



Seattle Green Spaces Coalition

October 7, 2016

Hon. Michael Murray
City of Seattle
P.O. Box 94749
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

George Scarola
Office of the Mayor
P.O. Box 94749
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

Seattle City Council
P.O. Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Fred Podesta,
Hillary Hamilton, Manager
Department of Finance and
Administrative Services
700 5th Ave, Suite 5200
Seattle, WA 98104

Jesus Aguirre, Superintendent
Department of Parks and Recreation
100 Dexter Ave N.
Seattle, WA 98109

Dear Mayor Murray, Mr. Scarola, Councilmembers, Mr. Podesta, Ms. Hamilton and Mr. Aguirre,

The Seattle Green Spaces Coalition oppose allowing outdoor homeless encampments in city owned parks, open space and natural areas, and on sidewalks.

We oppose funding for temporary, outdoor “solutions,” which leave homeless people exposed to increasingly severe weather as winter approaches. Instead, we urge you to find indoor shelter, which is available in city-owned vacant and underutilized buildings, and make that your preferred option going forward.

Homeless people deserve safe, clean, indoor places to live, with running water, cooking facilities, electricity and access to public hygiene facilities. Their children deserve dependable access to schools. They should not be forced to camp in the woods. They deserve a pathway from homelessness to permanent housing.

Outdoor camps are often creating spaces for illegal activity, drug use, and degradation of our public lands with unrestricted garbage dumping and toilet facilities. This not only negatively impacts our public infrastructure. It creates public health, safety, livability and social justice issues. Seattle residents and visitors deserve to be able to utilize sidewalks, public spaces, and recreation areas without being endangered and otherwise impacted by these issues that outdoor homeless encampments are creating.

Mayor Murray and Executive Constantine declared a homeless state of emergency nearly a year ago – on November 2, 2015. The objectives were to address this crisis by mobilizing critical local, state and federal resources and actions. Specifically, the city stated that, “Addressing this crisis requires all levels of government to come together and find solutions. Simply allocating additional City resources will not produce the long-term solutions we need.” In a state of emergency, temporary shelter is designated for those in crisis, with the end goal of permanent resettlement – in their original or new homes.

Thus, we call upon you to

1. Create emergency housing in city-owned buildings. The SGSC supports housing first. Pathways Home, for example, is an option that creates options for bringing people inside.
2. Address the underlying roots of homelessness, including honest assessments of Seattle’s booming development, which is displacing our citizens due to escalating rents and elimination of low income housing.

SGSC has been working for a more than year to retain the Myers Parcels for public benefit, and engage communities in envisioning the highest uses for this area. Residents in South Park, White Center and surrounding communities, including senior residents at nearby SHAG housing, are concerned about expansion of camping in this area, due to frequent noises, criminal activity, and periodic confrontations with campers that now appear to be escalating. The encampments are creating garbage, public safety and hygiene, criminal activity, drug use and mental health issues. We want to see these decrease, not increase.

So far, the City has failed to manage illegal encampments. Seattle residents are strongly engaged in their communities and parks, they support the city creating and implementing viable options for moving homeless people into permanent housing. They strongly oppose expanding encampments into parks and natural areas.

Sincerely,

Elaine Ike, Mary Fleck, Martin Westerman
Seattle Green Spaces Coalition / info@seattlegreenspacescoalition.org