The 10 Block Camping Ban

Why more work is needed prior to instituting such a ban

1. The 10 block “buffer” would eliminate almost every campsite set up by people trying to survive without housing.

There is a reason these camps are walkable and central. If the ban goes forward in any form, start by reducing the buffer from 10 blocks to 3 blocks.

1. Enforce current laws against crime rather than making new laws to criminalize homelessness.

Complaints by neighbors are primarily based on activities that are already illegal and criminals often hide their activities in the poorest communities; tents make it easy to “set-up” business. Enforcing laws that already exist will improve health and safety for everyone whether or not we are housed. Sweep these:

* trafficking tents that hold salespeople who do not even sleep in the tents they erect
* cars rolling through the neighborhood 24/7 with buyers and sellers
* giant storage tents that do not have anyone living in them
* garbage (then add dumpsters so there is a place to put new garbage)
* human waste (then add Sani cans and handwashing stations)

After these are accomplished – we will be faced with a much different - and more solvable - problem.

1. Problems with criminalizing homelessness
	* Illegal according to Martin v. Boise
	* Jail more expensive than housing alternatives
	* Criminal history makes it even more difficult to obtain employment and housing
	* Fines are the most unequal tool wielded by the criminal legal system. Do the research and find a more just way to approach this problem.

Safe camps instead of and sweeps

Logical steps to safe and healthy campsites

**STEP 1:**

Enforce laws against trafficking humans, drugs, and stolen goods within the existing camps; the “hands-off” by law enforcement in the camps resulted in great harm to both housed and unsheltered people living in poor communities.

Moving a camp without addressing the trafficking, bullying, and extortion that exists in almost every large campsite will simply create a new unsafe campsite and a new set of angry constituents. Turning a blind eye to crime in and around campsites continues to allow a few individuals to endanger everyone in the community and puts women and vulnerable campers at extreme risk for abuse.

**STEP 2:**

Consider camp improvements rather than moving the camp. Ask:

1. Is this a logical location for a camp based on survival of campers?
2. Would neighbors be open to living beside people without homes if Step 1 is complete and regularly monitored?
3. Check the structure of the current camp. Is this a community that wants to move as a unit?
4. Are there extremely vulnerable people who need other options in order to survive?

Offer real choice where people have agency (even if these are small areas of control). Provide whatever information people need to make informed decisions,

**STEP 3**

Provide actual solutions: a printed map -or at least a set of addresses- where camping *is* allowed rather than a list of places where camping *is not* allowed.

NEVER sweep an area without providing an address to a safe campground or safe lot where people can move AND where there is an available campsite or parking space.

**STEP 4**

Learn from our own experiences and the experiences of other municipalities (e.g., Puyallup).

* We know that congregate shelters are a critical tool for addressing homelessness and inequity in Tacoma/Pierce County.
* We know the multiple factors that keep reasonable people from choosing to move to a congregate shelter.
* We need to act responsibly to avoid the potential liabilities for taxpayers (and bad karma) if municipalities ignore Martin v. Boise.
* Pierce County developed a [COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS](https://www.piercecountywa.gov/7309/Comprehensive-Plan-to-End-Homelessness). Study it, find opportunities for collaboration. Act as if we are all in this together. We are.