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## What San Bernardino County is doing to combat veteran homelessness

*By Joe Nelson, The Sun*

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SAN BERNARDINO >> Beaming U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald paid a visit to San Bernardino County Monday, meeting with county supervisors and their partners who [housed more than 500 homeless veterans](#) in the last half of 2015.

“I’m just so proud,” he said of local efforts to care for homeless vets.

Meeting in a conference room in the offices of county supervisors, McDonald, county officials and their partners discussed what the county did, what it plans to do next, and

what McDonald will do to assist the county in its efforts and spread the word about its accomplishments.

“I’ll be out there and telling the San Bernardino story,” McDonald said at the conclusion of Monday’s meeting, which was followed up with a meeting of the county’s advisory group on homelessness, which McDonald also attended.

County officials told McDonald they would like to see additional funding made available for job training programs for veterans that lead to good paying jobs to cover their cost of living, plus more vouchers to house more homeless veterans.

The county is also in need of more federal funding for veteran families, more landlords to work with the county to house homeless veterans — which could include special incentives for landlords — and more case workers and housing navigators.

County CEO Greg Devereaux said what the county and its partners have done thus far is merely the beginning, and that the next step, as Supervisor Janice Rutherford said, is to get all the county’s homeless people and families off the streets and into housing.

“This, in many ways, may have been the easiest part of the task,” Devereaux said of the county’s efforts thus far in housing its homeless veterans. The longer-term goal is to reach a sustainable zero homeless population.

“If we don’t do that, and that number slips back up, then ultimately we failed. We haven’t really solved the problem,” he said.

McDonald’s meeting occurred just three days before the county’s annual point-in-time homeless count, which officials say will take a new approach. The objective is to begin the process of housing homeless

them as soon as they are identified.

The first question the counters will ask is, “Are you a veteran?” or “Have you ever served in the military?”

In June, the Board of Supervisors [unanimously approved a recommendation](#) by one of the nation’s leading experts on homelessness to implement a strategy to permanently house all 401 of its identified homeless veterans from last January’s point-in-time homeless count on or by Dec. 31.

By Thanksgiving, all had been housed, along with roughly 100 other homeless veterans who were identified after the homeless count, according to a news release.

The next step will be to house the approximately 100 homeless veterans identified since July.

Among those in attendance during Monday’s event included Rep. Norma Torres, D-Pomona, and Rep. Pete Aguilar, D-San Bernardino, along with representatives from the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino and members of various nonprofits and housing providers.

“As communities across the nation work to meet the administration’s ambitious goal to end veteran homelessness, right here at home, San Bernardino County is leading the way by implementing a comprehensive set of policies that have resulted in a significant decrease in the homeless veteran population,” Torres said in a written statement Monday.

Following McDonald’s visit to the San Bernardino County Government Center, he stopped for lunch at Loma Linda University, where he met with VA Medical Center administrators and staff,

“I was impressed with the community coming together in such a collaborative way,” McDonald said. “I think it provides a lot of hope and inspiration as to what we can do for the rest of the country.”

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