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County Supervisors Approve Resolution to Expand Law Enforcement Services in Flood Control Channel

County of Orange, CA (September 13, 2017) — The County of Orange Board of Supervisors approved a resolution to expand law enforcement services in the flood control channels with the adoption of a resolution at the Board of Supervisors meeting on September 12, 2017.

The resolution will dedicate enhanced law enforcement services to the Orange County Flood Control District's flood control channels and convene local municipal law enforcement agencies to discuss and formulate a shared public safety response protocol for the flood control channels. The Orange County Sheriff's Department will be the lead law enforcement agency, and will work with local public safety agencies to coordinate efforts.

"The main priority of the County is to provide a safe and stable environment," said Board Chairwoman Michelle Steel, Second District Supervisor. "By providing enhanced law enforcement services along the flood control channel, we will empower our County and local law enforcement agencies to actively engage and progress toward the County's goal to end homelessness."

The County of Orange, through the Orange County Flood Control District (OCFCD), manages more than 380 miles of flood control channels designed to safely convey runoff and provide necessary drainage and flood protection to adjacent communities. Flood control channels were never intended for human habitation and have not required active law enforcement services.

"The goal is to provide opportunities for those living on the riverbed to get help and move into housing," said Vice Chair Andrew Do, First District Supervisor. "Today's action will provide a balance between services and law and order to ensure a healthy and safe environment for all. These services are an integral part to ending homelessness in Orange County."

Approximately 70 miles of the County's regional trail system, which is maintained by OC Parks, is located on OCFCD property adjacent to the channels. The Santa Ana River Trail (SART) regional trail, which stretches for 30 miles along the channel, is one of the most used trails in the County and registers more than eight million users annually. The SART has recently experienced an increase in unauthorized homeless encampments along the trail. Based on a recent census conducted by CityNet, 422 individuals are living in unauthorized encampments in the open space adjacent to the SART between Chapman Avenue and Ball Road.

"Conditions on the Santa Ana riverbed trail have simply reached intolerable proportions," said Supervisor Todd Spitzer, Third District. "This is a compassionate policy designed as a progressive step toward addressing the most critical needs. Criminal activity combined with sanitation issues have compounded the public safety threat for those inhabiting the riverbed and citizens in the community."

“The flood control channel is not meant for, nor is it safe for, human habitation, but we have to be realistic,” said Supervisor Shawn Nelson, Fourth District. “We must have the will to identify real estate within the county for these individuals to relocate on our terms.”

The County of Orange has dedicated resources to address the encampments in a variety of ways, including a \$720,000 contract with CityNet for a six month pilot program. The aim of the pilot program is to connect individuals encamped in the area to resources and housing solutions, and since inception, 51 individuals have connected to shelter or housing options. In addition, the County has brought online 500 additional shelter beds in the last year, with 400 beds at the Courtyard Transitional Center in Santa Ana and 100 beds provided at Bridges at Kraemer Place in Anaheim.

“It will take a collaborative effort to solve the crisis of homelessness in Orange County,” said Supervisor Lisa Bartlett, Fifth District. “The County has led the way, and will continue to do so. Working with our partners in law enforcement, cities, nonprofits, community organizations and businesses, we will continue our progress toward approving what's needed- more permanent supportive housing.”

The County of Orange is building a system of care to connect those experiencing homelessness to available resources and assistance. To learn more about the system of care and the work the County is doing, visit the Office of Care Coordination website www.ocgov.com/gov/ceo/care.

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