

Hawaii News from the Honolulu Star-Advertiser - Homeless shelters earn wide support - Hawaii News - Honolulu Star-Advertiser

StarAdvertiser.com

Homeless shelters earn wide support

By Dan Nakaso

POSTED: 1:30 a.m. HST, Aug 10, 2015

LAST UPDATED: 1:48 a.m. HST, Aug 10, 2015

Residents say they like the idea of homeless shelters in places such as Sand Island, and even say they're willing to have a temporary shelter in their own neighborhood, if it helps ease the overall problem, according to a new Hawaii Poll.

Eighty-one percent of people polled said they're in favor of providing shelter and basic needs to homeless people on Sand Island "and similar areas," as has been proposed by city officials.

The 87-bed Hale Mauiola "modular container" project on Sand Island Access Road is scheduled to open in the fall. It is among \$20 million worth of temporary and long-term housing projects the city plans to build and buy through 2016.

The Hawaii Poll was conducted by Ward Research Inc. for the Honolulu Star-Advertiser and Hawaii News Now. It surveyed 408 residents across Oahu from July 24 to 29, with a margin of error of 4.9 percent.

Not only does it show major support for a Sand Island shelter, but 62 percent of people polled said they would even support a temporary shelter in their own neighborhood.

In response, Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell said he was pleased that so many Oahu residents support the city's efforts. And he said he was particularly happy that a majority wouldn't object to a temporary shelter in their own neighborhood.

Shelters might not be necessary for some areas, Caldwell said. But the city also wants to place individual homeless people in apartments. Neighbor acceptance will go a long way toward getting more people off of the street and get them the help they need to be successful, Caldwell said.

"If there's huge pushback it can kill it," Caldwell said.

City and state officials have convened a task force on homelessness to spearhead the examination of solutions to the growing problem.

"We are looking at places we can provide temporary shelters, and I'm encouraged that so many people are willing to support something like this in their neighborhood," Gov. David Ige said in a statement.

Rebecca Overfield, 60, of Waikiki expressed frustration with Oahu's homeless situation and said part of the solution is for everyone to accept homeless people in their communities.

"Anyone in their right mind would say yes and agree to that," Overfield said. "Anyone human would want these people to be taken care of."

Not everyone agrees.

When it comes to the idea of a temporary shelter in their own neighborhood, the poll found vast differences among age groups, ethnicities and geographic areas.

There was no statistical difference by income.

But 71 percent of Hawaiians said they would agree to a temporary shelter in their neighborhood compared with 52 percent of Japanese and 57 percent of Filipinos.

And while 79 percent of people 35 or younger would welcome a shelter, 48 percent of those 55 and older would be against one.

There were also large differences depending on what part of Oahu people live in.

Some 73 percent of those in Ewa and the Leeward Coast said they would agree to a shelter in their neighborhood. But only 55 percent of respondents in Pearl City, Aiea and Central Oahu felt the same way.

Darren Higuchi, 48, of Manoa Valley doesn't like the idea of creating new shelters and doesn't want one in his neighborhood.

"No," Higuchi said. "If they can't even make use of existing shelters, how's building another one going to help?"

Higuchi also would oppose efforts to put a temporary shelter in Manoa Valley.

"I've had many problems with homes for troubled teens," he said. "I lived right across from one, and I lived up the street from one. My neighbor's house got robbed. Fights broke out. A neighbor had a brick thrown through the window and was threatened by kids. I would come home and see a couple of kids smoking cigarettes in front of my house, staring at me. Hell, no. Don't stare at me in front of my house."

Rebecca Ward, president of Ward Research, said, "When we look at the willingness to have a shelter in your own neighborhood, Ewa and Leeward Coast residents are most receptive to the idea, as are Hawaiians — no doubt due to seeing homeless on the beach on the Leeward side for years. They would welcome a remedy. The other big difference here is by age. We do traditionally see younger people more concerned about social problems, and in this case we see younger people more willing to see a temporary shelter in their own neighborhood than we see among older age groups. Older people are more likely to be homeowners and concerned about property values."

The state is considering spending \$90 million to purchase a downtown tower for state offices to save money that would be spent to rent space. But a majority of respondents — 66 percent — said they would rather the state use the money to renovate more public housing instead of buying Alii Place.

Some 79 percent of people who earn \$50,000 or less prefer using the money for more public housing. But only 55 percent of those who earn \$100,000 or more agree. And 64 percent of registered voters like the idea, compared with 75 percent of unregistered voters.

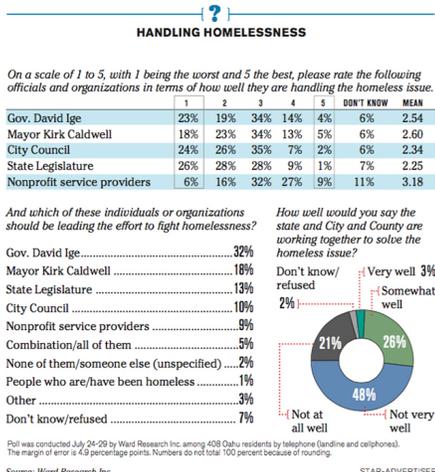
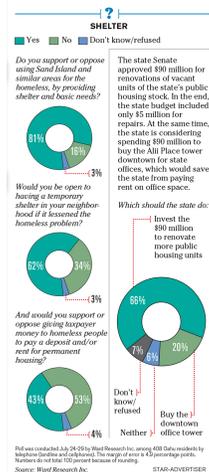
The poll found far less support for the idea of providing taxpayer money to homeless people to pay a deposit or pay rent for permanent housing.

While there were slight differences among geographic areas and ethnicity, only 43 percent overall liked the

idea of helping homeless people pay rent or deposits with taxpayer money.

But 55 percent of Caucasians would support the idea — along with 50 percent of people who have a household income of \$100,000 or more.

“Clearly, residents are in support of using taxpayer dollars for shelter on Sand Island and similar areas,” Ward said. “But when it comes to the idea of paying a deposit or rent — giving money to the homeless, essentially, albeit for housing — that generates far less support.”



BRUCE ASATO /
@STARADVERTISER
Tents belonging to
homeless people
line the Ewa bank of
Kapalama Canal.

BRUCE ASATO /
BASATO@STARADVERTISER.COM
Tents belonging to
homeless people line
the Ewa bank of Kapalama Canal.

Copyright (c) Honolulu Star-Advertiser