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1. Julie Atwood
2. Shoreline
3. (O) Richmond Highlands
4. julie@shinythings.com
5. 02/27/2017
6. Continued Discussion of Ord. No. 762 – Amending SMC for Temporary Encampments
7. Hello! I wrote to the council on this subject recently but the agenda item was pushed to a different meeting and wanted to ensure my comment on the item was registered.

On the subject of backyard encampments, I am firmly against them; they are potentially dangerous for the homeowner, the neighbors and most importantly the homeless themselves.

For the homeowner, there's a huge pile of unanswered questions and potential liability. What liabilities would the homeowner be taking on (property, life, limb, etc), and would their homeowner insurance cover any of that? What happens if their "tenants" refuse to leave at the end of their agreed-upon stay? Is there going to be some sort of standardized length of stay? How will this be enforced? Who is responsible should the "tenants" become disruptive or destructive? How many resources would a homeowner be expected to provide, other than a patch of land? Electricity, plumbing, sewer, etc?

For the neighbors and neighborhood, I would want to know what rights the neighbors would have to privacy and being able to observe peace and quiet, were there to be no setbacks from the property line required. Would the neighbors have any say at all when it comes to a backyard encampment that may potentially turn a property once intended for a single family into a much higher occupancy property? Would there be any kind of overarching organization to oversee backyard encampments, to provide some kind of conflict resolution and general oversight?

For the homeless population, I'd want to know what rights the "tenants" would have. Would they be legally considered tenants in the first place? What protections would they have against eviction before the end of the "lease" or whatever it would be considered? What services would they be able to access, considering how isolated they would be from organizations created to provide support? What are the long-term goals for transitioning them from backyard encampments to real housing? How exactly would they find another short-term location to stay, once the time runs out at their current encampment? What if there is nowhere else to go? Will anyone provide any kind of assistance or management for this aspect?

These are just a FEW questions that only scrape the surface, and I would definitely want comprehensive answers to these questions (and more) and hope the council would too, before making any decisions. This seems like a pretty complex undertaking, not anywhere near as simple as "Hey, you can stay in my yard!" might sound initially.

I worry that this would become a crutch that actually interferes with assisting the homeless. Instead of providing vital services and real housing or a path to real housing, we'd be cutting them off from the organizations that could assist them. Meanwhile, we also risk creating more conflict between homeless and homeowners/renters than already exists, and there's definitely more than enough prejudice to begin with.

I also worry that this is developing a false dichotomy -- some have said that if you're against backyard encampments, you're against the homeless. But this is SO far from the truth. While I am certainly concerned about so-called "selfish" issues such as enjoying the benefits of a low-density neighborhood and maintaining property values, I am also adamantly against anything that would harm our homeless population, and I do believe this would. I would certainly be willing to support a levy or some kind of program that provided more assistance that ultimately helped our homeless return to jobs and homes, but I definitely do not support this incredibly problematic and short-sighted proposal.

At BEST, this provides very little benefit to our homeless over existing services and organizations by serving as a temporary stop-gap when there's no other organization to step up to provide a location for the tent cities. At worst, it's a potentially explosive situation that may result in a regression in services provided (especially if some organizations decide that if private citizens are doing this, they don't need to). If big issues should arise, it reinforces the concerns and/or prejudices citizens already have (some comments on this subject already reference other homeless populations that have alienated their neighbors) and may put neighbors directly at odds with one another if there's no organization overseeing this endeavor. To put it more colloquially, this really seems like it can only end in tears. For everyone.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope we can help our homeless find jobs and REAL homes with real roofs, and in the meantime, if a tent city is their only option, ensure it's one that is overseen by a proper charity or organization equipped to handle the inevitable issues that arise -- as well as provide more comprehensive resources that go beyond a patch of land to pitch their tent.

Julie Atwood, Richmond Highlands

8. Oppose

Thank you,
City of Shoreline

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