

Anchorage Midtown Community Council

Resolution: Calling on the Mayor, Police Chief, and the Anchorage Assembly and our state legislators representing Anchorage to act as aggressively as legally allowed to stop illegal camping on public and private lands within the MOA and take other actions as suggested here to end the homeless public health, crime, and public nuisance problems in Anchorage before they are totally out of control as is now being experienced in major cities in California, Oregon, and Washington.

Whereas we recognize that the Mayor and his team have made some important changes including process structural realignment, the establishment of an Assembly committee on homelessness that has enabled critical learning at this policy level, the creation of a mobile intervention team, developed a zone based abatement approach to the illegal camps; the Midtown Community Council finds that the need for immediate action pushes us to call for more courageous, creative, and very focused leadership and action as midtown struggles with this problem; and

Whereas the Anchorage Police and Fire Department are now directly involved in the abatement process with outreach efforts designed to connect the homeless with social services that target their specific needs. Additionally, the outreach efforts of the MOA focusing on reducing the unnecessarily high rate of homeless use of emergency services by immediately connecting people with more long-term solutions to address health and safety needs, the volume of emergency calls in some homeless populations has decreased by 40-50%; and

Whereas those municipal governments across America that have failed to immediately, aggressively and appropriately address specifically their growing public health issues, to include the emergence and accelerated growth of deadly communicable diseases in some cities such as Bubonic Plague (LA), Typhus (LA & ANC), Tuberculosis (ANC), Hepatitis A and C (ANC), various other infectious diseases, are now scrambling to stop the probable spread of these deadly illnesses from infecting the general population; and

Whereas nine members of our state legislature, all of whom represent areas of Anchorage, recently sent a letter to the Mayor and Police Chief with bipartisan support, pleading that the Mayor take all legal measures possible to stop the illegal camps on public property, and demanding the municipality use its full legal authority to quickly clear camps that appear to be causing this health concern efficiently, immediately and apply rodent controls. The sponsor made it clear that, "We can't afford to handcuff ourselves with ridiculous waiting periods for abatement when those just allow criminals to exploit the system"; and

Whereas the Municipality of Anchorage has a serious spreading public health and public safety crisis; and

Whereas the Municipality has now published two Ten Year Plans (20 years) to End Homelessness although the growth in number of homeless appears to be flat, the street presence of the homeless in midtown continues to grow causing very adverse impact on our community, both business and residential; and

Whereas the Anchorage area has about 40 private organizations and 11 government agencies all involved in 'ending homelessness' a group now generally referred to as the 'homeless industrial

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complex' yet they have not evidenced any real success, as compared to other municipalities in America, over the past decade even though cumulatively they have spent millions of taxpayer and donated dollars allegedly attempting to responsibly address this growing public health, crime, and community crisis; and

Whereas the Municipality has refused to be as legally aggressive as allowed in addressing the open use of illegal, often deadly drugs, in homeless camps and on our streets - then disposing their syringes on the ground or in adjacent streams or storm drains generating a serious public health concern; and

Whereas the Municipality has refused to be more aggressive in the cleanup of significant amounts of human feces and other human and animal wastes that can cause health problems in and around illegal camps, especially those with resident rats and other vermin, on private and public property including municipal parks, streams, and trails, placing children, pets, and others at significant risk; and

Whereas the Municipality has refused to stop clearly illegal aggressive solicitation (not including passive free speech) in the MOA right of way and in the streets, a behavior that has grown in midtown with aggressive knocking on the windows of vehicles and demanding money, standing on narrow median strips in the middle of the public streets demanding money, causing distractions to drivers, and illegally drinking alcohol and openly using illegal drugs and/or sleeping in the MOA or some utility ROWs; and

Whereas the Municipality continues to resist any temporary/transitional shelter concepts, other than VetVillageAK, that have been presented resulting in the continuance of the very adverse impact of the 9th Circuit Ruling addressing 'lack of shelter' which allows anyone to now legally loiter, sleep, solicit, or camp/live on municipal property without a permit because the MOA does not have adequate 'shelter' (public or private) for them, and

Whereas the Municipality continues to not be as aggressive as legally allowed in cleaning out these illegal camps and sleeping areas that contribute to the crimes of rape, assault, homicides, murders, child abuse, illegal drug use, open illegal alcohol use on sidewalks and within the MOA ROWs, and

Whereas, many of the victims are themselves part of the so called 'homeless' population especially the young, women and those with mental health disabilities, and

Whereas the legal construct of our federal and state mental health laws constructed in the 1950s are not inclusive of new medications that can quickly restore 'normalcy' allowing such persons to safely survive in our community, with ongoing support, and

