

Seattle City Council

June 10, 2013

Mayor Michael McGinn
City of Seattle
600 Fourth Avenue, 7th Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Encampments and the City's Response to Homelessness

Dear Mayor McGinn,

We are writing in response to your May 31 letter regarding the Nickelsville encampment, located on the city-owned "glass yard" property. We share your concern about conditions at the site, as well as legal risks to the city. We agree with your assessment that the encampment is not sustainable.

However, the two options offered in your letter—(1) approving legislation that would permit longer-term transitional encampments on other public or private property or (2) taking steps to maintain and grow Nickelsville at its current site—would not be effective solutions. The City is investing in emergency and long-term housing as well as the services needed to transition homeless individuals and families into long-term housing. It is our view that the City should continue on this path.

We can and must do better for people living at the West Marginal Way SW encampment and in other encampments in Seattle. We can and should act to meet both the immediate and the long-term needs of the individuals at Nicklesville. We should not create an environment that facilitates or invites substandard living or increased and more permanent camping in Seattle as you have allowed at the West Marginal Way SW site and nearby.

The City is working with King County and our neighboring communities to meet the goals of the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. We are focusing on a regional response to prevent homelessness and provide housing as rapidly as possible to homeless individuals and families. The City invests more than \$30 million *each year* in programs and services to assist homeless individuals and families. In the past two years, the Council has provided an *additional* \$1 million in funding for shelter, rapid rehousing, and other services to help move homeless individuals and families off the streets and into shelter and housing. And we have provided additional funds to assist homeless individuals in our downtown core move into services and housing through the Center City Initiative.

We have worked with you to expand shelter beds and the capacity of shelter providers over the past several years by authorizing funding in both 2012 and 2013 to open a winter shelter at City

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Hall, and to increase shelter options for women. In addition, we have collaborated on the car camping pilot program in Ballard, providing safe parking in church lots and case management services in a concerted effort to move people into housing.

We have taken policy actions that affirm the constitutional right of religious organizations to provide shelter, including encampments, on their properties. These actions acknowledge that encampments are an option some providers may choose to support. We have also identified a need for the City to guide their safe operation. These policies are not an endorsement of sustained City support for encampments as the best option for shelter or moving people into housing that meets their needs.

We believe that increased outreach, case management and investments in proven programs provide the best path to housing. Recently, New Orleans, Baltimore, and San Francisco have moved to provide targeted, intensive outreach and engagement efforts with residents of encampments and have been successful moving these individuals into stable, safe shelters and supported housing. Seattle must adopt similar programs and work with the other members of King County's Ten Year plan and other regional partners to enact such programs.

Therefore, we request that you direct the Human Services Department to prepare a plan that would provide immediate targeted outreach and engagement services to the Nickelsville residents along with immediate provisions of shelter, housing and other services. Because we believe a public health and safety emergency exists, we ask this plan be developed and implemented—and Nickelsville be closed—by September 1, 2013. We recognize added resources may be required and, to that end, we will introduce legislation to authorize funding for this purpose.

In our view, the health and safety of Nickelsville residents is paramount. We also have a responsibility to successfully address the concerns of neighboring property owners and residents. The immediate outreach we are endorsing provides the greatest opportunity to assist Nickelsville residents in ending their homelessness and address reasonable concerns raised by neighbors.

We appreciate your engagement and compassion for people camping at Nickelsville. No one wants to simply displace campers. We can provide a route to safe, decent and supportive housing to anyone and everyone at Nickelsville. We offer our support and want to work with you to end homelessness in our City.

Sincerely,



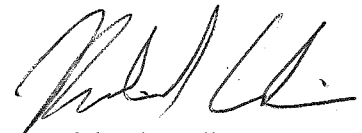
Sally J. Clark
Council President



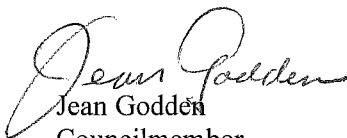
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