

# We Can Do Better

**Report by Ric Davidge, Vice President, Midtown Community Council regarding the effort by the Council and nine state legislators to push the Mayor and APD to more aggressively address the growing problems with ‘the homeless’ including public health.**

**Context** In almost a decade of work on the ‘homeless’ issues, mainly focused on veterans, I have not seen a more focused committed Mayor, or his team work harder on trying to deal with this issue. That doesn’t mean I have not been and remain a critic of this administration, but I believe it important to point out some of the advances Ethan, Nancy and some members of the Assembly have made the past five years.

1. The establishment of an Assembly work committee on the so-called homeless problem
  - a. This has changed the understanding of the Assembly of these problems and their responsibilities to fix it, and it appears to be making real progress as they wrestle with diverse challenges monthly.
2. Breaking down silos of thought and process that did not integrate such toward solutions resulting in enormous inefficiency, waste, and few real results.
3. Most do not know that Anchorage remains flat in the growth of the homeless community compared to what has happened in most U.S. cities with this problem.
4. The most transformative action was setting up the mobile intervention team, (APD/AFD/Mayor - a social service unified command) This structural change is significant and showing real results.
5. Restructured the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness to be more action oriented and better integrated – again structural changes towards addressing real problems
6. Each of the highest demand (top 50 in cost) homeless persons are identified and then ‘staffed’ with a multi-disciplinary team (many organizations structured specific to the base needs of a person) so the effort is ‘person focused’ not generically focused.
7. Developed a zone based abatement approach focused on protecting neighborhoods rather than the ‘poor me’ equation.

The MOA appears to now be focusing on a few areas needing real work.

1. housing (we have some suggestions)
2. jobs
3. a ticket home

**But we can do better. We must.**

**The Purpose and Function of this initiative by the Midtown CC:** The purpose of this report is to engage the collective organized Community Councils of Anchorage who are also facing this issue and others in an ‘on paper’ open discussion of the problems and to present solutions/suggestions that appear to have merit. Those who participate in Community Councils are self-selected residents/business owners who have voluntarily committed to work together in addressing problems in their districts. Over the past year more integration between Councils has developed in response to this and other issues. We wish to take advantage of this construct not only for each District but for our community. This is not a new idea, but one initiated by the Midtown Community Council out of desperation over the past two years and significant independent research to include the ‘Broken Window’ strategy outlined by Wilson and Kelling

over 40 years ago. It was then that the combined effort of neighborhoods in NYC brought Rudy Giuliani to power as Mayor and together they proved their ideas worked recapturing NYC - one of the greatest cities in the world. This success has now been tested by universities in America and in Europe and every time proven successful. Best short read is: *'How New York Became Safe: The Full Story'* by Kelling in the City Journal 2009. Alas now, under Mayor Bill de Blasio, NYC is again sliding into the mess it once was. This failure in leadership is a common theme in cities with this problem.

**The Problem: Governance** The Municipality of Anchorage is now into its second ten-year plan to end homelessness. According to some government officials we have over 40 nonprofits and 11 government agencies involved in ending homelessness – many now for well over 20 years. One official inside a major c3 said, no it was more like 220 nonprofits and government agencies. The Permanent Fund 'Pick, Click, and Give' campaign (totals usually over \$3Million) facilitates donations to 628 nonprofits not all of which are focused on the homeless problems. Either way, this is far out of balance with the reality of the 'need' and the lack of real success. So, if you add up all the federal, state, and local government (love to have this number) and private money and/or cost of services applied to the so called 'homeless' problem(s) just in Anchorage over the past decade the total spent must be staggering. (*FYI: I measure everything in total spend per capita. They really are the only honest comparables*)

In context the City of San Francisco spends over \$250 Million a year on their so-called homeless problem and reports little progress. Los Angeles spends almost \$620 Million a year, and they also report 'little progress'. In fact, the situation in these two cities is almost unbelievable.

Maybe we should look at cities who have solved this problem. St. Petersburg, FL solved their homeless 'on the street' problem in six months. How? They provided a property to allow transitional camping with very good planning, management, etc. They approached the homeless as 'persons' not problems and structured what each needed to climb out. We have asked the city to provide us a copy of their report. A group is now trying to get the mayor of St Petersburg who championed this success to come to Anchorage and tell us their story.

**The Problem: The Homeless Industrial Complex** Keep in mind that a \$150,000 annual salary for an Executive Director of a so-called nonprofit in Anchorage, is not considered excessive. On a cost per homeless person invested in, we could have provided lots of subsidized housing, although that is not THE solution, to hundreds – but we haven't. So, what is the economic/fiscal incentive to solve this problem when you have hundreds of nonprofits and dozens of government agencies 'living' off the problem. The incentives are wrong. The money went to 'managing' even enabling the homeless not 'solving' the *root* causes. Why have these combined entities not made more progress?

Remember that nonprofits don't have to pay property taxes. The reason for this, and it is long standing, is that communities realized that 'charities' as they were called then, provided services in the community at a much lower cost than government could. Wow, that has changed if you compare 'total spend' per capita today. Some of us at the Midtown CC have called on the MOA to audit all nonprofits who pay no property taxes to determine their actual economic contribution or 'value' of the services they claim to provide to Anchorage. Having spent too many hours in meetings with dozens of these organizations, this audit could be very revealing.

There is a large list of reports, studies, interviews, etc on the *Homeless Industrial Complex* on the Net if you do a Google search. Last count was about 20, then ask for *The Homeless Business* and you get lots

more. So, is there a problem here? The only way you can determine this is to measure audited results of private/public entity spending compared to total spend per capita and persons 'served'.

Again, maybe we need to **rethink the incentives**. There is currently no **economic** incentive to 'fix' this problem. The homeless industrial complex is attempting to 'manage' the symptoms of the problem, not address the root causes there by maintaining a very good cash flow and, for some, political leverage. This is not to suggest that you don't need to address symptoms, but unless you put some effort some money into identifying and then fixing the root causes, you are just 'managing' the symptoms. There have been some significant efforts in the past 5 years that have made some changes, but the problem continues although the MOA reports the total number of 'homeless' in Anchorage remains flat – no increase for the past couple years. They claim to have stopped the growth. But in context, the population of the state and Anchorage is also shrinking, based on PFD applications alone. My intel says it is flat. Let's see how many 'visitors' show up again this October after they get their PFD and come to Anchorage - the big city – but then join the Second Ave subculture generically referred to as 'the homeless'.

**The Problem: Who are the Homeless?** One of the problems we have in this discussion is that the term 'homelessness' is inclusive of a number of groups of persons with significantly different root causes. To identify and address their root causes, you need to know and understand each group, each person and then craft specific proven strategies that fit that group's that person's root cause, if legally possible.

- Persons with mental health disabilities (many can be treated but courts have made this very difficult) read: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3392176/>
- Persons addicted to drugs and/or alcohol - both of which are symptoms not root causes
- Persons who are displaced in our western 9-5 culture without the skills to survive here
- Criminals, some organized
- Persons who will not live in any type of structured environment. "I don't want to live there, they have too many rules". This includes some who refuse to stay, even overnight, in the shelters, in the VA Domiciliary, temporary housing, permanent long-term supportive housing, etc. 'Too many rules' - they chose to be 'free' but at a significant cost to the community.

Each of these groups present different challenges that really must be crafted specific to their root cause, not just their symptoms.

The homeless includes lots of different folks with different problems in different intensities at different times in their lives and with a wide range of health issues. Are they alone or part of a family? Some who are not even homeless but find being in the homeless world enables enormous criminal opportunities and income.

