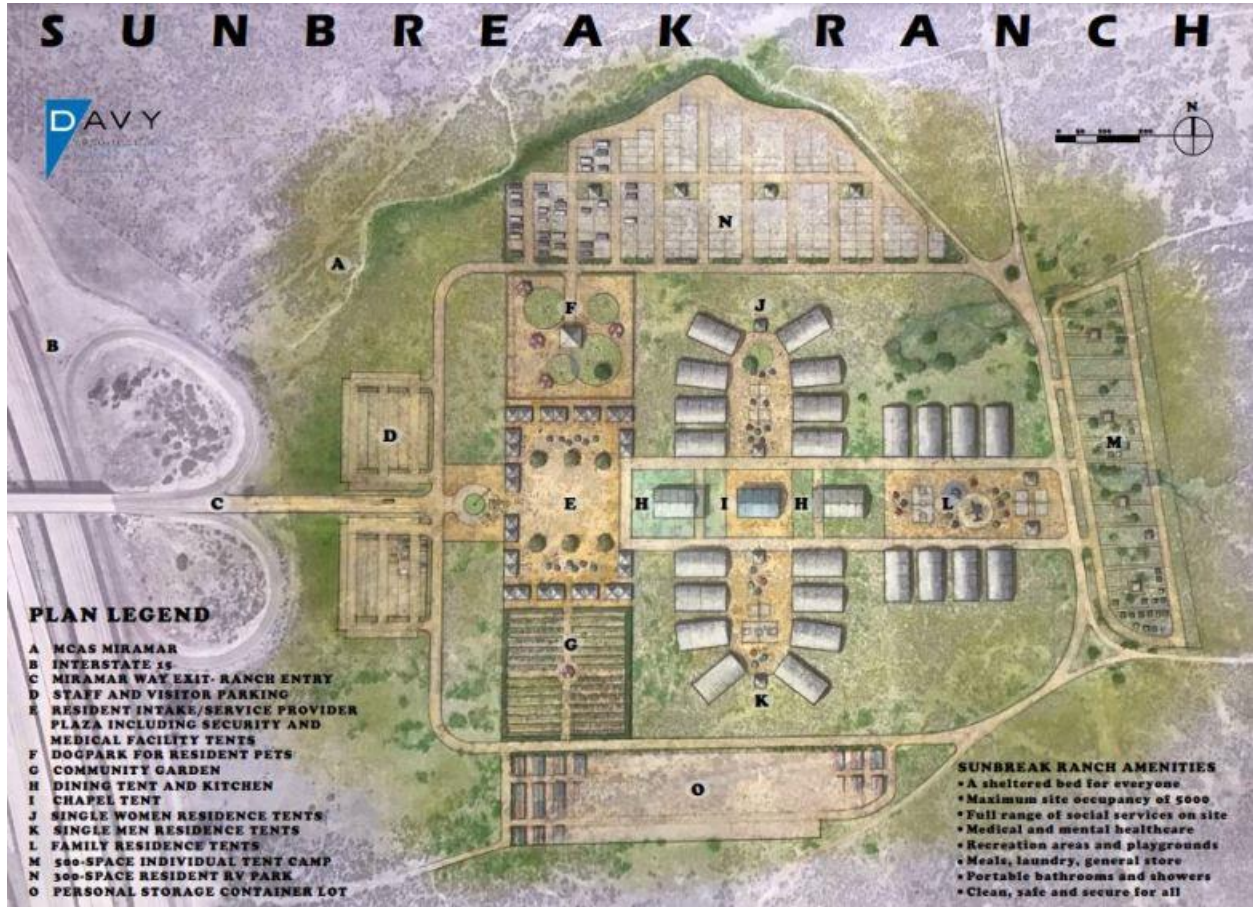


# Homelessness Is an Emergency — Let’s ‘Parachute in’ Sunbreak Ranch at Brown Field

By George Mullen and Bill Walton



A plan for Sunbreak Ranch at Miramar by Davy Architecture.

San Diego is currently living a homeless humanitarian catastrophe of epic proportions.

The time is now to consider deploying what we call the Sunbreak Ranch Emergency Parachute.

The tragic numbers are staggering.

According to our own local government's Regional Task Force On Homelessness, in the San Diego region there were over 4,751 new unsheltered homeless people in 2023.

This equates to a 50% year-over-year increase in the total number of unsheltered homeless people.

There were 14,258 first-time homeless people in 2023.

The number of homeless veterans increased 17% in 2023. Nationwide it rose only 7%.

Our overall number of homeless people increased 22% in the past year to over 10,264. But we all know the real figure (unreported) is multiple times higher than this number.

There have been almost 600 homeless deaths on the streets of San Diego in each of the past two years.

This is a more than 250% increase in deaths from just a few years ago.

A civilized society cannot carry on this way.

