

COLUMNISTS

Keeping an open mind

Tent city for homeless deserves fair hearing

"The highest form of ignorance is when you reject something you don't know anything about," according to the great motivational speaker and author Dr. Wayne Dyer.

Keeping this thought in mind, I was willing to meet with George Taylor, advocate and founder of National Homeless Veterans Support, about his concept for a tent city homeless camp on county-owned land in Mims.

George approached the Brevard County Commission more than a year ago about the issue of homelessness among veterans in our county, and inquired about the possibility of the county building or purchasing a facility for housing.

With the financial position that we are in, due to falling property values, increasing state mandates and the general recession, the acquisition of a building for this purpose is not in the cards.

George then asked about the viability of a "tent city" on county-owned property, in which homeless veterans could be housed in a large military-style tent, without



**Commissioner
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Guest columnist

the fear of being evicted and losing their belongings.

He told me about a site in Pinellas County where this is being done, and our Housing and Human Services staff is researching how it is working.

I know that residents do not want homeless people camped out in their backyards. That is why we agreed to explore the joint use of a site at Hatbill Park in Mims, where there are no residences nearby, as a possibility for a trial location on a temporary basis.

Several issues still need to be addressed by Taylor's group before we move forward, such as flooding concerns and access to utilities, transportation, emergency management, law enforcement and fire rescue. But we must be at least willing to discuss the concept and investigate and evaluate all solutions, before making a de-

cision.

Veterans now make up 25 percent of the homeless population, and those numbers will continue to increase, as military members return from the battlefield with emotional and mental health issues. These are people who have offered their lives for their country and their fellow citizens.

The response from some has been surprisingly negative with regard to my open-mindedness about this concept and willingness to discuss its pros and cons.

This is the approach I take with every idea that a citizen brings to me. Homeless veterans are a very serious issue, and I would hope that each of you would have the courtesy and reasonableness to actually learn about a topic before arbitrarily dismissing it.

I don't have all the answers, but I am willing to listen to possible solutions to a problem that doesn't appear to be going away any time soon. I would encourage you to do the same. ■

Fisher represents District 1 on the Brevard County Commission.