**Myth: *The majority of the homeless in Anchorage are Alaska Natives.* NOT TRUE!**

We have known this for many years, but for some reason this myth continues. According to all the 'counts' only about 40% of the homeless in Anchorage are Alaska Natives, and most come from villages in remote parts of Alaska, mainly the north-west coast. They came to Anchorage for many reasons, then get stuck here with little ability or reason to go home given there is often no longer any economic purpose for their home community. This is a serious statewide problem that our state government needs to address, sooner. Recreating remote community economies has been an interest of mine for decades, but no one wants to listen. If Alaska really wants to solve many of these socio-economic, public health and

suicide problems in rural Alaska, this – recreating an economic purpose for a community - is where we need to start.

The classification of persons who claim to be homeless is in part already done to some extent with the ‘Point in Time Count’ twice annually. We need to make this attempt at ‘knowing’ the ‘homeless’ as distinct persons and then connecting them to services that are appropriate for their root cause. Then, importantly, following up so that we can accurately measure results. We need to understand the numbers and the needs to construct comprehensive solutions. Anchorage has made some real progress here, but we must do more if we are honestly going to ‘fix’ this.

Assign each person to a focused effort via intervention consistent with their needs.

**Example:** Mental health disabilities (not just ‘immediate’ harm to self or others) but any mental health disability that keeps someone from reasonably surviving in Anchorage is such a group. Many can be treated but given the ‘case law’ that doesn’t allow you to require anyone to take their medications even though the meds bring them back to a safer even functional reality. It really is in their best interest in surviving. This is a long and detailed complicated problem that I will mention later.

Read: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3392176/> Even Supreme Court Judges have called for serious process and structural reforms at the federal and state levels. This reality has been with us now since the 1960’s and what have we done holistically to deal with this human tragedy? Not much.

Since the laws changed closing many state/private mental ‘hospitals’ significantly impacting persons with mental health disabilities, this period is often mentioned as the ‘beginning of our national homeless problem’. Yes, hundreds of mentally disturbed persons were left on the streets as homeless and your read of the mentioned summaries will illustrate the need for comprehensive reform at the national and state levels IF we are to ‘fix’ this.

**The ‘social program epidemic’** In the process of my research, having read almost everything published on homelessness by or to Congress, by national nonprofits, and on the Net since, and the multiple dozens of meetings I’ve attended local and national - this phrase comes up occasionally. The concept is that the more programs or services you provide the more demand you encourage, and you will never finish providing more and more services so long as you have ‘sufficient’ funds to provide them. But again, are you solving the root cause or trying to manage the symptoms? Think about housing here. I believe you can build subsidized long-term housing for the homeless in Anchorage forever and still have homeless on the street. Again, root cause, must be the target and we **MUST** seriously start work on several **transitional housing** locations if we are to seriously begin. Yes, we are treating the symptoms but maybe not ignoring the root causes if these are designed properly. There is much about this ‘social program epidemic’ on the Net. Anchorage has more nonprofits per capita than any other city in America. Wonder why? It’s not always about the need, often its about the money.

**Solutions:** We have provided a list of solution suggestions that our community should openly consider and debate – towards constructive changes. We welcome all constructive ideas in this discussion. Each will be reviewed, honestly considered, and referenced in our proposed resolution and this appended report to be formally approved on September 26, 2019. Please join us at noon.

**This is a list of ‘the problems’ as I see them outlined with a clear statement as to what the problem is and offering functional solutions and/or suggestions.**

**The Problem: Panhandling** Our legal construct (case law) i.e. panhandling:

1. *You can't stand on the sidewalk and ask for a ride, but you can stand on the sidewalk and ask for money.*
2. Panhandling is now 'case law' protected as a form of 'free speech' so long as it is passive (a small hand-written sign on cardboard) not actual speech/voices (could be too loud or considered threatening i.e. not considered passive to some) on the sidewalk. A host of court decisions in a wide variety of situations around the country make this now clear. The Ninth Circuit has the most impact on Anchorage. This needs to be appealed.
3. We allow panhandling, but we don't allow people in vehicles to hand them money and we don't allow the panhandler to take money from a vehicle. That is against the law. The concern is public safety.
4. We also don't allow a person in a vehicle to get out of that vehicle, when on a street, and walk up to a panhandler who stays on the sidewalk and hand them money. The concern is again unsafe vehicle/public safety issues.
5. We also don't allow 'solicitation' within the ROW or roads i.e. the MOA ROW **by anyone else** accept the firepersons once a year to 'fill the boot'.

**Example:** Placement of For Sale signs for homes and businesses. They can only be on private property, and although the area between a sidewalk and the curb (which can include a 'parkway') is 'owned' by the home or business owner and is taxed by the MOA as the property of that owner, they cannot put a sign in the MOA ROW – it must be behind the ROW usually behind the sidewalk. If you put a sign up within the MOA ROW it will be removed without notice by the MOA and/or the state if adjacent to state roads/highways. If you continue to do this, you 'may' be cited for violations. Again, putting a sign (passive soliciting) on your property that you pay taxes on but is within the MOA ROW is illegal. So, **you are denied your right to free speech on your property that you purchased and pay taxes on, but panhandlers are not so restricted.**

6. Generally, the police do not ticket persons who violate these laws – regardless of the public safety concern and the fact that panhandlers will not often pay these fines or appear in court to address them. APD did advise in our first meeting that in 2019 they have issued more citations for panhandling related violations than ever before, most to those who give. But if the citation is not paid, it is then another violation of law. We constantly hear that 'we need more data'. If you don't cite someone as 'required' by law, you can't initiate or build a data base, can you?

So, we have a legal construct that allows passive 'free speech' to panhandlers but they can't be handed anything/money from a motorist while that vehicle is in traffic. ***So, we in fact encourage/enable the 'ask' but do not allow the 'get'***. Also note that there are now food trucks that 'service' the panhandlers with free prepared food in a bag handed directly to the panhandler out of the drivers' window in the street. I have witnessed this several times at intersections in Midtown. Again, this 'transaction' is a violation of law. Wonder if they ever get cited?

**Solution: We either need a new legal construct or easier/more creative governance**

**Suggestion:** Let's say that APD forms a two-person team to monitor panhandling in those intersections (we are providing APD with a map illustrating those in the Midtown District and suggest every Council do the same monthly) that are of highest concern. No, they are not in uniform with lights flashing, but a little more discreet. Whenever someone offers the panhandler money requiring the panhandler to step off

the sidewalk and likely into the street, the driver is stopped by APD and cited with a fine of, we suggest, \$100. This fine should then be doubled each time they get caught up to \$400 and then a court appearance should be required, and the fine is then \$1,000 and a full day's class on road safety. These fines should be tracked to show the 'offset' of cost/income for APD and other services.

Obviously, this will require some time/cost, but not that much against the value of the results. Panhandlers are generally not at 'their' intersections all day. They are there when the traffic is enough to provide an income. And, yes, we know that if people didn't give them money they wouldn't be there and if the trucks don't give them sacked lunch, they wouldn't be there either. Now, if you rotate the APD team's targeting different days and intersections, it will become known that these are not good intersections to get money. They will move to new intersections and then you do it again. Eventually, if they are not collecting sufficient income, they will find new ways to make money. How about a part time job? When we designed VetVillageAK we asked and got written commitments for up to 150 jobs a year committed – we asked for jobs not money.

If you look at the intersections with the panhandlers who are 'making money' there are lots of opportunities for the MOA to post a sign advising drivers -Fine for giving money to panhandlers from your car. I know, simple – but I suspect effective and not that expensive against results. As that driver is reaching into their pocket for change or a bill, they see the sign and realize the risk they are taking. The signage will have an effect. Why not at least try this?

