



City of Seattle

Jenny A. Durkan, Mayor

Human Services Department

Catherine L. Lester, Director

April 18, 2018

Gunner Scott
Vice Chair
Highland Park Action Committee

Dear Mr. Scott,

Thank you for your correspondence expressing concerns about the impacts of the Myers Way permitted encampment in Highland Park. I am pleased to hear that Myers Way/Camp Second Chance (9701 Myers Way) is operating with little incident in Highland Park and I acknowledge that you are asking for more support from the City of Seattle in relation to infrastructure, public safety and transportation projects.

The reasons underlying the homelessness crisis are many, and it is an issue that no local government can solve alone. As a result of cuts to or chronic underfunding of many support systems at the state and federal levels, local municipalities have been asked to bear the burden of emergency response to this growing crisis.

Our region's current needs outweigh shelter capacity, leaving too many seniors, families, and individuals sleeping on the street and in vehicles. The 2017 point-in-time count, Count Us In, found that 5,485 individuals were living outside and unsheltered in King County and 70% of these individuals were counted in the city of Seattle.

While the City's Human Services Department (HSD) invests over \$65 million annually in services for people experiencing homelessness, it remains a complex problem without easy solutions. The City has focused its funding on programs and services that provide an intentional connection to housing and is testing new strategies to address this staggering crisis.

One of these strategies is the permitted encampment program. Thus far, permitted encampments have shown success in assisting chronically homeless people that have lived outside for extended periods of time and in allowing the City to offer safer places to stay for individuals that are living in precarious conditions. The City currently hosts six managed encampments across Seattle (in Districts One, Two, Four, Five and Seven) which offer a safer place to stay for more than 300 people per night.

Permit Renewal Process:

Camp Second Chance was permitted by the City of Seattle in March 2017. The current process will determine whether the Camp receives a renewal of that permit for an additional 12 months. HSD contracts with the Low-Income Housing Institute (LIHI) to manage permitted encampments and HSD manages the process by which the City extends the permit for these encampments. HSD considers the following factors during the renewal process:

1. The program's performance outcomes;
2. The condition of the property; and

3. Unforeseen impacts on the surrounding community that are directly attributed to the presence of the permitted encampment village.

In addition to weighing these factors, HSD has solicited input and comments from community members related to the re-permitting.

Unmanaged Encampments in Myers Way Greenbelt:

Several community members in Highland Park have expressed concern over the conditions of the unmanaged encampments in the greenbelt on the east side of Myers Way, across the street from Camp Second Chance.

Cleanups at unmanaged encampments are prioritized based on public health and safety conditions. Criminal behavior and obstructing a facility (e.g., camping on the sidewalk) are considered as part of this prioritization. Upon receiving reports, specially trained City staff visit the site to assess the conditions. Encampments are then scheduled for removal based on their priority. If an encampment is abandoned but trash remains, Seattle Public Utilities' Illegal Dumping program addresses the site.

As you know, the steep incline and soft soil of the Myers Way greenbelt makes it difficult to fully remove debris and waste during the fall and winter months. To address the conditions of the unmanaged encampments in the greenbelt, the City has taken the following actions:

- The Navigation Team, a cohort of police officers and homeless outreach workers, has visited a site near the SR-509 service road and WSDOT drainage system weekly since February 2018 to perform outreach. One person chose to move to the permitted encampment in Georgetown.
- WSDOT and the City of Seattle cleaned an accessible portion of this encampment to address conditions associated with increased flood risks in early March. The City works closely with WSDOT at a variety of sites, both to take advantage of WSDOT crews and to address WSDOT operational concerns.
- Seattle Public Utilities has picked up garbage weekly at unmanaged encampments along Myers Way since May 2017.
- Councilmember Herbold joined the Navigation Team on an outreach visit in the greenbelt in March.
- The Navigation Team and WSDOT are monitoring the condition of the encampments and the ability of cleanup crews to work safely on the muddy slopes. Cleanup will proceed when conditions are reliably safe for this work.

Best Practices for Neighborhoods that Host Permitted Encampments:

It's vital to help prepare host neighborhoods by sharing best practices learned since opening the first permitted encampment in November 2015.

The City of Seattle and LIHI have worked with community members in the following ways over the last several years:

- Creating a Community Advisory Committee Meeting (CAC) for each permitted encampment and holding CAC meetings that are open to the public.
- Host a community meeting before the encampment opens and before the permit for an encampment is renewed.

- Complete a permitted encampment evaluation yearly. Read the [2017 Evaluation](#).¹
- Provide a 24-hour contact number for the encampment manager.
- Work with community members to address poor conditions in the neighborhood to the best of City and the operator's ability including installing street lights, adding garbage pick-up and protecting wetlands with fencing as well as enforcing parking rules along Myers Way.

Given the scope of the homelessness crisis in Seattle and the difficulty in finding public land that can accommodate a managed encampment, the City is unable to provide constituents the opportunity to select managed encampment locations. However, we would like to improve our response to community concerns. We are interested and appreciative of your suggestions to improve our community outreach process and our methods of communications and will share them with our community outreach team members.

Timeline for Myers Way Park:

Parks does not currently have funding to develop nor maintain a community park on this site. The 2021-2026 Seattle Park District Capital Improvement Program (CIP) funding process will be the first opportunity to procure funding for this development. Should Parks fund the development of these parcels through this process the earliest public meetings and planning processes would begin in 2021.

Seattle Police Department Jurisdiction:

Your letter indicates that you are experiencing difficulties related to jurisdictional issues between SPD and the King County Sheriff's Office. This issue isn't within HSD's purview. I've reached out to SPD to provide more context about the current Mutual Aide Agreements between jurisdictions and encourage you to work with Assistant Chief Steve Wilske at Steve.Wilkse@seattle.gov to discuss your specific experiences.

Thank you for reaching out to me. I look forward to hearing how we can work together to serve both people experiencing homelessness and housed community members in Seattle.

Best,



Catherine Lester
Director, Human Services Department

¹<http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/HumanServices/AboutUs/Final%202017%20Permitted%20Encampment%20Evaluation.pdf>