The vast majority of San Diegans are people of goodwill who genuinely want to help end the homelessness ravaging our streets, canyons, and public parks. We want to help our homeless brothers and sisters, and assist them on their path to better lives.

Though our approaches to help the homeless may vary, there is one harsh and startling truth facing us.

Our [local government spent \\$2.37 billion of our taxpayer money on solving homelessness from 2015 - 2022](#) and these efforts have failed miserably. Our homeless problems are worse than ever — dramatically so.

This is why [Sunbreak Ranch](#) has generated so much interest and excitement. It is a new and refreshing approach that offers real hope, not more of the inefficient, ineffective, futile same.

Sunbreak is an aggregate facility to house people, identify their needs, and move them with care and proper treatment to more permanent housing or treatment centers. It is an emergency regional "triage center" where everyone in need will have a clean,

healthy, safe, and secure place and bed. Even one for your son or daughter, should they ever be in such dire need. It is a voluntary facility where all residents can come and go as they please.

Aggregate facilities do work. The United Nations has run refugee centers around the world that are humane and offer extensive care and assistance. FEMA has repeatedly done the same in emergency situations across America.

Bob McElroy, respected CEO of [Alpha Project](#), coincidentally had a similar idea to Sunbreak 25 years ago. Even then he was also eyeing the vast unused open lands of Miramar. The politics of the day sadly wouldn't allow his idea to happen. If it had, perhaps we wouldn't be facing our current humanitarian emergency.

We have a chance in 2024 to make this right.

Sunbreak Ranch is a true citizen's movement stepping in to address a massive community crisis that our elected officials are either unable or unwilling to solve.

Sunbreak is a non-partisan, non-political, all-volunteer effort. And we are diligently searching for a suitable site for Sunbreak.

Our main focus continues to be on the vast open lands in Miramar and Otay Mesa, and we are working every possible angle trying to help San Diego get on the right course to a sustainable, safe, secure, clean and healthy future.

This is easier said than done.

With respect to Miramar, there are at least four potential sites within this enormous area. We are working our way through the U.S. Marine Corps Command at Camp Pendleton, and ultimately the Pentagon.

In Otay Mesa, there is an ideal large open site at the north end of La Media Road — but we are told it is off-limits due to owl mitigation. Likewise, there is another prime site adjacent to Brown Field — but we are told FAA regulations prevent its use.

Our bigger catch-22 problem is that we can't lock down a sizable site for Sunbreak without full community buy-in. And without a site, we can't raise money to go operational.

Our community and citizenry are enthusiastically supporting Sunbreak, as are most civic leaders.

Please see our [Sunbreak Ranch Endorsement Team](#).

Our difficulty remains with our elected officials. Most continue to duck us and / or want to continue pursuing expensive temporary band-aid solutions that have repeatedly failed.

To be taken seriously though, we need our political leadership on board, as part of our Sunbreak team working to solve the problem.

We, again, invite Mayor Todd Gloria, the San Diego City Council, the County Board of Supervisors, and all regional city mayors and councils to join us.

Only as a unified community force will we have the necessary muscle to be taken seriously when negotiating for a Sunbreak site on federal or state land with the powers that are at Camp Pendleton, the Pentagon, Sacramento, Capitol Hill, and the White House.

Together we can move mountains. Divided, our disastrous descent into quicksand will accelerate.

As we strive to achieve community consensus and find a permanent site, we remain neck-deep in a catastrophic humanitarian emergency.

Which is why we must consider deploying the Sunbreak Ranch Emergency Parachute in the interim.

The best location for this is on Brown Field in Otay Mesa. Having scouted Otay at least 50 times over the years for Sunbreak site locations, we have personally witnessed the minimal air traffic relative to other airfields. And most of this air traffic is centered around prop-plane flight schools doing touch and go's, skydiving, and an occasional private plane.



Open land adjacent to Brown Field.

If there is a location that is temporarily expendable (with temporarily relocatable stakeholders) during a city emergency, this is it.

We do not want to inconvenience anyone, but in a humanitarian emergency like this one, we need to act — now.

Brown Field is a near perfect Sunbreak location — city-owned land; 15 minutes from downtown; plenty of flat open space; water, sewer, and electricity already onsite; an adjacent operating fire station; the new [Salvation Army Adult Detox-Rehabilitation Center](#) down the street; an MTS bus stop nearby; easy access to highways 905, 125, 805; and so on.

Here is our Sunbreak Ranch Emergency Parachute Roadmap. Please note that it can only be set-in-motion by our elected local government officials:

1. Declare a San Diego City and County Homeless State of Emergency based on the overwhelming scope of our homeless crises.
2. "Temporarily" shut down Brown Field flight operations based on the City Emergency Decree. This action will freeze FAA regulations and jurisdiction over this city-owned land. All plane owners will be given 72 hours to relocate to Gillespie, Montgomery, Palomar, or elsewhere.