The point is that over time it becomes generally known in Midtown that you might get caught if you 'give' and must pay a fine starting at \$100. So, is it worth it for a moment of 'feel good' about yourself? Add some solid media marketing on this initiative with the signage and you will further reduce the 'give' and thus the 'ask'. You have not interfered with the panhandler's right to passive free speech, but you have made it not very rewarding – in selected intersections. The Midtown District has five such intersections.

This is just one suggestion/idea of what our governance and law enforcement could do. APD advised in our meeting that they have issued more 'give' citations in the first six months of 2019 than ever in the past. We certainly want to encourage this effort, but we can do better.

## **General Observations - Midtown Community Council meetings past year plus**

### **The Problem: Disorder/Lawlessness      Some laws are just not being enforced**

Every month, over the past 24+ months, the Midtown Community Council has heard from independent business owners, building managers, homeowners, property owners, store employees, etc. that when they call for APD assistance for what they describe as 'obvious' crimes (trespass, assault, open use of illegal drugs, theft, etc), it takes forever to get a response and often, upon arrival, the police officer says they can't do anything because the MOA prosecutors, or the mayor's office, or someone has instructed - "***we have been told not to enforce these laws***". This is the beginning of lawlessness which is ***the most common denominator in every city in America that has a massive homeless***, drug/alcohol abuse/addiction, crime, and growing frightening public health problem. ***It all starts with lawlessness or the perception there of.*** What we might call 'soft on crime'.

[Go on the Net and watch all the documentaries on San Diego, L.A., San Francisco, Seattle, etc. They tell essentially the same story. Best is *Seattle is Dying* because of its in-depth confidential

survey of police officers. There is a new one on **Anchorage** that I recommend at [alaskalandmine.com](http://alaskalandmine.com). They will be at our August Midtown CC meeting.]

From our point of view, what this means is that law enforcement (APD officers, prosecutors, MOA Admin) has decided that some laws (of less concern when violated) are not going to be enforced. This category of law is thus no longer relevant within our legal construct, so they effectively don't exist. If you pass a law and refuse to enforce it, that law does not exist, or there is 'contempt of the law'.

The APD has advised that this 'understanding' is not quite correct. The officer has the 'discretion' to apply the law or not. What is the training for officers on their use of discretion? We understand the concept, just not sure of the application based on the long list of statements made at our Council meetings.

Let me point out that APD says this 'refusal to enforce' cannot be true. They specifically ask, and so we have informed those who attend the Midtown CC and others, that if a police officer tells you they have been instructed not to enforce the law, **APD wants that reported ASAP** to dispatch. Most police have business cards, so get their card and then report. If you don't want to do it yourself, ask your Community Council to do it.

The problem we have is that these stories are almost always the same and from what we can figure most of these persons who bring such complaints to the Council do not even know each other. It is just not probable that they are coordinating their stories, it is far more likely they are true – at least to some extent. It will be the policy of the Midtown CC to advise anyone who reports such conversations with officers to report it immediately to the APD dispatcher. Name, badge number, date, time, location.

At one Council meeting a man told the story of calling APD for help due to several people trespassing on his private property even though there was a fence, locked gate, and the appropriate signage. When the two officers arrived and investigated, they prepared to issue trespassing citations, but one officer decided to call his supervisor about the circumstances because one of the trespassers was a 'public person'. When he hung up, he informed the property owner that he had been told not to issue any citations. This property owner is well known in that community and well respected and asked, "So, what do you do then? These people are illegally on my property and I'm legally and financially responsible if anyone of them gets hurt. You don't think this impacts my general liability insurance?"

Another rental business owner told of discovering a 'gang' had moved into one of his rental properties. He approached and told them to get out. A member of the gang hit him in the face, he fell back and left the property and called the APD. When the officer showed up, the owner was told that since there was no blood on his face, the officer could not verify the assault. When the owner showed the officer a large quantity of what appeared to be new bicycles in the back yard, the officer said he could do nothing as they may have been found rather than stolen. (this was just days after the robbery of the bicycle store in ANC) The officer also advised that he could do nothing about the trespass as the gang is legally considered to be 'squatters' and the owner would have to file in court for an eviction – a process that would take months and cost the owner. By the time the owner finally got his property back it had been purposefully demolished from the inside out, so he chose to tear it down and rebuild. The problem is lawlessness.

**Solutions:** Call APD dispatch and REPORT what the officer has told you. Get name and badge number if possible – but ALWAYS report. Give them a couple days and then call dispatch (907-786-8900) and ask for a written statement of what APD has done in response to your report. Then bring it to your next Council meeting and report so that the Council is aware and can also follow up.

But, given where we are at this point- given the number of stories we have heard from independent individuals in our district, the Midtown Council has asked our Assembly Representative for a list of the MOA laws that are apparently no longer ‘enforced’ allowing ‘discretion’ and under who’s authority they have been ‘set aside’ from their intended application although formally passed by the Assembly and signed by a mayor. Our Assembly person has advised that: “It’s not that APD has been told not to enforce laws. She provided a list of potential violations, generally citation offenses, that APD may in its discretion choose to issue.” This is consistent with what APD has said, but it is ***critical that you report*** and follow up. Based on many of the stories we have heard at Council meetings, the use of discretion by a police officer certainly didn’t look like it was the correct choice. We will continue to monitor – but it is essential that you report such events if we are going to make any progress – and share them at your Council meetings.

We will continue our cooperation with the Anchorage Police Department to discuss our concerns and request answers to our questions and report complaints. Our first such meeting was very helpful, and we plan to continue these meetings. It is also critical that the assigned police officers to each of our districts attends our meetings so that they can report to their superiors what we are hearing on this and other subjects. We are delighted to report that two officers showed up to our August meeting and the discussion was very productive for both our members and the officers. In addition, while attending the Campbell Creek CC three officers showed up and engaged with the community – again very productive. These monthly interactions must continue and help mold a ‘sense of team’ and trust between citizens in Council Districts and the APD.

We are fully aware that these laws are not ‘arrest’ laws, only ‘citation’ laws. We understand that, but you can’t build an administrative record or data base of violations of law or any sense of cost if you don’t even issue a citation, so you can begin to ‘measure’ the size/scale/cost of illegal realities here. For years we have heard the mantra that ‘we need more data’. In this case, the citation and its appended report is where data begins. In addition, if the citation is not paid, then you have a further law violation that can require a court appearance – more data. Why not? Our courts are just too busy? This is where we suspect the MOA prosecutors complain. NYC is a good case study of how important the enforcement of the ‘little’ laws is to the culture and civil order of a community. That single decision started a revolution on the streets of NYC and moved them back to sanity. I have personally experienced this change while serving with the Reagan Administration and then later as a private visitor almost every year.

Look it up: *How New York Became Safe: The Full Story/Restoring Order in NYC* <https://www.city-journal.org/html/how-new-york-became-safe-full-story-13197.html>

And, does this **have to be** a state responsibility? In Anchorage, maybe at least a part of it as the MOA has become the chosen center of homelessness in Alaska with most arriving from outside of Anchorage – and no, not just from the bush – from all over the nation and some from outside of our country. We have worked with several who got ‘taken’ by the old North Slope job scam on the Net only to find that the job was not real and then were stuck here without adequate funds to get home. Again, ‘would you like to go home?’ has been a very good and most efficient tool here.

**Solution:** One of the suggestions I have heard while attending other Council meetings looking at this report and at the Midtown Council DRAFT Resolution and how they want to ‘take action’, is the suggestion to APD that officers ***walk through the camps often*** – at least once a week. Ask to see IDs and engage with those in the camp. Look for evidence of drugs, crime, public health concerns. and report.

We agree and think APD should consider this 'tool' as soon as possible. Yes, public safety has priority, but if you can see something coming it just might be more effective than responding 'after the crime'.

