

DRAFT Outreach Phone Call Outline

Purpose: To reach out to key community members to informally share facts about the illegal encampment at Geri Field and the City's intent to address its growing public health and safety concerns.

Timing: The City is approaching a point where alternatives for shelter by those camping at Geri Field have been rejected or ignored and the risk to public of continuing the encampment has reached a point that warrants imminent City action.

Key Points:

- **Illegal, unpermitted encampment.** Some residents and volunteers involved with the encampment at City Hall set up an encampment in the lower Geri Field parking lot in the Civic Athletic Complex. Overnight camping in City parks is not allowed by City municipal code without a permit. Based on the lack of any observable structure or rules by this group both at City Hall and at Geri to date, the site is unsafe and a public health and safety hazard. Observed unsafe behaviors include violence, drug/alcohol use, illegal activities, lack of social distancing or mask use. Without significant changes, it would not be possible for the City to issue a permit to this group to legally use this or any other site.
- **Who is camping at Geri Field?** According to service providers with direct experience with many of the individuals at Geri, most of the actual campers (not the organizers who also camp there) are members of the chronic unsheltered. Many of these campers have complex and significant challenges such as addiction, aggression and mental health issues which hinder their ability to succeed in group settings or in social service programs.
- **Who is organizing the unsheltered at Geri Field?** Many of the organizers are self-acknowledged member of the Whatcom Democratic Socialists of America. Their demands (taken from their Facebook page) are to:
 - Drop all of the charges against protestors arrested at the removal of the illegal camp at City Hall and the Library.
 - Provide permanent, *no-barrier* housing for all
 - Permanent ban on encampment sweeps.
- **What is *no-barrier* housing?** No barrier housing is a “harm reduction” model in which residents are not restricted from drug and alcohol use. Very few rules are established regarding behavior and aggressive behavior is often left to the police. City ordinances currently allow for a very-low barrier encampments provided credentialled professionals with experience working with the chronic unsheltered are on-site. Without oversight, the risk to residents and the community at large is too great.
- **Reasonable alternatives for shelter are immediately available.** Base Camp now has the capacity to offer rapid COVID-19 screening at any time of day. Anyone in need of shelter is welcome to walk up to Base Camp or to call ahead and schedule an appointment for screening. If the antigen test is negative, the person will be admitted on the spot. If the test is positive, they will work with the individual and the Health Department to connect them with the Isolation and Quarantine Facility.