

How Chico Can Govern Toward Housing

A common-ground response to Rob Berry's How Chico Governs Its Future

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Affordable housing is the problem ...

homelessness is the outcome.

Housing First over Treatment First. Dignity and respect. Facts over fiction or personal belief. Proven research and methods over ideology.

By "affordable housing is the problem," I mean the shortage of housing people can actually afford. That shortage is a central structural cause of homelessness. Personal crises, disability, substance use, and mental-health needs can complicate an individual's path, but none of those explanations creates an affordable home where none is available.

I read Rob Berry's October 25 essay because I take his underlying questions seriously. Chico should explain its decisions, examine the consequences, track the results of public spending, and change programs that are not working. I agree with that standard. [1]

This response is not an argument about personalities or political labels. It is an invitation to apply those standards to the problem itself, using credible evidence, lived experience, and measurable results rather than assumptions about who deserves help.

1 | Common ground: accountability, evidence, and results

Berry asks what must change, what must not be lost, who bears the consequences, and what evidence should change government's course. He acknowledges that clearing a campsite can shift the problem elsewhere and that an arrest cannot create economic independence. Those are useful starting points. [1, pp. 3, 6-7]

I want transparent contracts, responsible city officials, published goals, independent review, and public safety. But accountability must apply to elected leaders, departments, contracted operators, and agencies as well as individuals. We cannot measure success by how efficiently we move people out of sight. We must measure whether people become safely and permanently housed.

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2 | Begin with the shortage of affordable housing

The City's proposed five-year strategic plan acknowledges the shortage of deeply affordable housing. In the 2025 Butte County Point-in-Time survey summarized by that plan, 49% of respondents reported affordable housing availability as a barrier and 42% reported rent or deposit costs. These are countywide responses, not percentages of every person experiencing homelessness, and respondents could identify multiple barriers. [2, p. 6]

The Butte County Continuum of Care illustrates the affordability problem with a household receiving \$1,000 a month: at 30% of income, affordable housing would cost no more than \$300 per month, including utilities. Housing at that level is scarce. [3, p. 15]

Chico needs more housing, including an appropriate mix of homes. But quantity alone is not the entire measure. We must ask what residents can afford, whether units are completed and occupied, which income groups are served, and whether people can remain housed. A Pallet shelter is an important interim option; it is not a substitute for permanent housing.

My position does not waver: prevent displacement, expand deeply affordable and supportive housing, preserve existing affordable homes, provide safe interim options, and measure success by permanent housing stability.

3 | Housing First over Treatment First

I support effective addiction treatment, mental-health care, medical services, counseling, and recovery supports. Make them accessible and available when people want them. But treatment must be voluntary, not a condition someone must satisfy to receive a clean bed, a shower, shelter, or a home.

Housing First is not "housing only." It removes sobriety and treatment preconditions while making supportive services available. HUD's 2024 research review reports strong evidence that Housing First improves housing stability and helps people exit homelessness faster than treatment-first approaches. Results for health and substance-use outcomes are more mixed, which is exactly why we should report them accurately rather than promise outcomes the research does not establish. [4]

No one should have to prove they are "ready," worthy, sober, or compliant before qualifying for basic human needs. An immediate threat requiring a lawful emergency response is a separate matter; it does not justify blanket conditions imposed on everyone.

4 | Dignity and respect are not rewards for compliance

People experiencing homelessness are adults, neighbors, and members of our community. They should participate in decisions about the programs that affect their lives, have their belongings and privacy respected, and receive clear, fair rules with meaningful ways to raise concerns.

Everyone deserves a safe, clean place to sleep ... no exceptions. Assistance should start from that principle, not from personal judgments about someone's worthiness. Dignity is part of an effective response, not something we grant only after a person behaves as we prefer.

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5 | Enforce real crimes, not homelessness

Police should focus their time on violence, theft, threats, exploitation, and other conduct that actually harms people or places, whether the person has housing or is experiencing homelessness. Experiencing homelessness is not a reason to treat someone as a criminal. I oppose using citations, arrests, or repeated displacement as a substitute for providing a realistic, safe place to go.

Concerns about trash, blocked access, unsafe conditions, and damaged public spaces deserve attention. My preferred response starts with toilets, trash collection, storage, public works, voluntary outreach, low-barrier shelter, and pathways into housing. Genuine crimes and immediate threats still require appropriate law enforcement.

Federal interagency guidance warns that removing encampments without effective shelter, housing, and support can simply move the problem elsewhere. Count displacement and repeated interventions, not just the appearance of a cleared site. [5]

We do not have to choose between public safety and human dignity. Stop confusing the condition of homelessness with criminal behavior.

6 | Follow the money with the same standards for everyone

Here Berry and I share considerable common ground. The May 19, 2026 City staff report lists \$3,490,925 in actual Genesis operating expenses for fiscal year 2024-25, including \$2,901,187 in a bundled category for operator services, security, meals, showers, laundry, and related needs. These amounts are not evidence of organizational profit; they are a reason to demand clear contract-level reporting. [6, pp. 2-3]

Publish what each contract pays for, who receives the money, what services residents can use, how many people enter permanent housing, and the full cost per durable outcome. Hold enforcement and cleanup operations to the same test, including police time, storage, emergency responses, displacement, and repeated work.