**NOTE:** When I began trying to understand the homeless problems in Anchorage, it quickly became clear to me that what I was being told, was not the whole truth. Not that I was being lied to, but I was not being given all the facts or their critical context. Of specific concern was the St Francis shelter. To address this, I paid a homeless veteran to remain in the shelter. He had been there for a couple weeks already and was very observant and capable of this mission. He would call me daily if something had developed at the shelter and share his observations. He is now working out of town in his skill area and very happy. The path to getting him there was long, difficult, but eventually successful. But the insight he provided, almost daily, to life in the shelter, was priceless.

What I learned was that drugs and alcohol were readily available **on the property** for a price every am. I also learned about the organization of women/girls and boys for prostitution. When I reported this to APD I was told they didn't have the manpower but were aware of it. Further, I personally witnessed the extraordinary impact that bed bugs can have on people in the shelter as I watched a man remove his long sleeve shirt and saw most of his skin come off his arms due to bed bug bites, infections, etc. I took him immediately to the hospital and got all his bites and infected scars treated, arms, legs, and waist. When I reported this to the nonprofit responsible of the management of the shelter, I was told that they didn't have bed bugs. They had traps out. When I asked a professional exterminator I know, who deals with just this bug, he advised that the traps don't work. Wonder who paid for them?

I bring this up to expose the need of our municipal officials to learn from within the shelter culture but also to point out that this too is 'lawless'. Human beings being harmed by incompetent management paid by so called nonprofits underwritten/grants by government agencies is a crime against persons and the people of Anchorage.

**The Problem: Public Health The significant contamination of the rivers and streams, as well as public places in Anchorage, may be causing deadly communicable illnesses that can spread quickly across Anchorage and even Alaska**

Most are unaware of the growing surface and subsurface contamination of the natural waters, streams, and creeks in Anchorage. This has been monitored for many years but lately an initiative to better identify contamination sources using DNA in areas was started. This group has already discovered that the areas of water contamination are NOT coming from livestock sites as those properties are generally well managed. **NOTE:** We were recently informed by our Assembly representative that the MOA does not have an organizational construct through which it can address these immediate threats to public health.

**Solution:** The Midtown Community Council is coordinating with other CCs and the ongoing research of our surface water sources to help identify specific source locations, many believe in proximity to illegal camps, that are not only disposing human waste in the streams but also drugs and drug related vessels that sink into the sand/mud at the bottom of our streams. After reading some of this intel I would not let my dog enter these waters and if she did, I'd take her home and wash her and then take a shower.

We will work closely with this initiative with specific concern of those water sources in our District but only as a part of the larger research. This cooperation will enable the larger group to report directly to the

Council on any discoveries that impact the Midtown CC district businesses, residents and their children, and pets.

The current level of fecal coli contamination alone in some areas is cause for a public health alert. Most of these sites are already 'classified' and unusable, but we still see people and their pets in these waters, boating through them, and even drinking.

**Solution:** The MOA must make this a high public health concern and establish a multi-agency governance team with the CDC and the state to monitor and address this growing public health threat. AS a part of this initiative the MOA should strongly support this research and include it in any of its surface water management programs.

**Solution:** In addition to the water contamination issue is the general human waste and drugs or needles left on public properties in the MOA. This too is a public health concern. Building managers who regularly attend the Council report that they must now hire specialty crews to handle cleanup. One building manager recently reported that human waste was spread on the outside wall of their building (very prominent in Midtown) and lite on fire. Other building managers' report constant urination through locked doors and/or human waste at or on the front door. This is obviously a 'statement' of some sort and not just a personal disposal issue. If we had public toilets maybe this would stop, but it just doesn't seem to be the only cause. There is an apparent anger here that needs to be investigated and understood. Are they angry at the building owners/tenants because they, the homeless, are not allowed to us its toilets whenever they want? We recommend that any such activity be reported to the Anchorage Police Department so that no less than a data source is created allowing tracking of these behaviors and the places and levels of concern. It is also important that each building manager or their private security report these incidents to the police for record. We also recommend that a camera be placed so that the faces, date, time of these actions can be gathered helping inform both private security and APD. Again, a sign pointing out "you are being videotaped" could be a deterrent.

**Caution:** Most Alaskan's are unaware that the homeless sidewalk encampments in L.A. have given rebirth to over 150 confirmed cases of Typhus carried by rats and flees. Essentially, from a public health standpoint, LA have regressed a hundred years into the slums of old Europe. Do we have rats or other vermin in Anchorage? In Alaska? Yes, of course we do, and you can find them along streams and in encampments all around town. Maybe the MOA needs to hire an exterminator as part of their illegal camp cleanups.

Anchorage's residents are also unaware that Anchorage had two confirmed cases of Typhoid Fever, a deadly communicable disease, in Anchorage last year. Their specific cause (generally contact with someone who has the bacteria, it can also come from contaminated water) and source are not known, but this should give the MOA enough notice to begin getting serious about the contamination of our natural freshwaters.

**The Problem: The Environmental impact of contamination of our stormwater and the dangerous collective discharge of both contaminated 'freshwater,' stormwater (which is contaminated), and 'treated' sewage into the inlet**

This is a huge problem and one that the MOA has finally seriously begun looking at. The MOA has a total discharge permit from the EPA/DEC that if violated could cost the MOA billions and require immediate action or more fines. Hello property owners who underwrite our municipal government.

Think about the environmental impact of just the illegal drug devices (that leak) in our stormwater and the impact on fish, wildlife, the belugas, etc. When stacked on top of the massive MOA sewer discharges, also under a very liberal/exception permit from the EPA/DEC that puts millions of gallons of ‘treated’ sewage full of pharmaceuticals, micro plastics, etc. into the inlet, is there any real surprise that the belugas, our salmon and other species are having problems?

**The Problem**      **Housing:** The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals found that *government cannot criminalize homeless people for surviving in public without providing alternative places or shelter*. Shelter is defined as: ‘a place giving temporary protection from bad weather or danger.’ This is a key legal point in the struggle of communities to address the ‘homeless’ problem. It comes in two parts:

### 1. Temporary or transitional supportive housing/shelter

The MOA has refused to ‘invest’ in any temporary housing or shelter. As a result, again within the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit ruling – we do not have ‘alternative places for them to go’. Because we do not have ‘shelter’ for them we cannot force them off public property. There are several options that have been presented to the MOA, but none have been seriously considered to date. The only one endorsed by the Assembly is the VetVillageAK project presented by the Alaska Veterans Foundation, Inc. This is a small cabin ‘village’ in the woods that starts with 25 cabins and a Veterans Service Officer to help with services. This is shelter - both temporary/transitional housing and long-term supportive housing for homeless veterans and families depending on the need of the veteran and/or their family. **BUT – you must work** to live in this village.

Anchorage needs to look at other sites across America and design options for ‘temporary’ shelter(s). (more on this later)

### 2. Long term/permanent supportive housing/shelter

Yes, we need more low income/cost “housing”, but (let’s be honest in the use of the term ‘low income housing’ when what we honestly need to call it is ‘**government subsidized housing**’ because that is what it is and that better reflects public (federal, state, local) spending through the homeless industrial complex. The private sector cannot afford to provide so called permanent ‘low income housing’ because their cost (40% of the cost of a new home in a new subdivision in the MOA is directly caused by MOA regulations, delay, and uncertainty – and it has very little to do with ‘health and safety’) In most cases, long term supportive housing for the homeless is a very good dependable income source for the owner(s), most often nonprofits because what is not paid by the tenant (not more than 30% of their income whatever it may be) is paid by government which covers, with a minimum 15%+ administrative margin, the cost of this housing - so long as the government subsidies exist. We do need more low-income housing – but we also immediately need transitional housing and we need jobs of various types.

