



Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness

<https://pchomeless.org/> - info@pchomeless.org

September 17, 2021

Mayor Victoria Woodards
Members of City Council
Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
Linda Stewart, Director, Neighborhood & Community Services

Mayor Woodards,

There is nothing easy about our work right now, but it is going to be much more difficult to try to relocate unhoused people with COVID-19 rampant and the rains beginning. Somehow “camping” seems more acceptable in the summer. So acceptable that housed people pay money for equipment and travel and camp sites.

There is nothing acceptable about forced encampment moves when there is no place for the people living in these sites to go. We all know we simply lack the housing required for all of our unsheltered people. And there is nothing acceptable about forcing people who have no homes to move their tents without a safe and decent place to go. No one can tell us where they will go. There is no low barrier shelter; Shiloh says it won't open until Sept. 27. Where will couples go? People in encampments, and in shelters, often form a community. Will the HOT team help communities relocate together? If so, where will they go?

We know the City's HOT team has taken the lead on relocating people. Do they have a ByNameList so we can know who was in the encampment and where they go? How else can outreach workers follow up with the people they are assisting if they don't know where they have gone?

Two weeks' notice for the people at 8th & Yakima was a good decision. We'll find out September 21 if two weeks was enough time for each of the people in that encampment to locate a new place and figure out how to move their tents, and their lives, to that new place.

72 hours notice for the people at 11 & Yakima or any other encampment is simply not enough.

We don't know if either of these sweeps meets the CDC guidance.

Here are some specifics - if you are going to sweep, we ask you to minimize the human harm:

- Designate a publicly-owned site for low barrier urban camping before authorizing a sweep.
- Ensure enough new low barrier beds open before the sweep and hold beds for people affected by the sweep.
- Reach out to likely impacted low income neighborhoods and develop a plan for the housed and unhoused people. Porta potties, hygiene stations, on-site assistance including Safe Parking site options for those living in vehicles, “hot spots” or other means of communication, commitment of daily sup-



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port services even when people say “no” and say “no” and say “no” yet again. Why? Because experience tells us that one day, they will say “yes.” We want them alive and able to make that response.

- Incentivize the move. We’re having success in COVID vaccinations with bringing vaccines TO people experiencing homelessness and providing a \$50 cash card for each shot. We don’t know what might incentivize people in an encampment to move so let’s ask them.
- Use the same planning and care that was done with People’s Park.
- Never shut down Porta potties or hygiene stations before a sweep.
- Provide each person with garbage bags - enough for their belongings and enough for their trash.
- Have medical care on-site.
- Ask the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department to offer COVID vaccinations prior to the sweep.
- Stop using 72 hours’ notice; give at least two weeks time.
- Provide each person with an appropriate shelter option AND a permanent housing intervention. The model is called “Built for Zero” and it underlies our work on the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness Steering Committee; a plan that the City of Tacoma has promised to align with. At least use these sweeps as an opportunity to try “Built for Zero” options.
- Engage people with lived experience to help people relocate as humanely as possible.
- Have trucks and drivers available from the date and time the sweep notice is posted to help people move.
- Secure short term storage for the belongings of people who require more than what the City can store off-site.
- Identify enough safe sites plus 20% prior to the posting of the sweep notice. Encampments are fluid. The City counted twenty tents on Sept. 7 but we counted twenty-five the following Sunday.
- Just as the City Dept of Emergency Management has triggers for heat and cold and air quality, there should be weather conditions under which a sweep simply cannot happen. Hospitals are filled with COVID patients. We cannot force people to move in the rain, during storms or cold weather events. How will they ever dry their tents? Their belongings? Themselves?

We in the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness appreciate that the City gives us notice before they post a sweep notice. It will help us if the City’s sweep decision-making process is more transparent. What exactly initiates a sweep and who makes which decision?

These tents are people’s homes; these encampments their community.

The people living in these tents are part of our community, our beloved community.

On behalf of the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness,

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