The Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness urges the City of Tacoma, Port of Tacoma, Washington State Department of Transportation, Pierce County, and Puyallup Tribe to use the following standard procedures to minimize the harm to people living at any given site:

First, the law requires that residents of any camp site that is to be removed are offered access to safe, dry, warm shelter that is appropriate to their situation. No one should be criminalized for lack of having a safe place to lay their head. To meet the requirements of the Martin v. Boise court decision, this is the minimum requirement before someone can be moved.

Also ensure that any action to remove someone’s vehicle that is serving as their primary home meets the requirements of the Long v. City of Seattle court decision.

Here are some specific ways that we ask you to minimize the harm to our houseless neighbors:

* Ensure that there is space for each person in a given location at a publicly-owned site for low-barrier camping before authorizing a sweep.
* Ensure that there are enough new low-barrier shelter spaces open before the sweep and that beds are held for people impacted 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 support 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.
* Coordinate care and transportation to help move people from their current location to safe shelter.
* 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 20 tents on Sept. 7, 2021, but we counted 25 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?