The point is that if folks have money, they most often find shelter. This is most obvious in the month of October after receipt of the PFD. **So, lets enable work.** Work can be defined, for example, as 4 hours a day, 3 or more days a week not just 8 hours a day, five days a week. Day labor is the most immediate available option IF the worker is sober and clean. Often these private companies have more jobs to fill then they have workers. No one will accept the insurance risk of folks who are drunk or high to work with their clients. I have used day labor from a national organization with offices in Anchorage and only twice in a decade had a problem. I have found these workers to be capable and willing to work.

In a recent interview with HUD Secretary Ben Carson, he pointed out that the biggest obstacle to their efforts in cities like San Francisco and L.A. is the overwhelming cost and restrictions of their municipal regulations. Most dealing with esthetics not health and safety. He referenced the National Homebuilders Association who tracks the cost of municipal regulations on new housing and reports that on average 25% to 30% of the cost of new homes – even those subsidized by HUD – is municipal regulation. And again, they are more about esthetics, space, and not health and safety.

As a result, several state legislatures are now taking back the general authority previously granted to municipal governments to regulate new construction and only allowing them to deal with the health and safety concerns. Then you have the struggle of agreeing on a legal definition of safe, safer, or safest. The point is that each level of ‘safe’ adds often significant additional cost. Given the regulatory cost impact in Anchorage (40%), this is something the MOA should quickly explore, seriously assess, and fix. Let’s roll back some of the municipal regulations as they may specifically impact low income housing or shelter. And, this time let’s not hire an expensive consultant from Denver. Let’s reach out into the development (residential and commercial) community who have extradayentary skills and experience (Anchorage Homebuilders Association is a good source) and put together a 90-day task force of municipal and private entities to ‘work this problem’ starting with low income housing, and seriously reduce this cost.

There are several local initiatives to provide low income housing if the MOA would allow them. Secretary Carson reported that San Francisco was building, at \$700,000 per living unit cost, new low-income housing. He made it very clear that HUD will not participate in this kind of spending when there are many far lower proven cost options. There are lots of examples in other communities that have faced this challenge. Let’s ask them.

### **We thus have:**

1. **Temporary or Transitional/shelter** (some 90 days, but others 24 months) in the Housing First model (warm & safe) ‘*we take them as they are not as we wish them to be*’. We get name, phone number, and background intel that will be of assistance later. We get them off the street out of the camps, but do we get them work? They pay 30% of their income, whatever that is, towards rent and the government (HUD) pays the rest, at least until the tenant doesn’t pay their portion and then they are back on the street. Again, ‘jobs’ are so critical in ‘fixing the root cause’.
2. **Small homes/cabins/shelter** The Alaska Veterans Foundation has designed and is in the process of providing 25 one room cabins in Anchorage for homeless veterans and their families, and yes, work is a requirement. In addition, the ‘Bird Houses’ built by Cook Inlet Housing years back is an enormous success. Go look at it just off the Strawberry turn-off from Minnesota going south. And there is Rose Hubbard’s, Anchorage Communal Homeless Village Project off Tudor, is another. There are more. Why doesn’t the MOA have a meeting and invite these ideas to the table for serious consideration. And, please invite the media so that the residents of Anchorage can learn about these options too. And yes, NIMBY is a problem, but we can work out of that.
3. **Tent City/shelter** (very low cost but warm, clean, and safe) Again we can collect data with the permit. The key here is that it **MUST** be well designed, must be well run, and you must require a dollar a day and a permit that can be revoked if there are violations of the rules. This is how St. Petersburg, FL got started, but now many there have built small cabins and a sense of community has been established. Good leadership, good planning, good management. (more later)
4. **Long term supportive housing/shelter** (far more expensive but it **MUST** integrate ‘work/jobs’ to really be successful in ‘solving’ their needs.) And why not fully integrate this housing into

new subdivisions? It doesn't have to look like low cost housing. There are lots of very successful models like this in other communities. Again, this is subsidized housing with the tenant paying up to 30% of their income and the federal government paying the rest. But there is high turnaround as some don't pay their portion because they stopped working and get evicted.

**The Problem: Funding** At a recent meeting on the new MOA ten-year plan to end homelessness in Anchorage the common theme or complaint was that the city needed 'larger bags of money' – yes from the state of course. It is very clear from what we have already learned that throwing more money at symptoms is not the solution. We must address root causes. Its far more successful and less costly over time per capita.

One of the innovations by the Mayor of St. Petersburg, FL to help enable donations not only from residents but also from visitors, was the conversion of old parking meters into bright yellow 'donation' meters to help the city deal with their homeless problem. These were placed strategically in places that were often used for panhandling as well as other locations to entice visitors to give. This simple innovative idea generates thousands of dollars a year for a specific purpose and helps those who want to give a dollar or a quarter toward this end, to do so within the law. You can also add a credit card mechanism into the meters to allow larger donations.

Today, we don't have enough MOA funds (or assist from Juneau or Wash DC) to provide an agreed need for a (150) Adult Day Care facility (no job options yet that we can find). A building has been found in midtown that may be acceptable in that location. Day care shelter would help reduce the number of homeless on the streets (NYC example) and provide an opportunity to get to know each person in more depth to help determine next steps, their needs, and general intervention, etc. Importantly, it would also offer the MOA an opportunity to try and line them up for work (not just government work) at some level and enable income so that they can afford at least a hostel (\$25 a night) which appears to be the choice of many panhandlers.

**Solution: State Alcohol Tax** - spending needs realignment (this is not to have the state 'dedicate funds' it is to 'designate' or 'transfer' funds, at least that's what the courts have said is allowable)

- Alaska collects \$48M a year ANC consumes about \$300,000,000 in alcohol a year. How much of the \$48M comes from the MOA area? I have asked this question, but still no answer. Why can a portion not be 'transferred' to the MOA via a negotiated MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) structure for very specific purposes – like a day care site - other than just counseling which doesn't seem to be showing very good results.
- Now: 50% of this \$48M goes to the state general fund and is used for whatever the legislature and governor decides. 50% goes to alcohol counseling/grants (not effective based on reports) and according to a legislative research report of the 50% spent on alcohol counseling only about half of those assigned this counseling finish the program and those that do are generally incarcerated, so it's a way to get out of their cell for a couple of hours.
- ***We need externally audited results every year attached to any budget request for any of this money.*** You want this money, show us your results - every year. (Years 3 and 5 are critical thresholds in recovery that AA measures to assess sustained results) AA does an international survey on results. Most government agencies do nothing in this regard. That's one of the reasons

why this spending is not being successful. We are not monitoring or reporting results so that we can adjust our spending to achieve better results.

- DRAFT legislation for House/Senate bipartisan bill to change the transfer/allocation to each municipality in the amount of the funds collected from that jurisdiction, for their use w/specific requirements (a negotiated MOA). We have requested a group to organize and craft this bill for the next regular session. It is now underway.

**Suggestions: Adult Day Care/Shelter** We immediately need a full-service shelter to house, treat, and rehabilitate those who will not or cannot do so themselves. This could be an open facility or a lock down facility responsive to citations that are not paid and/or multiple citations/arrests for the lower range of crimes that fit this purpose. The purpose/function is intervention thus enabling rehabilitation and building enough skills that will enable employment. Placement could be based on violations of law or volunteer commitment (free choice) for a specific time. Based on very successful programs in other states/cities, this also needs a relationship with ongoing medical treatment and counseling services after release. Once sober or clean, if they go back out into the community, they need ongoing support much like a weekly visit with a counselor like a ‘parole’ officer concept. This is an open discussion now underway in the MOA and nationally.