3. Establish Sunbreak Ranch on Brown Field as the temporary "homeless triage center" for the City and County of San Diego using the [Sunbreak Ranch Architectural Rendering](#) as a model.
4. Pitch management of the U.S. Marines / Seabees / FEMA to immediately come in and build-out a modular forward military base (like in Iraq or Afghanistan) on Brown Field to house up to 5,000 persons with mess halls, latrines, showers, and any other necessary infrastructure. We have been told this would be a useful training exercise for the Marines / SeaBees since they haven't executed such a mission in some time. The equipment is in local warehouses and they can accomplish this task within weeks.
5. Launch an emergency fundraising campaign seeking both public funds and major local and national philanthropists to provide emergency funding for the Sunbreak Ranch pilot program. The philanthropic upside here may be bigger than any other. Sunbreak will be a true "pilot program" to solve our nation's greatest humanitarian challenge. Once proven in San Diego, Sunbreak will be a model that can be replicated everywhere. And cities across America are desperately seeking a viable answer to this problem.
6. Call a meeting of all city and county Homeless Service Providers and make it clear that we expect each of them to immediately establish a 24/7 operational outlet at Sunbreak in a soft-sided facility provided to them at no cost. Otherwise, they will be dropped from the list receiving city / county help going forward. This is a homeless humanitarian emergency, meaning all hands on deck.
7. Call a meeting of the [Hospital Association of San Diego & Imperial Counties](#), as well as all city hospital CEOs, and ask them to staff and equip an emergency soft-sided medical facility on Sunbreak Ranch. With approximately 1,000 of 7,000 regional hospital beds occupied by homeless persons on any given day, they are likely to welcome this opportunity to dramatically lower the homeless headcount in their hospitals.
8. Set up a 24/7 San Diego Police and / or Sheriff outpost on Sunbreak. Peace, safety, and the rule of law for all residents is a constant tenet of Sunbreak Ranch. We will keep drug dealers, gangs, and sex traffickers out.
9. Set up 24/7 private security to further maintain peace and safety.

10. Redirect all available city and county employees to Sunbreak to help staff roles in the welcome facility, administration, maintenance, janitorial services, et al. Likewise, call for community volunteers.

11. Build a genuine "supportive community" at Sunbreak for all residents, with a [Real Time Shelter Dashboard](#) and a [Real Time Employment Dashboard](#) as centerpieces.

12. Establish (as needed) additional shuttle bus service to downtown San Diego and Mission Valley.

13. Instruct the San Diego Police / Sheriff to begin phasing-out homelessness on the streets, canyons, and public parks, and relocate those who are unsheltered to Sunbreak Ranch. For those persons not willing to go to Sunbreak, bus tickets to their home city will be provided. Whether their home is LA, Denver, NYC, or otherwise, we will help them get to where they have a family / friend support network.

14. Instruct San Diego Police / Sheriff to arrest drug dealers, gang members, sex traffickers, and anyone else preying upon the homeless in the Sunbreak Ranch area, with stiff and real penalties in effect. Our most vulnerable citizens must be protected from predators.

15. And much much more...

The time is now to deploy the Sunbreak Emergency Parachute and start saving lives. If we don't act, our ever-present proponents of the status quo will naysay us into eternity with why we can't use any land we suggest. Endless excuses to not take action are unacceptable.

Politically speaking, Sunbreak Ranch on Brown Field is likely to receive significantly less opposition than H-Barracks is currently facing for the (much smaller) proposed 700-person homeless tent-shelter in Point Loma. H-Barracks is located adjacent to San Diego International Airport, one of the busiest single-runway commercial airports in the world, multiple operating hotels, as well as being close to Liberty Station, numerous schools, and vast residential neighborhoods.

The H-Barracks proposal is blatantly seeking a path of extreme resistance and opposition. Brown Field, on the other hand, doesn't have any of these same disqualifying attributes nearby.

Once we have a temporary Sunbreak site operational on Brown Field, it will serve as the inspiration to lock down a permanent site. The people who justifiably want Brown Field flight operations to resume will keep the pressure on.

If there is a better location to deploy the Sunbreak Emergency Parachute, please join the conversation. We are not interested in inconveniencing anyone at Brown Field or anywhere else. But we are facing an existential regional emergency.

When another suitable site is locked down, we will promptly relocate Sunbreak to that location.

Extreme conditions call for extreme measures. The lives and deaths of our brothers and sisters are more than enough justification.

Great leaders rise to tackle emergencies.

We have a dream that our streets can be clean again, our homeless will not be allowed to needlessly die anymore, and there can be one place where our homeless brothers and sisters can be safe, properly fed, and assisted with a plan and path to better lives.

This new year presents us with the opportunity for a fresh start. Let's make 2024 the year we tackle our homeless emergency and begin saving thousands of lives.

We are ready.

How about you?

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