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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, SEPTEMBER 1

JOINT NEWS RELEASE

City, county emphasize collaboration on homeless issue, but recognize limits

Durango, CO: The city of Durango and La Plata County will continue their joint efforts to assist with the scheduled Sept. 30 closure of the homeless encampment known as Purple Cliffs, but recognize there are limits on what can be done locally.

“While we will continue to do everything we can to mitigate the impacts of the camp’s closing, what we are effectively doing is trying to find a local solution to a nationwide problem,” said Tom Sluis, spokesman for the city. “The city, county and our numerous partners exemplify the generosity of the community, but we are typically addressing symptoms of homelessness versus the structural causes. As such, we need a true community solution created from the local as well as state and federal levels. We are not giving up, but there are limits to what we can do based on the resources available and the expectations of the community.”

The two entities have been pooling resources with each other, and numerous local assistance groups, for many years in the provision of mental health services, housing vouchers, food, medical assistance, trash and waste cleanup, and law enforcement management to the Purple Cliffs residents. These group discussions have identified numerous potential sites for a managed camp, and all have been thoroughly vetted without finding a suitable location.

The lack of an identified managed camp site acceptable to all stakeholders does not indicate a lack of effort among all parties involved. Homelessness is a national issue with deep roots, and while cities and counties are often expected to address the problem, the scale of the challenges inherent in combatting homelessness make a permanent “solution” to homelessness in Durango and La Plata County unlikely. It is within this framework that the city of Durango and La Plata County have been working, and will continue to work to minimize the impact of the homeless community on the larger populous while respecting the individual rights and remaining attentive to the well-being of all residents, housed or unhoused.

Ted Holteen, spokesman for La Plata County, stressed the collaborative efforts of local governments while crediting the non-profit organizations working every day.

“Although there’s not a great deal of fanfare about it, there are people on the ground out there at Purple Cliffs, interviewing residents to best mitigate the considerable but unavoidable impact this

closure is going to have on the community,” Holteen said. “The more Purple Cliffs occupants whose needs can be addressed before September 30, the lesser that impact will be.”

This joint endeavor includes a triage approach to address the highest priorities for the closure of Purple Cliffs, and is being led by Manna, the Neighbors in Need Alliance (NINA) and the Durango/La Plata County Coordinating Council on Homelessness. These efforts have been underway since before the announcement to close the homeless camp, and will continue after Sept. 30 as well.

The outreach has already resulted in several Purple Cliffs families receiving temporary housing in local hotels and several other families moving out of Purple Cliffs for other private housing options; those families staying in hotels are working with Housing Solutions for the Southwest to find permanent housing and the community partners will continue their efforts with the support of local governments to match current Purple Cliffs residents with the services that will provide their best options for safe housing opportunities.

Additional resources:

[Neighbors in Need Alliance](#) – (970) 257-1129

[Manna Soup Kitchen](#) – (970) 385-5095

Updated information is also available on the [La Plata County website](#) and the [city of Durango’s website](#).

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