provides funds to local governments as an incentive to create partnerships that produce and preserve affordable home ownership and multifamily housing.

http://apps.floridahousing.org/StandAlone/FHFC_ECM/ContentPage.aspx?PAGE=0132

Tuesday, the commission agreed not only to the purchase, but also to immediately put down \$25,000 to get the project started. Once the city annexes the land, the will be reimbursed for the \$25,000 under SHIP.

However, commissioners wanted to make sure that their bases are covered.

"Our primary position here of responsibility is also to protect the city, and you're talking about half a million dollars," Commissioner John Kady said.

Several provisions will be written into the agreement, including no further city involvement and funding after the land is bought, a promise that there would be no recruitment for vagrants

outside of Bay County, and a guarantee that once the shelter opens up, the Rescue Mission closes down.

The task force is looking to local charity funding as well as both private and federal grants so they can provide security and operate the center. They're hoping to provide housing, job training, and other resources for the homeless.

"The resource center will provide these services in a location that gives participants the best possible services with the least possible impact on local residents, homes and businesses," said Zana Ireland with the Homeless Task Force.

Mayor Greg Brudnicki has high hopes for the project.

"It's gonna be tough, but I know these people will get it done," Mayor Brudnicki said.

There will be a 60 day due diligence period as the city evaluates the land and moves forward with annexation. The task force has a web site set up where you can read the finer points of the project. You can visit the link at <http://www.bayarearesourcecenter.com/>