Whereas the Municipality has at some level (we are constantly informed) directed the Anchorage Police Department to not fully enforce certain laws but rather to 'use discretion' the apparent history of which, based on two years of testimony from citizens in the midtown district, is clearly not in the public interest, and an act we believe may be in violation of state and local law, and

Whereas the citizens of Anchorage have not been appropriately and responsibly informed of this decision to not responsibly enforce a growing number of municipal so called 'lesser' laws;

Therefore, be It Resolved, that the Mid Town Community Council which has actively engaged in the issues and problems of homelessness and its impacts within its district and with neighboring districts to include harm to businesses, shoppers, residents, open assaults on employees in public and private areas

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for over two years - calls on the Mayor, the Police Chief, and the MOA Assembly to take much more aggressive action, as is allowed by existing law, with a sense of urgency to:

1. Formally recognize the serious public health problems that are festering on our streets, in our streams, and in the illegal camps on public lands
2. Establish a formal public health emergency team to aggressively address this serious and threatening problem before it spreads into the general population. We must be in front of this threat - not behind it.
3. Immediately initiate an aggressive new shelter program/system/site allowing the homeless a safe warm space/shelter so that we do not have to leave them on the streets or in the woods.
4. Stop all soliciting (begging) in the municipal Right of Way (ROW), other than passive free speech on sidewalks, in the streets or medians of Anchorage by more aggressive enforcement with immediate citation and if the person cited does not pay the fine, be called to court and further disciplined consistent with the law, this includes those who give from their car window in violation of the law.
5. Respond more quickly to complaints raised by residents and businesses who are dealing with homeless persons who clearly appear dangerous or involved in crime i.e. the increase in assaults in business areas and on property owners.
6. Close and clean up all illegal camps and then stop their reestablishment on public or private property by whatever legal means possible i.e. provide shelter.
7. Remove all benches or low walls at street corners that encourage and enable the homeless to 'day camp' openly drinking alcohol, using drugs, illegally soliciting, and harassing drivers.
8. Call on the Mayor, our Governor, and the President to organize and challenge a special national task force of experts in law and mental health to consider the ongoing advancement of new medications that can quickly return a person suffering from mental health problems to normalcy, that would allow such medication uses to be monitored and required, as has been suggested by former U.S. Supreme Court justices.
9. Enable a formal tent camp area, similar to what other cities have done, for those needing immediate shelter under the management of the MOA or combined nonprofits that:
 - a. Requires a permit with stated behavioral rules (no alcohol or illegal drugs) for a person to stay for up to 7 days at a time. After 7 days, a new permit is required. This allows a review of the tenant and enables intervention if needed to help in their transition to civility in the community
 - b. Requires a fee (we suggest \$1.00 a day) to stay in the camp. If unable to pay, they can work it off in the camp. Camps in other states require up to 10 hours of work a week.
 - c. Provides appropriate toilets (not portables), showers, trash collection, etc in the camp
 - d. Provides appropriate onsite supervision to ensure public safety and cleanliness
 - e. Provides, we suggest, traditional white canvas tents, like the original historic Anchorage tent city, so that its general appearance is acceptable.
 - f. Requires public health interventions to ensure communicable diseases and rodents are not nested in or around the shelters
10. 'Offer a ticket home,' if the homeless person says they are willing. (This is the least costly method of reducing homelessness in Anchorage). Negotiate an agreement for low cost tickets with the various airlines to enable this 'return home'. This is a one chance offer and the municipal cost of a ticket can be recovered from their PFD next year.

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11. Insist that the state (DOL and DOE) initiate a training program in remote communities of Alaska so that young residents can learn how to survive in a western 9-5 work culture. Previous programs have been very successful.
12. Negotiate with such work providers as People Ready, Goodwill Jobs, etc. for day labor jobs for those in the legal tent camp with an onsite place to sign up for work.
13. Mayor should formally declare a public health "crisis" and use his authority to take more aggressive steps dealing with public health issues resulting from illegal camps or loitering.
14. Aggressively investigate the conversion of the vacant state Palmer prison which could house up to 800 persons for drug/alcohol detoxing and recovery as well as essential counseling and work development training and placement
15. Require APD to have officers walk through illegal camps at least once a week. Requesting ID and observing the area to identify any criminal activity.

The Midtown Community Council has initiated a cross Council interface to enable broader discussion within the Community Council structure on these issues. It is critical that the assigned police officer attend the monthly meetings of councils who have identified concerns with the various issues addressed in this resolution.

The Midtown Community Council Executive Committee will continue to work closely with APD, our Assembly representative, and state legislators and their representatives on these issues to ensure ongoing communication on the advancement of the solutions outlined in this resolution.

Submitted: by the Midtown Community Council Executive Committee