

From: dbobena@yahoo.com

Subject: Take actions to reduce unauthorized homeless camp removals in Whatcom County during COVID-19, and beyond
Date: Thursday, October 8, 2020 1:15:38 PM

Dear Homeless Strategies Workgroup, Bellingham City Council, and Whatcom County Council:

I am sending you a link to a January 31, 2020, California Coastkeeper Alliance article entitled, "Lessons Learned from Empowering the Homeless for Cleaner Rivers & Streams." <https://cacoastkeeper.org/lessons-learned-from-empowering-the-homeless-for-cleaner-rivers-streams/>

The current procedures and practices for what the Bellingham Police Department calls Camp Clean-ups, focus on vacating people without shelter from unauthorized camps without providing them with an alternative place to go on the day of the removal of their camp. It is vital, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and during a time we anticipate an increase in the population of people in our community who are unsheltered, to ensure immediate safe and healthy sheltering options for the numbers and specific needs of those unsheltered friends and neighbors.

I call on all of you to work with all available community organizations to come up with strategies to address unauthorized camps in ways that will significantly reduce the number of camps that are being removed, so that CDC COVID-19 guidelines regarding homeless encampments can be consistently followed. In the case of the article I am sending you, this would mean reaching out to environmental organizations, or other social justice organizations with similar goals, in our area to see if they will work with you on developing similar kinds of clean-up empowerment efforts that are listed in the Homeless Engagement Report linked to in the article. In the report, that has the header, California Trash Hot Spots, Homeless Encampment Clean-up Programs Overview, a list is provided, on page 2, of five different programs in different parts of the state of California. https://d59.e92.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CCKA_Trash-Hot-Spot-Memo_Homeless-Encampments_01.27.2020.pdf

Also, here is a brief excerpt from that report:

"CRA's approach to this trash reduction program is to work with members of the unhoused population, rather than evicting individuals from their camps. Despite accusations by local community members that CRA is enabling the homeless by allowing individuals to continue to live in

encampments, the CRA is committed to engaging the unhoused population in an effort to reduce the generation of trash from existing encampments. The reasons for this programmatic approach include:

- (1) When individuals are admitted into shelters, they are not allowed to bring all of their possessions with them, meaning these items must be abandoned.
- (2) When people are evicted, their possessions and waste remain in the camp. Without engaging the unhoused population, no one knows whether that individual is gone permanently and whether the items are abandoned.
- (3) If people are evicted from one camp, they will often find somewhere else to go or return later. Evictions often lead to less engagement with nonprofit and local agencies in the future.
- (4) Unhoused individuals want to live in a clean space and have proven to be willing and engaged in the clean-up effort."

I have written to California Coastkeeper Alliance today attempting to get a good link to, or copy of their Homeless Encampment Clean-Up Programs Best Practices, since the link for that which they provide in their article and on their website is not going to that material.

I call on all government officials and community organizations to work together, striving to eliminate unnecessary trauma, de-stabilization, and mistreatment of people who are unsheltered. One means of doing so is by taking action to empower our unsheltered friends and neighbors, while reducing the number of unauthorized homeless camp removals and their associated costs so that much of those resources and funds currently going to vacating homeless camp residents can be placed toward providing community empowerment, along with transitional and permanent housing options.

Sincerely,

Dena Jensen
Birch Bay, WA