



Edward Varso
Chief of Police
1163 N. Centre City Pkwy.
Escondido, CA 92026
Phone: 760-839-4721 Fax: 760-745-3432
evarso@escondido.org

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Supervisor Lawson-Remer:

I am writing to you in response to the upcoming Board of Supervisors agenda item, "Making County Land Available for Emergency Homeless Shelter Solutions." While I deeply understand the need to take action to address the ever-complicated homeless challenge, from a purely public safety perspective, setting up a temporary homeless shelter on land at 620 E. Valley Pkwy. Escondido is extremely shortsighted. Furthermore, I believe it critical for you to know that this particular location is within close proximity to numerous apartments and single-family residences. Those who live near 620 E. Valley Pkwy. are often families, seniors, and largely low-income. The staff report references the close proximity of public transportation, suggesting this is an advantage for a homeless shelter. However, what about the mothers, children, and seniors who rely on that same transportation? What safety impacts will be expected when this shelter results in increasing the population of those with mental health, substance use disorders, and criminal histories? Placing a homeless shelter in a portion of Escondido with some of the most vulnerable populations is reckless.

What is the plan to protect the neighboring residents? How will you manage the security of the facility? How will County staff ensure the safety of the surrounding neighborhoods, bicycle paths, and sidewalks? How will staff ensure the safety of kids and families walking (often alone) to nearby schools? How will staff address the chronic drug abuse and crime that is so prevalent within the homeless community?

As you know, recent data shared by District Attorney Summer Stephan confirmed that homeless individuals account for significant amounts of criminal activity (often over 100 times more likely than non-homeless). Those crimes go beyond simple drug possession, but include assaults, arson, and other violent crimes.

Just last week, I answered an email from an angry school administrator sharing a story about staff and middle school students verbally threatened by a homeless person just blocks away from the recommended site. Yet, our response is to consider adding a shelter and inevitably increase the homeless population? Is there really no other solution than more homeless housing in the middle of a residential and commercial area? I will be sure to share this plan with the school administrator who was understandably upset by the treatment his staff and students endured. I am sure he will be beyond angry (as will most residents).

Focusing solely on selecting locations for more temporary shelters while not mitigating the public safety risks will result only in a failed program. Finally, as a person who has dedicated over 23 years to protecting Escondido, the recommended location will bring harm to our community. I urge that 620 E. Valley Pkwy. be removed from consideration as it will bring a detrimental effect to public safety.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward Varso".

Edward Varso, Chief of Police
City of Escondido