

Robyn Tice

From: Don Kraher
Sent: Thursday, February 4, 2021 9:07 AM
To: Jared Moore; Ann Hill; Sherri Myers; Jennifer Brahier; Casey Jones; Teniade Broughton; Delarian Wiggins
Cc: Elaine Mager; Sonja Gaines; Ericka Burnett; Robyn Tice
Subject: FW: Article PNJ homeless

Council President and Members of City Council

Please find below a link that has been requested to be shared with all Council Members, by a fellow Council Members.

[Pensacola homeless: Advocates need help rehousing homeless living under I-110 \(pnj.com\)](https://www.pnj.com/story/news/politics/2021/02/03/pensacola-homeless-advocates-need-help-rehousing-homeless-living-under-i-110/7058144002/)

Respectfully,

Don Kraher
Council Executive
Office of the City Council
222 W. Main Street
Pensacola, FL 32502
(850) 435-1686 – Office
(850) 384-6363 – Cell



City of Pensacola



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Advocates are scrambling to help homeless living under I-110. But they need help

Colin Warren-Hicks, Pensacola News Journal

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Opening Doors of Northwest Florida has dedicated itself to a nearly impossible undertaking.

As the lead organization tasked with finding shelter for the homeless men and women camped underneath Pensacola's Interstate 110 overpass, the nonprofit has a major problem: There is simply nowhere for the homeless people to go.

Local shelters are already at capacity. The few second-chance landlords whose support local charities traditionally rely on to house Pensacola's homeless are already helping. The "old faithfuls" are out of roofs and have no beds to spare.



A homeless camp is seen Jan. 28 underneath Interstate 110 in downtown Pensacola. (Photo: Gregg Pachkowski/gregg@pnj.com)

"It all comes down to low, low affordable housing options," said Opening Doors spokeswoman Serene Keiek.

So now, Opening Doors and its coalition of charitable organizations that are working to find more permanent homes for those camping beneath the underpass need help themselves.

"The one thing that we really need is housing replacement," Keiek said. "We need transitional homes or permanent homes. The main thing we need are places to put people without incomes and a few who have pets while we can work on getting them Social Security or we need someplace stable for them to live while we find them a job and while they build their income."

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► [Pensacola officials plan forced move for homeless under I-110 overpass, will clean up park \(/story/news/crime/2021/01/29/pensacola-homeless-people-living-under-110-into-forced-leave/4303327001/\)](https://www.pnj.com/story/news/crime/2021/01/29/pensacola-homeless-people-living-under-110-into-forced-leave/4303327001/)

► [Pensacola mayor wants to spend \\$200K on homeless initiatives, day-use center \(/story/news/2021/01/12/pensacola-mayor-wants-to-spend-200-k-homeless-initiatives-day-use-center/6626293002/\)](https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2021/01/12/pensacola-mayor-wants-to-spend-200-k-homeless-initiatives-day-use-center/6626293002/)

"We need community support. We want to try to do this as a community. We don't want to — and can't — do this on our own."

Opening Doors staff is practically begging for support from the Pensacola community, praying that compassion for those in need will push the city to show its true colors.

"There have got to be some landlords out there that have some available properties who are willing to help," said Joan Vincent, Open Doors director of accounting. "If they read this, I hope it gets some interest into them. Some landlords must be able to give some of these people a chance."

The homeless camp underneath the I-110 overpass leading in and out of Pensacola has been growing for months. It was estimated up to 50 people were camped there as of last week.

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A homeless camp is seen Jan. 28 underneath Interstate 110 in downtown Pensacola. (Photo: Gregg Pachkowski/gregg@pnj.com)

However, their camp was built on city property. The Hollice T. Williams Park is situated underneath the overpass and stretches for almost exactly one mile from its southern edge along Cervantes Street to its northernmost point along Maxwell Street.

Late last week, city officials announced plans to dislodge those homeless people from the park.

"After receiving complaints about unsanitary conditions at Hollice T. Williams Park, the City of Pensacola is planning to temporarily close the park by early March so city staff can conduct a thorough cleanup," city spokeswoman Kaycee Lagarde said in a Jan. 27 statement.

This week, city officials have worked with local organizations to attempt to help the people still living in the park.

"The City is working with community partners to connect homeless individuals in the area to available resources, including housing, food, quality mental health and medical care, transportation, and employment interviews for those who are job-ready," Lagarde told the News Journal in a statement.

► [Homelessness, police reform, education and more on CivicCon docket for 2021 | Guestview \(/story/opinion/2021/01/02/civiccon-2021-docket-offers-diverse-lineup-crucial-topics/4086655001/\)](#)

► [Pensacola's homeless: Team to provide care for homeless, public restrooms part of new plan \(/story/news/2020/11/19/pensacolas-homeless-city-works-plan-address-homelessness/6322737002/\)](#)

On Tuesday, city staff visited the park, along with staff from organizations such as Opening Doors, the Children's Home Society, 90 Works, Pathways for Change, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Loaves and Fishes, Faith Works and the Alfred-Washburn Center.

The coalition found that more than 20 homeless people had left the camp over the weekend after they heard the park would be closed.

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"They scattered," Keiek said. "We have no way of knowing where they went."

Of the 15 men and women still in the park as of Tuesday, three men told Opening Doors staff members they already had bus tickets to leave Pensacola. One of the men was a veteran, and his ticket had been paid for by 90 Works. ~~\$1~~ for 3 months. Save 97%.

Opening Doors conducted a survey of the other 12 people still living at the camp in the hopes of helping them secure housing before March 1, when they will be forced to leave.

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"We need grace and time to be able to work with these people before they are moved. What we really need is more time," Keiek said. "We really need anybody else out there who helps the homeless to join together and move as one big team."

Until the park can be cleaned in March, the city will be putting temporary amenities at the park to provide more sanitary conditions. These amenities will include portlets, a handwashing station and a Dumpster, according to Lagarde.

"Our goal is to make this transition as smooth as possible, and we are grateful to all of our community partners who are assisting with this effort," the statement read.

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A homeless camp is seen Jan. 28 underneath Interstate 110 in downtown Pensacola. (Photo: Gregg Pachkowski/gregg@pnj.com)

Despite the challenges anticipated in the coming weeks, Keiek said her organization remains resolute in its mission to find the people in the park the shelter they need.

"We are good stewards of the city," she said. "We appreciate the partnership we have with them, and given that, we and our team are going to do everything that we are able to do to get these people a safe place to sleep at night."

Anyone who would like to offer support to Opening Doors or provide housing for Pensacola's homeless residents can contact Keiek at 850-741-6416 or serenek@poeningdoorsnwf.org (<mailto:serenek@poeningdoorsnwf.org>).

Colin Warren-Hicks can be reached at colinwarrenhicks@pnj.com or 850-435-8680.

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