**Solution: The Palmer Prison/shelter** (now empty but costing the state for maintenance and security) *[This was a suggestion from Nick Begich of Eagle River]*

- Capable of housing **800** persons with adequate space and facilities to rehab violators and volunteer commitments. They are off the street, out of the camps, and in rehab.
- We must include ‘jobs’ as a critical component of this rehab initiative so they will have an income to provide for their housing. This could include jobs within the facility that would enable a savings account toward their release. Keep in mind that like most of America, there are more jobs in need than workers willing or able.
- We should also always offer ‘a ticket home’ for those who want to go home. This can be repaid out of their next PFD if it requires state/municipal spending.

**Transitional Housing/shelter** Although the Mayor’s office continues to say they are not interested in investing any funds into transitional housing (they mean structures) the VA for example considers this type of housing – up to 24 months -basic to the **immediate** effort to get people off the street and into a warm and safe environment (Housing First) that then enables them to make ‘better choices’ and helps get them a job. The VetVillageAK project of the Alaska Veterans Foundation will provide both transitional housing and long-term supportive housing. The housing is based on the need and ability of the tenant. They are all small cabins. Also, the Anchorage Communal Homeless Project is one of many examples that should be considered by the MOA – soonest. Again, getting the homeless to shelter, allows the MOA to get them off the street and out of the woods. They can start feeling warm and safe, a sense of community which is critical, and then begin the climb towards recovery with a job and the ability to survive in Anchorage – or go home.

**Historic Anchorage Tent City/shelter** The notion of a ‘tent city’ has been suggested to the MOA for decades – but pushed away as not worth the cost or time. “We are only interested in long term supportive housing” is the answer you get from the MOA. [look closely now for the homeless industrial complex] We suggest they don’t understand or appreciate the need nor the opportunities this tent city provides in ‘beginning’ to end homelessness in Anchorage. Again, it allows you to get them off the street

or out of the woods. Or you can do as the MOA is now doing and leave them on the street or in the camps and remain unable, legally, to do anything because you have NOT provided any other 'shelter' options. A tent city or small cabins allows the type of intervention that can identify root causes and start solving them. As APD said in our meeting, 'If there is no place/shelter for them, what can we do?' A well designed and managed 'historic looking' Tent City provides such a place between living on a street, in a camp, or expensive long term/permanent subsidized supportive housing.

1. First, the MOA Assembly and key MOA staff need to go to other cities who have done this and learn. Assemblyman Weddleton has, and it changed his understanding of this idea. He visited a site that started 19 years ago in Portland, and it is doing very well. There are many others like the newer one in St. Petersburg, FL. There are others that didn't do so well, visit and learn what works and what doesn't. It's not the idea that fails, it's the failure of management.

KEY: The one we suggest should be a planned, well organized, professionally managed, and a constructed replica of the original 'Anchorage Tent City (1915)' using white canvas for the tents, board walks, toilets (not portables) showers, laundry, etc. Main office to issue week long permits and collect \$1 per day. If the person does not have the \$1 per day, a work agreement can be entered with that person to 'work' in the tent city to offset this bill. Some of these 'villages' require 10 hours of work per resident per week to help 'build' a sense of community. This does not have to be a municipal facility. It in fact should be a shared (state, local, private) development taking advantage of the various nonprofits who get government funds to help end homelessness and even many businesses in Anchorage who wish to contribute. The original concept was developed and presented to the Assembly by the alcohol beverage distributors who were willing, at that time, to help underwrite it. But alas, they were turned down. Think of what a difference these possibly 100 tents could offer today.

2. The location needs to be in town, so the tent residents have access to friends and services and importantly JOBS. This also provides the opportunity to gather information on each person for further assistance if asked for or necessary. This should be a **starting point**, not the only option.
3. The location also should be within the older section of town, even close to the original Tent City where Anchorage was first formed. This then sets up a response to visitors, 'it is a recreation of our original tent city that we now use to help the homeless'.
  - a. It is often suggested that the old Native Hospital site on 3<sup>rd</sup> and Ingra be a tent camp, because it is close to the Brother Francis Shelter, Beans Café, and the Soap Kitchen. It is also already owned by the MOA, Land Trust.

Problem: The city has already sent hundreds of people into this area which is and has for some time been a mess. There is some planning underway with the move out of the auction yards, but it is not appropriate for all the homeless to be 'put' into one corner of one district. People live and work in this area and their property values continue to be harmed by putting more homeless in this area. The consolidation of homeless persons is not a good idea. Smaller well-designed camps offer much better management, targeted services like jobs, and responsive law enforcement. Our neighbors in this area who own property or work there think it only fair that other neighborhoods take on some of this burden.

4. The availability of the Tent City provides an option when APD or others are dealing with a homeless person and there is not available shelter – temporary or long-term. This is a key issue when citing a homeless person who is in trespass in the MOA ROW or in muni parks or woods for example. ‘Where else can they go’ is the question asked by the courts. When you provide a very low-cost week-long location that is warm and safe you are providing a temporary shelter option – but you get them off the street and into a warm safe community. If they choose not to accept this option, then you may have a legal action you can take, and they need to understand this.
5. Those who choose to live in the wild. We know Alaskans like this and have worked with men (no women yet) who are so far, all combat veterans who live in the wild of Alaska, as their home of choice. They come to Anchorage in the spring to make money over the summer to underwrite their cash needs the rest of the year. They don’t want to stay in expensive hotels because that defeats their effort to save their income. They almost always have a dog or two. And besides, they will tell you, there are too damn many of ‘those tourists’ there. The Tent City may offer them an option – and they may be excellent ‘workers’ for the City allowing them to stay at no cost but to contribute to the value of this community and save their money.

When recently asked during an Assembly Committee meeting on Homelessness, the representative from the mayor’s office said, and I paraphrase: ‘Alaska’s winters make a tent city complicated if not untenable. *[comment: so just leave them out on the street or in the camps?]* ‘There are liabilities that must be taken care of with training and other measures,’ she said. ‘There are rules about sanitation and safety.’ ‘The cost of putting one together is “almost what it would take to do a 50-unit apartment building”, she said. “There is a lot that goes into structuring something that you can say is safe.” *[comment: so just leave them out on the street or in the camps?]*

St Petersburg, FL did it in six months with little public funds, and it is working very well.

The tent shelter camps suggested in this report will cost money, but nothing close to what the MOA/ state/ and HUD have spent on ‘long term supportive housing’. For example: The recent conversion of the John Thomas Building, which used to house various nonprofits and was owned by the MOA for some time, was instructive. Or consider the cost of redoing Karluk Manor specifically for chronic inebriants. Where are these ‘audited’ numbers? What was the cost per resident?

No, a tent city built to appear like the original Anchorage Tent City will not cost that much per tent (put out a challenge to anyone who wants to try, to present designs, costs, etc.), it will be a very small fraction of that, but we get them off the street and out of the camps in, yes ‘temporary shelter’ but that is at least a start in helping homeless persons take the first steps to getting back into functional civil society.

**Long Term Supportive Housing/shelter** Work must be a requirement, or you are not ‘solving’ the problem - you are enabling continued disfunction and dependency within the often perverse culture of the homeless community. Work can be defined as 4 hours a day 5 days a week for example. It doesn’t have to be 9-5. They must pay up to 30% of their income toward the cost of their housing when they are working. If someone refuses to work, they are put into temporary housing and receive counseling on how to find, qualify for, and keep a job in Anchorage. There are those who say you can’t require work for ‘disabled’ people. Look at the programs in Anchorage and nationally that train disabled kids and adults for jobs. Work is a general term that can be adjusted to ‘accommodate’ (ADA) disabilities, but it gives

them a sense of purpose, value, independence, and hope they do not generally find otherwise. Work is critical to real long-term functional recovery.

