

Statement to the Planning Commission Regarding Transitional Encampments in Residential Backyards

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October 20, 2016

I have read a great deal of opinions on Next Door, in the Seattle Times, and have listened to the hour-long KUOW radio broadcast about the Jungle.

I don't pretend to be a homeless expert nor an expert on property rights and regulations. What I do know is that, hidden among much of the fear mongering rhetoric about this issue is a great deal of misinformation.

But I'm here simply to express my opinion respectfully to the Commission in support of easing the restrictions on individuals to host encampments on their property.

The one issue I've read most about is the setback. I would like to go on record as strongly favoring a 5-foot setback—setback similar to how closely a garden shed, back yard porch, or stone barbecue, I believe, could be built to a property.

I also want to address the many who have stated that homelessness should be a problem for the City of Shoreline to solve instead "placing the burden on homeowners."

What I believe they really mean is that the burden is on the NEIGHBORS of homeowners, since those willing to host encampments presumably don't see it as a burden—at least not one they are reticent to undertake as concerned and gracious citizens.

What those with the typical NIMBY—or perhaps we should call it a "Not EVEN In My NEIGHBORS Back Yard" attitude—**don't** get is that the City of Shoreline already runs on a reasonably lean budget. To undertake the responsibility of homelessness would necessarily mean a significant increase on our property taxes. Is that what they want? Are the NIMBYs wanting to pay \$500 or \$1,000 a year in taxes to move this problem out of their neighbor's back yards...I doubt it.

If it truly costs over \$30,000/year to support a homeless family, then I contend that by allowing us to host encampments on our property the City IS doing something about it and they are doing it in a most cost-effective way possible.

No, back yard homeless encampments are not the best nor the only solution we should be considering, but it is one solution that should be allowed and facilitated into the mix.

Beyond my three minutes, I would also like to point out:

In keeping with the spirit of the diversity and inclusion so important to the Council of Neighborhoods, I believe we should not be afraid of adopting a LIMITED social experiment in Shoreline—for an initial limited period of time, say 3 years—that would allow us to evolve and somewhat perfect the concept of Transitional Encampments....or discard it as a failed experiment.

Most of the fearful reasons mentioned this evening are not based upon fact and indeed, are contrary to what the experts have found to be true. One only need to listen to the research broadcast on KUOW conducted by the investigative journalists looking at the extreme situation at the Jungle to know that one of the main reasons people fail to adopt supposedly available Shelter space is that they have to take ALL their belongings with them EVERY night. They often have to wait for hours to be accepted; they may have to sleep in a chair; they can't take their pets; and they are often rousted at 5:00 AM....*NOT* that they can't use drugs or that they don't wish to seek rehab.

As I've said, I have confidence that Director Cohen's Staff can provide enough of the needed considerations to make this a workable solution to add to the quiver we use to combat homelessness in our community.

We need to check our white privilege at the door and realize that it *IS* our responsibility to do what we can to help those ***who are part of our community***, and—as Commissioner Donna Thomas mentioned—many of us are only 2 paychecks or 2 financial disasters away from that same situation.

Respectfully Submitted,
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