

PLANNING COMMISSION TALK
10.20.16

My name is Kim Lancaster. I live in Shoreline. My husband, Brad, and I are going to tag team our message tonight, because we may otherwise run over time.

I speak tonight about the proposed amendments to create a homeless encampment permit. I appreciate much in these proposed amendments: the fee reduction for proposed encampments, the retention of the neighborhood meeting requirement, and the extension of the encampment period up to nine months. Many of the members of Rain City Rotary are in attendance tonight to show their support for a term for encampments that does not require schoolchildren to move with their camps during the school year. Raise your signs, folks.

I strongly oppose one component of the proposed amendments. The staff proposal requires that homeless encampments have a fifteen foot minimum setback from other parcels. This setback has been revised downwards from twenty feet in the last version of the amendments.

The effect of this requirement is that few homeowners and many smaller churches cannot effectively host homeless encampments. I have a large back yard. Under this setback, I would be able to site about four tents in the middle of my yard. I have been to many church-based encampments in Shoreline and north Seattle. Each of them has at least one side of the camp right up on the property line with their neighbors. The churches need that zero setback because otherwise the encampment will gobble up too much parking. If hosting a camp will have that negative parking effect, many churches will decline to host an encampment. Further, siting at the property line makes it possible for the encampments to install their six-foot screening on the host's fencing without erecting an expensive and fragile separate structure for that purpose.

Perhaps the rationale for the fifteen foot setback is innocent enough. Perhaps it aims to reduce impacts on neighbors. I doubt it reduces such impacts. A pernicious rationale also exists. It is stated in tonight's planning commission agenda materials at page 6. Neighbors may object to having a camp next door. The net effect of the setback requirement will be to reduce the availability of hosts for homeless encampments in Shoreline. That is exactly opposite the charge the City Council gave to staff and the Planning Commission last fall. It is also plain discrimination against some of Shoreline's most vulnerable citizens.

The staff sentiment appears to be that homelessness should not impact Shoreliners. I am sure you will be hearing from others here tonight who in good faith believe that homeless people should be homeless somewhere other than Shoreline. One cannot make homelessness less bothersome, except by ending homelessness. Perhaps we will find the political will to end homelessness in the near future. Perhaps not. In the mean time, we need ways to keep Shoreline's homeless persons safe, warm, and dry. Only a zero setback maximizes the number of homeless encampment hosts. Please reduce the required homeless encampment setback to zero.


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My name is Brad Lancaster. I am an attorney. I live in Shoreline. My law office is in Shoreline.

There is a further problem with the proposed fifteen-foot setback requirement for homeless encampments. If the fifteen-foot setback prevents a person or church in Shoreline from hosting a homeless encampment, despite their religious conviction that they should do so, then the setback violates the Washington Constitution's provision for religious liberty. The City of Woodinville sought to frustrate homeless encampments in their city by delaying issuance of permits for a homeless encampment. The Washington Supreme Court found that Woodinville's zoning decisions violated the religious liberty of the church that brought the action against Woodinville. Shoreline does not want to invite litigation, or become a symbol for religious discrimination.

I believe that the proposed setback exposes the City of Shoreline to litigation of this very sort. I have briefed the City Attorney at some length on this matter. I encourage you to forward to the city council's consideration zoning amendments that contain a zero setback provision.

Thank you for listening. We appreciate your service to our community.



Definition of "managing agency" discriminates
against religiously motivated individual citizens