Facts over fiction: public dollars should be judged by independently verifiable results, not assumptions about providers, personal narratives, or whether an approach fits someone's ideology. Good intentions are not a substitute for evidence. Neither is punishment.

7 | Consider a resident-governed Genesis alternative

A resident-governed Genesis program, with support from Chico community organizations and independent professionals, deserves a serious feasibility study. Residents could elect representatives, establish reasonable community standards, and share responsibility for day-to-day operations. A nonprofit or cooperative model could be compared with existing contracts on cost, resident safety, access, dignity, and permanent housing outcomes.

This is a proposal to investigate and pilot, not a claim that it is already authorized or would cost nothing. Insurance, accessibility, fiscal capacity, property agreements, health and safety, and the existing legal framework would all need review. [7]

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8 | Apply Berry's own questions to every policy

What must change? The shortage of truly affordable homes, unsafe interim conditions, avoidable barriers to voluntary help, and poor accountability for public outcomes.

What must not be lost? Dignity, choice, personal property, voluntary care, safety, public access, and the duty to plan and provide pathways to housing.

What happens if we repeat this? Repeated clearances without housing move the problem. Repeated investments in affordable, stable homes have measurable potential to reduce it.

Whose consequences count? People experiencing homelessness, neighbors, businesses, police, providers, taxpayers, and future households. Count costs shifted to others.

We should not treat any method as correct because it matches an ideology, a political affiliation, or a personal belief. We should start with what credible research shows, set measurable goals, and remain willing to change course when the facts demand it. This applies to Housing First programs, treatment providers, contracted shelters, and enforcement alike.

9 | A practical, evidence-based work program for Chico

- * Publish a housing scoreboard. Show permitted, completed, occupied, and preserved affordable homes by income level; track shelter-to-housing moves, retention, and returns to homelessness.
- * Provide safe interim options now. Clean sleeping space, bathrooms, showers, laundry, storage, sanitation, and clear pathways to permanent housing while new homes are developed.
- * Keep treatment voluntary. Fund access to qualified professionals and evidence-based services, without making treatment or sobriety a housing requirement.
- * Use policing for actual crime. Separate reports on violence and property crimes from camping enforcement and displacement. Evaluate whether responses resolve harms rather than relocate people.
- * Audit spending and outcomes. Compare shelter contracts, enforcement, public works, and housing placements by full cost and durable results, not simply activity counts.
- * Give residents a real voice. Establish a City commission on housing and homelessness with people who have experienced homelessness and qualified independent experts.
- * Test community governance. Examine a low-barrier, resident-governed Genesis pilot with elected resident participation, transparent safeguards, and independent evaluation.

An invitation to common ground

Rob Berry asks Chico to think seriously about how it governs. I agree. Let's ask what the evidence supports, what people actually need, and whether our decisions reduce homelessness or merely make it less visible.

I am not asking Chico to tolerate crime, disregard public safety, or spend without accountability. I am asking us to put Housing First over Treatment First, dignity and respect, and proven research over ideology at the center of the response.

Affordable housing is the problem ... homelessness is the outcome. Judge our progress by whether people can find, afford, and keep a home.

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SOURCE NOTES / PUBLIC DOCUMENTS & EVIDENCE

References and scope

This response addresses Berry's October 25, 2026 essay. Local statistics and research claims are tied to the sources below. The policy priorities are the author's positions. Figures retain their source year and population; research claims are stated within the limits of the evidence.

[1] Rob Berry, How Chico Governs Its Future: An investment in understanding, Chico Restoration Project, October 25, 2026, pp. 1-8.

Original essay is on Rob Berry's Substack; direct link in October 30 blog post.

[2] City of Chico, Unhoused Strategic Plan: Proposed Five-Year Framework 2027-2031, draft dated October 20, 2026.

Housing barriers, existing services, planning goals, and draft governance provisions. Open source.

[3] Butte Countywide Homeless Continuum of Care, 2025 Point-in-Time Executive Summary, May 2025, p. 15.

Countywide affordability example and one-night PIT scope. Open source.

[4] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, Addressing Homelessness Through Housing First, Policy & Practice, Autumn 2024.

Evidence for housing stability and voluntary services; effects on other outcomes vary. Open source.

[5] U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 7 Principles for Addressing Encampments, June 15, 2022.

Federal interagency guidance on displacement, humane outreach, and housing access. Open source.

[6] City of Chico, City Council Agenda Report: Post-Warren Options Regarding the Alternate Site, Genesis, and Enforcement Operations, May 19, 2026, pp. 2-3.

FY 2024-25 Genesis operating expenditure categories; these should not be equated with provider profits. Open source.

[7] California Government Code Sec. 8698.4, shelter-crisis provisions, and Chico's Shelter Crisis Plan.

Legal context only; not an automatic authorization for an operator transfer. Open source.

Terminology. Person-first language is used throughout. Original document titles and source descriptions retain their published wording when cited.

Purpose. Community discussion and evidence-based policy evaluation. This is not a finding of misconduct, an audited cost-benefit analysis, or a legal determination.