

Agenda Item # 5

January 16, 2024

Dear Mayor Cavanaugh and City Councilmembers,

My name is Steve, and I am a 74-year-old Piedmont resident. I currently live on Blair Ave., and I attend Piedmont Community Church. I have lived in and around Piedmont since 1980. I was an employee of PUSD, as a substitute teacher, and a basketball coach at Piedmont High. My children attended Piedmont schools. I had a private consulting and recruiting firm for the hospitality industry between 2006 and 2020. The pandemic, the subsequent shutdown, and my age/arthritis shut down my practice in 2020. At that time, I was renting/living on Cambridge in Piedmont. I was unable to keep up with the rent. I was eventually evicted in early April 2023. I initially took a room at a motel. My only income was/is SSI.

Eric Behrens, who also attends Piedmont Community Church, recommended I contact BACS for information and/or assistance. I was initially very reluctant. Pride and some level of denial certainly played a role in my reluctance. During April 2023 I relented and contacted BACS. I was told to come to their offices on Harrison, at the Towne House, which I had driven past for many years, by 8:00 AM, as potential clients were dealt with on a first come first serve basis. I did so, but my expectations and attitude were low. My stress level had been significantly high for too many years.

As I arrived, I was invited to a large, comfortable room. It had clearly been a living room once. Everybody I dealt with was engaged and skillful in their jobs. I had to wait about an hour to begin the process. During that time, they fed me and 15-20 others a free, freshly cooked hot breakfast. That breakfast, made me realize BACS was something more than a bureaucratic processing organization. The potential clients ranged in age from teens to me in my 70's. The demographics were consistent with where we live. I only witnessed a single potential client who was distressed and on edge. A couple of employees, clearly well trained, immediately addressed and soothed the man. The employees I observed, and dealt with, were younger than I (who isn't) and professional in all they did. It was impressive. I was interviewed initially to see if I even qualified for their services. As soon as I qualified I was taken to a private office and again interviewed more deeply. It was clearly a background check. I was told it would be very thorough and would be followed up on. At the end of the interview I was told I was now on a list for housing. I was instructed to keep my phone available and be able to respond to housing opportunities immediately. If I wasn't ready, they told me they simply went to the next person and I went back to the bottom of the list.

I received a call from BACS about two weeks later. It was in early May. I immediately accepted the offer and moved into a former hotel, The Henry, in downtown Oakland. It is clearly for people in transition. The accommodations were not great, but clean. I was assigned a case worker. The attitude of the case workers, in general were again very professional. I had continued my search for suitable housing since the eviction in April without luck. Once at The Henry, I was aggressive in setting meetings with my case worker, as well as with his boss and another man who assisted in employment placings. I was told BACS offered supplemental rent payments for varying amounts of time and money. I asked if I found a suitable location would they supplement the rent there or did the location need to already be on their approved list. I was told if I found a suitable location in Alameda or Contra Costa Counties, BACS assistance was available. I had just been informed, by another member at Church about an ad for this place on Blair. I immediately met with the landlords, who have owned and lived in Piedmont, in this house, since 1975. He, his wife and I came to an agreement. I moved on June 2, 2023, three weeks after beginning my stay at The Henry. In the ensuing months Daniel, my case worker, at BACS has kept monthly contact with me, both, by coming by and electronically.

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My years of managing and owning high-end restaurants has given me strong knowledge of what hospitality involves. My experience with BACS, from a client's perspective, has been exemplary in terms of their professionalism, respect, caring, follow through, and commitment. Considering the chaos we all have been experiencing, in recent years, it is refreshing and helps re-enforce and retain my optimism. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to recommend BACS as an organization and community asset.

Best,
Steve