

This may not be a formal letter, but I just wanted to be sure that voices of rural Polk County residents are being heard. I live in Monmouth and I have seen a steady increase in obvious cases of people living out of their cars, old RVs, and tents around town. If you watch the local social media groups you will see other people complaining about seeing these vehicles that are moved periodically to keep from getting a ticket. You will also see pleas from people who are about to lose their housing, people who have recently lost their housing, and people who are hanging on by a thread. We can look at the FCO numbers to see the data (45 individuals and 63 members of family units are literally homeless and working with the FCO), but it needs to also be said that everyday members of our communities are seeing and feeling this homelessness crisis in rural Polk County.

The Polk County Family & Community Outreach does amazing work, but I have heard over and over that they are missing the transitional shelter piece that Church At The Park will provide. It is critical to their ability to move people out of homelessness and to prevent homelessness when the individual just needs a few weeks before their voucher comes in or their next step is ready to receive them. We have options for veterans, domestic violence survivors, Ediger's House for one family at a time, and we will soon have David's House for 14-18 year olds. We need individual and family shelters that can handle the majority of homeless folks that don't fit into one of the categories that we currently have covered. It is also critical that we have transitional shelter in rural Polk County, so kids can stay in their schools, families and friends can continue to live near each other, and people with jobs and no housing don't have to give up their job to have shelter in Salem.

I am looking forward to Church At The Park sites opening in Polk County, so that we as a community can volunteer at these sites and donate items to folks moving from transitional shelter into permanent housing. I think it will be healing for our community to come together to help one another. I have had a lot of people ask me if they can volunteer or donate to Church at The Park in Polk County, so it is clear that we have a lot of support here for this project.

We have an active opposition that is organized by one individual, who has been pushing lies and leading people to be hateful about this project. One reason his lies get traction is that people are afraid of what they don't know. I believe that many of the opposition are scared of unmanaged campsites like the one at Wallace Marine Park. This is what they think is coming to Dallas. Once we can show them that we are housing their neighbors in clean sites with services, I believe the opposition's ranks will be greatly depleted.

Please help us house our neighbors in their community, and convert the haters to supporters by approving the amendment to the Church At The Park's Emergency Order grant contract. We need to move forward to heal our community. As actively involved community members, we have put a lot of work into this project and we want to see it through to completion.

Thank you,

Jodi Russell  
Monmouth, OR