



Memorandum

TO: RULES AND OPEN
GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: Councilmember Raul Peralez

SUBJECT: Addressing Homelessness through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic

DATE: February 4, 2020

Approved

Date 02/04/2020

RECOMMENDATION

Direct the City Manager to report back as soon as possible to the City Council with recommendations for the following:

1. Advocate to the County's Public Health Department to make available COVID-19 vaccinations along with outreach services to unhoused individuals at campsites,
2. Following implementation of 1, immediately resume pre-pandemic encampment management and abatement procedures, prioritizing high impacted locations utilizing reporting data and in coordination with the Council Offices,
3. Establish a temporary sanctioned encampment on a publicly-owned site for the duration of the Local State of Emergency.

DISCUSSION

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City acted swiftly to halt encampment abatements to reduce the likelihood of transmission. As a result, infection rates have remained low in the unhoused community and it was not only until recently have we seen the numbers rise during the winter surge. However, the suspension of abatements has led to a proliferation of encampments, resulting in an increase in blight and concerns of safety where some of the encampments have settled. With the distribution of vaccines, we must now prepare to revisit the position on encampments, considering the impacts and exploring a careful approach to resuming abatements.

Prior to COVID-19, abatements only served as a quick fix solution. The typical trend would be that after an encampment was abated, individuals would simply relocate to another location in proximity or even return to its original location after a certain period of time. While it did provide the community temporary relief, the process of abatement is volatile and disrupts any sense of stability for those residing in the community, housed or unhoused. This is why I have long

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advocated that abatements be paired with some form of interim or permanent housing resource.¹ Establishing sanctioned encampments must be part of the conversation if we are to return to resuming abatements during this time and ensure that there is a dedicated location for individuals to safely relocate while eliminating the constant worry of being uprooted.

In addition, the abatement process was halted due to the potential risk of unknowingly spreading COVID-19 among unhoused residents. Traditionally, prior to abatements, outreach services would be deployed to offer resources, including temporary housing. As the County continues to administer the limited supply of vaccines, prioritizing those in the unhoused community should be taken into consideration, and offered alongside pre-abatement outreach services. In the latest point in time count, 37% of the City's most chronically homeless reported to have chronic health problems. Contracting COVID-19 could be deadly, as many of those who are unhoused already lack access to health care and cannot properly quarantine. Displacing individuals without a safety net from the pandemic places not only the individual at risk, but our community as a whole.

This proposal presents a thoughtful and strategic approach to addressing homelessness as we begin to enter the vaccination phase of the pandemic and prepare to address the encampments that have grown almost completely unabated since last March. Exploring sanction encampments will provide the stability that has not been associated with abatements in the past and prioritizing vaccines within encampments will ensure our unhoused residents are vaccinated before we resume any pre-pandemic abatement operations. COVID-19 will be with us for the foreseeable future, however it has more broadly exposed the significant challenges we face with homelessness and forces us to take bold actions to protect our entire community.

¹ <https://bit.ly/2Le2hcF>