**The Problem: Mental Health Disabilities** The legal framework of our mental health treatment construct is a mess. Most of the foundation of these laws were crafted based on an understanding of the brain developed in the 1950's that we would now consider primitive. When you add to this the complex mix of case law (<https://mentalillnesspolicy.org/legal/mental-illness-supreme-court.html>) both in actions and in definitions – we are in trouble. We cannot fix these problems – unless:

**Solution:** I, along with many others, have called for a national/state/local government organized initiative to fix this mess. No, I'm not talking about some conference back east. I'm talking about a Special Task Force initiated by the federal government (WH and HUD) in cooperation with states to reconstruct our mental health laws with the integrated critical assistance of 'experts' on the problems, the solutions, and the significant changes we need to make in law. You need people who understand the brain, the medications that work, and the law. Lawyers who specialize in mental health law know what the problems are. The task force should list them and offer options for new laws. And, no, we don't need politicians – just recognized experts in mental health and the law from key states and communities to be challenged, directed, and motivated to solve the construct of our laws in this area.

One of the best examples of these problems is the redefinition of 'immediate threat to self and others' and how that twists the use or not of medications. The definition of 'immediate' is the problem. That means 'now' not in 10 minutes or later in the day or tonight. So, the legal application of this definition is the biggest pebble in the shoe that must be adjusted. We can do this, we just need to try.

We now have the proven ability to help adjust chemical imbalances in the brain that change behaviors. This is transformative, and we know that most of those with mental health needs who are homeless can be 'treated' if allowed - if required. But rather than just consider the 'rights' of the mentally ill, can we not at least consider the rights of the people who must interact/live with them too? This must be a balance if we are going to make any real progress helping those with mental disabilities who are on the street which is the last place for them to be safe. Most often these citizens are the easiest victims of crime. Many are not 'dangerous' just in need of treatment which may include medications that brings them back to functional reality.

This is a difficult problem and we can expect more advances in medicine and treatment that may again require legal adjustment. But there are very good recommendations from the US Supreme Court and many others over decades past that no one is paying attention to.

I recommend we, this Community Council, take the initiative and formally call on our mayor, our Assembly, and Alaska's governor to request the President call for the formation of this national task force to move this mess into a workable responsible solution. This single action will save hundreds of lives, souls, save huge amounts of public funds, and the sanity of those who live with persons with mental disabilities. This is not another function for social elites, but a short-term working group very willing and knowledgeable to apply their professional skills to craft new legal options. Again, this would be hugely transformative not just in the homeless struggle, but for humanity.

**The other Problem: Mental Health Disabilities** Alaska has long had difficulty recruiting and then keeping mental health professionals. Why? They can make a lot more money in less challenging (cold/dark) locations in other markets. Many are not interested in hunting or fishing or skiing or doing other Alaskan stuff.

**Solution:** The Alaska Congressional Delegation needs to focus on this problem and do whatever they can to get the U.S. Public Health Service to recruit, educate, and place mental health professionals in Alaska with a minimum 5-year contract. The Public Health Service has done this in other areas of medicine in Alaska for decades and it works. We have several doctors in Anchorage who came here that way, and they stayed because it wasn't about the money, it was about the lifestyle (hunting, fishing, skiing). Alaska's governor should request this assistance. Alaska is not the only state with this problem. It is a growing national problem predicted in 'Future Jobs' an extraordinary forward-looking book that will change the way you think about not just our future but that of the world. But we have a good team in Wash DC who can 'work' this in the subcommittees to ensure we get at least one new mental health professional a year until we don't need any more.

Another strategy would be for the state, via the University of Alaska, to join with campuses in smaller parts of America that educate/train mental health professionals and then helps underwrite their cost with a contract that requires they must work in Alaska for X number of years based on their underwrite. This is not a unique idea.

**The Problem: Cultural Disabilities** We have a growing number of Alaskans who come to visit 'the big city' often using their PFD on a one-way flight, most coming in October. They know Anchorage from watching TV but that's all. They initially stay in low cost hotels or with friends until they run out of money. Their expectation is that Anchorage will be a great place to visit and live especially since there is no longer any economic purpose in their home community. The problem is they have no job or even the personal skills to enable their survival in a western 9-5 work construct. **This is NOT their fault. This is NOT about race. They are not 'bad people'.** It is the result of where they were born and what they didn't learn because their area was not a western 9 – 5 work culture, but most likely a lifelong federal welfare and subsistence communal culture. They are not lazy, they just learned a different set of work skills and different life skills, especially the western notion of time, that now do not work well for them in the big city.

**Solution:** Revamp the old Department of Labor Program that provided training in the schools starting at about 14 years of age. How to survive in a western 9-5 work culture. There is no pressure to move out of their remote community, but to learn the skills they will need IF they chose to move from their remote village to the big city. Please understand that many remote communities no longer have an economic purpose and haven't since most of the commercial fishing 'limited entry permit' holders discovered that their permit was worth over \$250,000. We have a way to fix this as well, but that is a separate paper. There really are no 'jobs' available to them where they grew up. As my old friend Willie Hensley said to me decades ago, the two most damaging things to the traditional Alaska Native culture were: 1. Lifelong **federal** welfare that injected a dependable cash flow into their lives and their future, and 2. TV. Most Alaskans do not know that live TV was not in the villages until the mid-1970s when satellite TV was beamed down to Alaska. This initiative to teach young people the skills necessary to survive in a western 9-5 work culture, must include the 'craft trades' most of whom are in desperate need of skilled workers in Alaska and across America. I am confident the craft unions will join this initiative. With the reinjection of craft skills in our schools, we should find remote Alaskans more capable of fitting in with the

qualifications to survive if they come to Anchorage. If they don't come to Anchorage, their skills will not be wasted if our state does what it must do in recreating economies in the bush.

I received a note from an old associate who lives in the bush that one of the reasons the state stopped providing these job and life skill training was an objection from local school boards who only wanted the local culture taught. Subsistence and 'Native' culture. I have also been told that some of the elders in some villages complained that too many of their young were leaving to get work in the big cities. The political decision was thus to cancel the program. Now we have one of this highest per capita number of suicides, drug overdoses, and alcohol/drug problems in America - across remote Alaska. And I thought it was 'for the children'. Obviously, we need to have some discussion between cultures about a strategy, but we need to do something to help those young Alaskans who want to leave remote villages and find a different life.

Think about the young man who came to Anchorage from the Yukon-Koyukuk area and got into trouble in Anchorage ending up in jail. He's back home now, but with craft skills he learned in prison that now allows him to support his family and be a contributing member of his community. Does a child at 18 not have the inalienable human right, protected by our constitution, to 'pursue happiness'?

**The Problem: Human Waste** The growing illegal deposit of human waste and other contaminants continues, and as mentioned, are measurably polluting our waterways throughout Anchorage. This is also causing significant and costly problems for building owners, managers, cleanup crews, employees, etc. In fact, many 'janitors' now refuse to deal with this, and the owners are having to contract expensive 'specialty crews' with specific training and equipment. Often the waste is left at a front door of a business or under an overhang. We also have people urinating through the crack in the locked front doors of businesses. Both require immediate and distasteful attention at the start of every business day.

Although we have heard about this problem for some time and the problem is generic to the so called 'homeless' problem, there just doesn't seem to be a solution. When asked about this the representative of APD assigned to the 'homeless' problem(s) said, "Where else are they going to poop?" What used to be generally accepted as public toilets at gas stations for example, are now closed, locked for obvious reasons, and no longer available unless you purchase something in the store. These spaces are often illegally trespassed, used for overnight stays by the homeless who sneak into a building and hide in the stalls or under staircases until the building is empty. Portable toilets have been tried in many areas in the MOA via the municipal park and recreation office, but again the vandal damage to them causes the vendors to not to participate. The vendor's cost goes up, but the MOA needs to keep the cost down.

