Sweeps Protocol

The Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness urges all governing agencies within Pierce County to adopt the following standard procedures to minimize harm to people living unsheltered and the community as a whole:

**Legal Requirements:** The *Martin v. Boise* court ruling holds that cities cannot enforce anti-camping ordinances if they do not have enough homeless shelter beds available for their homeless population. A more recent ruling, *Long v. City of Seattle,* protects vehicles from impound if a vehicle is serving as a person’s primary residence. In addition to these legal issues, there are humanitarian considerations. No one should be criminalized or harassed for lack of having a safe place to lay their head.

**Here are our specific recommendations** to minimize harm when sweeps are deemed necessary:

1. Offer reasonable alternatives:
   1. Create new, low-barrier shelter spaces before the sweep and set aside/hold enough beds for people impacted by the sweep.
   2. At minimum, ensure there is space for each displaced person at a publicly-owned site for low-barrier camping before authorizing a sweep.
2. Facilitate a smooth transition
   1. Never shut down Porta potties or hygiene stations before a sweep.
   2. Provide each person with enough garbage bags or other containers for their belongings
   3. Supply enough garbage bags, brooms, dustpans, rakes, shovels, etc. so that people can clean up the site and dispose of unwanted items.
   4. Coordinate assistance and transportation to help people move.
      1. Have trucks and drivers available from the date and time the sweep notice is posted to help people move.
      2. Secure short term storage for the belongings of people who require more than what the City can store off-site.
   5. Have medical care on-site. *I’m not sure why this is included – maybe need to say why.*
   6. Offer COVID vaccinations prior to the sweep (Tacoma Pierce County Health Department)
   7. Incentivize the move. We’re having success in COVID vaccinations with bringing vac-cines 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. *I can see a number of problems that could emerge with this one and think that including it in this document might actually harm our chances of being heard. Creative but problematic.*
3. Commit to a plan to end homelessness that serves housed and unhoused people as well as businesses and public agencies. Such a plan must include:
   1. Community outreach and information; particularly for high impact neighborhoods.
   2. Multiple options to serve multiple needs AND ensure the commons, particularly for neighborhoods and business districts in low income areas. Options include self man-aged, lightly managed, and 24/7managed facilities:
      1. safe lots and RV camps
      2. urban campgrounds
      3. congregate shelters
      4. non-congregate (including hotel rooms and micro-shelters)
   3. Porta potties, hygiene stations, access to services wherever outdoor options are offered.
   4. “hot spots” or other means of communication
   5. Supportive 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.
4. Adopt humane policies and procedures, such as:
   1. Minimum of two weeks’ notice prior to a sweep.
   2. 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.
   3. Engage people with lived experience to inform planning and processes.
   4. Identify enough safe sites plus 20% prior to the posting of sweep notices. Encampments are fluid. The City counted 20 tents on Sept. 7, 2021, but we counted 25 the following Sunday.
   5. 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?

As members of the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness, we appreciate receiving notice from some municipalities prior to the posting of sweep notices. It will help us further if the sweep decision-making process is more transparent. What exactly initiates a sweep and who has decision-making authority?