**Solution:** This is not a problem limited to Anchorage. It is an old and international problem. Let's look at what other cities have done, but not just in the USA, let's also look at Europe, for ideas that are successful and try to apply, at least as a pilot project, an initiative that may reduce this problem – and this health risk. Many cities provide public toilets along sidewalks or ROWs that are owned and operated by a municipal authority. All the utilities needed for these small buildings are already under the ground. We recommend that this option be explored and tried with a good measure/results report every quarter. So, we not only need to provide 'shelter' we need to provide a place to 'poop'.

**The Problem: Stuck in Anchorage** Folks are sometimes stuck in Anchorage without the funds to return home wherever that is. During the initial interface (intervention) with a homeless person,

it works well to find out where they are from and then ask: Why'd you come to Anchorage? How did you get here? Now, listen to what they have to say and then, at the right moment ask, "Would you like to go home?"

**Solution:** "Would you like to go home?" Just asking this often triggers the notion that this is a viable solution to their problems. To go home. Why not enable this choice when we otherwise enable so many other vastly more expensive options? The MOA or a group of nonprofits should negotiate a ticket package every year with the airlines to help provide low cost one-way tickets home. I'll wager that if you offered some very positive media for their support, the price per ticket will go down. First you need to call 'home' and find out if they are welcome or there is some reason not. The homeless person is personally transported to the airport, given a ticket with their name on it, clears security (you observe) and is on their way. You don't want to allow the ticket to be sold. If they come back to Anchorage, they are no longer eligible for another free ticket home. Also, consider doing some public service ads on radio and TV so when/if they get their PFD and get stuck in Anchorage, they know where they can get a ticket home with some of that money. Remember the cost of these tickets can be attached as a reimbursement from their next PFD. *This remains the most cost-effective responsible workable tool to shrink the Anchorage homeless population.*

### **In Sum:**

The MOA has enormous control over what you can do with your private land but can't require someone to get a permit to camp on municipal property – not even in our parks. You can't stand on the corner and ask for a ride, but you can stand there and ask for money. Such is the legal complexity of this problem and one that must get substantive, deep attention by all who have a creative mind and an understanding of the need for common sense and balance in the law and in public management.

We have been told and lectured to that the problem is a lack of housing. And that the lack of housing is due to the failure of the state to provide more money. But the MOA has refused to consider any proposals for temporary transitional shelter other than VetVillageAK. If we want to get the homeless off the street, we must have shelter (9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court) in which they can be safe and warm, or they must be allowed to sleep on the sidewalks or in the woods until. This is not just an Anchorage problem, it is a state and national problem. But some communities have solved it and done so quickly. Options have been presented but are not being considered by the MOA in deference to 'long term supportive housing' and we suspect the homeless industrial complex. We need immediate shelter not expensive subsidized apartments and we need jobs.

Yes, we need more low income, unfortunately government subsidized, housing. But part of the problem is MOA ordinances, policies, and discretion on new housing that greatly (40%) impacts costs, time delays, and frustration. Additionally, we must stop pushing all new low-income housing into one district. Low income housing must be fully integrated into our community. Any development of residential housing of ten or more units should be challenged to integrate this housing. You won't even know they are 'different' because if done properly (very good examples in other cities) they fit into the design of the residential development and are not esthetically apparent as subsidized housing. This includes what look like large single-family homes that are in fact fourplexes. The success of this idea is very available in communities that have done this for decades. Living and working in a nice middle-class neighborhood gives the low-income resident **hope** and they intuitively desire a better life. It places them in a community that lifts them up out of poverty. Helps them plan again for a better future for themselves and

their families. To again be proud of who they are and what their future can be. It offers hope. But the problem is **not** the lack of housing.

In addition, go visit the Strawberry Village on Strawberry Road just off Minnesota going south. Built by Cook Inlet Housing Authority it has been hugely successful in results and low in cost. We should enable the development of more of these small ‘villages’ with AHBA competition for structural and site designs. No, not expensive homes, but small/tiny but livable ranch and two-story homes that can be rented and then even sold to the renter and fit the need and the cost realities of this solution – lower cost shelter.

The problem is the **homeless industrial complex**. The economic incentives are not working for the community, but they are working for this few. I’ve mentioned this and continue to find this one of the biggest obstacles in the current construct because the costs (although often camouflaged) are huge per resident, and the results clearly appear limited. Remember, if the government subsidies end, what happens to these projects?

The number of nonprofits in Anchorage is the highest per capita in America – why? This will require strong deep courageous thinking from outside of the box, but it is essential if we are to more efficiently use the funds we can, maybe collectively, gather. We must solve at least this part, temporary shelter vs long-term shelter, of the housing problem. Again, check the Net, there are dozens of reports on this problem that warrant serious consideration if not even some investigation. You will be shocked. Google “the homeless industrial complex” or “the homeless business”. *Best is a very detailed paper by Edward Ring, July 2019 America’s Homeless Industrial Complex*

The problem is **the total failure of our federal and state laws** that address **mental health** thresholds and how they can be treated. We know so much more now about the brain and how to help it then we did in the when most of these laws were written or twisted by the courts. The inability to require treatment results is terrible human tragedy, but the failure of our courts to apply reason and wisdom continues. We also desperately need more mental health professionals in Anchorage. You have some suggestions.

The problem is **drug and alcohol abuse and addiction** and the total failure of state and federal initiatives to deal with it. Remember, the abuse of drugs and alcohol is more often about self-medicating to mute some sort of pain which is most often the root cause. Find the bases of the pain, and you just may start solving the problem. We have done this for a long time with combat veterans and PTS. Remember that once addicted, brain cells are changed and rarely fully recover. The problem is the absolute failure of state and federal programs who claim to be trying to honestly measure results but create straw men or redefine words. AA measures their results internationally every couple of years. Their reports are very telling especially their notion of recovery thresholds at years 3 and 5. State funded alcohol counseling uses half of the \$48M a year the state ‘takes’ from alcohol consumers (the clear majority of whom do not abuse it), applies 50% to counseling with no real cost-effective measured success. Yes, there are a few. But these ‘results’ reports are critical to understanding and adjusting effectiveness, raising public confidence in this spending of a tax taken from citizens who are not the cause of the problem. We know that almost half of those required to take alcohol counseling never finish it, and those that do finish it are almost all incarcerated at the time. But how are they doing year 3 and 5?

The problem is **cultural disability** that has nothing to do with race only where you were born and the skills you didn’t learn. This we can fix quickly. The problem is the failure of our K-12 system to teach the skills, including the crafts, essential to survive in a western 9-5 work construct. The problem is the failure of the state to recraft a vibrant base economic purpose for remote communities who have lost them

– often due to actions by the state or federal government. The problem is the structural lack of attention this issue is given at the state level. These are all solvable problems with some leadership and creativity.

The problem is **lawlessness**. I think this may be turning in our favor based on our many meetings with APD and their experts. ‘REPORT’ is the key to making this work. It starts the data from which we are now so dependent. And remember, if an officer says they have been told not to enforce, REPORT that to APD and then follow up. We need some light on this problem, but I’m willing to wait a little and see how APD makes progress. Again, it is essential that the APD assigned officer attend your Council meetings every month. If they don’t show up, REPORT and send them a written summary of citizen concerns from the meeting. Build the data base.

What is the problem? **We continue to spend public funds to address symptoms, not the root causes.** Yes, we must address immediate needs/symptoms, but unless we also invest wisely into knowing and understanding and then fixing the root causes of these socio-economic and mental health problems, we will not fix this. This must change if we are honestly going to seriously fix these problems and greatly reduce the so called ‘homeless problem’. We can at least make it a transitional problem rather than a life style.

**This report was prepared by Ric Davidge, MPA  
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**If you have suggestions or questions, you can reach Ric via the Midtown CC.**

**Midtown CC believes we can do better!**