

Sender: rmsepler@cob.org
Subject: RE: Encampment health and safety update
Message-Id:
<[CO6PR09MB8520FC202392A50BCBB26409C2A00@CO6PR09MB8520.namp
rd09.prod.outlook.com](mailto:CO6PR09MB8520FC202392A50BCBB26409C2A00@CO6PR09MB8520.namp
rd09.prod.outlook.com)>
To: tsundin@cob.org

From: "Sepler, Rick M." <rmsepler@cob.org>
Subject: RE: Encampment health and safety update
Date: January 22, 2021 at 12:50:21 PM PST
To: "Sundin, Tara J." <tsundin@cob.org>

Brilliant!

Key would be for Barry to limit time. Mayor can reach out to him. I will follow-up.

Rick

From: Sundin, Tara J. <tsundin@cob.org>
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 12:48 PM
To: Sepler, Rick M. <rmsepler@cob.org>
Subject: RE: Encampment health and safety update

Not if Barry limits time for public comment. Gives Satpal, Mayor and others time to set the record straight. Nothing helps the City now but communication and following through. Can't worry about the protesters and what they say...there will never be a point where we win them over and they stop yelling. Until they are gone for a few weeks...maybe.

From: Sepler, Rick M. <rmsepler@cob.org>
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 12:45 PM
To: Sundin, Tara J. <tsundin@cob.org>
Subject: RE: Encampment health and safety update

Would you cancel today's meeting? Wouldn't it solely function to give the protestors air time?

From: Sundin, Tara J. <tsundin@cob.org>
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 12:34 PM
To: Sepler, Rick M. <rmsepler@cob.org>

Subject: RE: Encampment health and safety update

This is good. I hope he can deliver something similar at 1:30.

From: Sepler, Rick M. <rmsepler@cob.org>

Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 10:33 AM

To: Sundin, Tara J. <tsundin@cob.org>

Subject: FW: Encampment health and safety update

FYI

From: Fleetwood, Seth M. <smfleetwood@cob.org>

Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 10:27 AM

To: Grp.CC <Grp.CC@cob.org>

Cc: Grp.All.Department Head Team <Grp.All.DepartmentHeadTeam@cob.org>

Subject: Encampment health and safety update

Council members,

I'm writing with additional updates about the encampment. The Public Works crew arrived to assist in the planned City Hall clean-up at 9:30 a.m. Due to protesters blocking the road they were unable to access the area. Most campers have not complied with our request to create a 25-foot fire and safety area. Public Works crews have left the area for today. As you know, we have indicated the encampment will come to an end this month.

Below my signature, as background information for you, is an email sent to our most recent point of contact for encampment negotiations. It was written in response to the collective rejecting our offer to work together to provide tiny homes on public property in a very low-barrier setting for about 25 people, a proposal that would have added additional capacity during cold weather months.

In this email, I also ask their help to ensure a safe end to the encampment, emphasizing the significant public safety and health risks it poses to campers, volunteers and community members.

Today I wanted to provide more details about the increasing public safety and health risks we have been seeing, especially in light of members of the public now urging us to consider letting the encampment remain until spring.

The number and nature of incidents at the encampment have greatly escalated during the time we have been negotiating with the collective. We are seeing tensions rise and an increase in fights and violence, threats to people who walk by, mental health episodes, drug use, and criminal incidents.

Among the many incidents reported to Bellingham Police, more than 25 have been identified as “significant,” including disorderly conduct, felony assault, sexual assault, drug investigation and harassment. When incidents occur, there is active hostility toward fire, EMS and law enforcement personnel and obstruction of investigation of crimes. Just last night, firefighters were threatened while responding to an unattended fire. Their vehicle was surrounded by hostile campers hitting it and blocking it from leaving. Fortunately, no one was harmed.

In addition to these threats, human and animal feces and urine, discarded needles, trash and other debris, and rodents attracted to it all, pose serious public health and safety risks in addition to concerns for campers who are not consistently distancing or wearing masks.

The business of the City, the Library, and the Courthouse is increasingly affected. Our employees and members of the public feel understandably intimidated approaching the building and surrounding sidewalks, and they report they are harassed and threatened. People sleeping or laying in front of doorways block building entrances. Mail and other delivery services have been impeded or refuse to deliver to City Hall. It has become an intimidating setting for homeless outreach workers and other service providers, and most will not enter the encampment to try to serve camp residents. They have indicated they feel unsafe and unwelcome.

The circumstances I describe above are in addition to the safety concerns that prompted us to create the 25-foot fire and safety area around the building. The concerns I outline here will not be resolved by the safety buffer and they require us to end the encampment.

As I have committed, it will end this month. We are preparing our plans to do so, and I will keep you informed. On a parallel track, we will continue the important, challenging work, along with our partners, of increasing shelter options. Please contact my office if you have any questions.

Seth Fleetwood
Mayor
City of Bellingham
360-778-8100

smfleetwood@cob.org

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From: Fleetwood, Seth M. <smfleetwood@cob.org>

Sent: Thursday, January 21, 2021 1:50 PM

To: Brel Froebe <brel.alexandre@gmail.com>

Subject: Encampment operations

Brel,

I appreciate you getting back to me with your response. I am disappointed that we cannot work together to offer modular tiny homes in a very low- to no-barrier setting for 25-28 unsheltered community members, a proposal that would have added yet another shelter option and incremental increase to sheltering capacity during cold weather months.

While I appreciate you and your colleagues earnest interest in providing temporary housing, the proposed size of your requested encampment (up to 100 individuals) would not, according to experts with specific experience in operating tiny home villages, be safe or efficacious for either the residents or the volunteers supporting them. These experts believe that 50-60 residents in a moderate-barrier setting is a sweet spot for stability. The villagers, case managers, and site staff know each other, so even when there are challenges, there is more trust. It is more feasible to resolve conflicts and problems as they arise. Villages with over 60 residents begin to feel unsafe. When conflicts happen, they are much larger and deeper, and factions arise. This situation would be difficult to manage over time. It is important to note that the number of residents for a very-low to no-barrier “harm reduction” shelter would need to be significantly less than 50-60. For reference, Seattle’s Licton Springs Tiny Home Village (a very similar encampment to the one you proposed) had 27 residents.

As you are aware, with space currently available at Base Camp (supplemented – if needed – by additional space at the Drop-In Center), the new Swift Haven tiny house encampment and the forthcoming Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI)/ Road2Home encampment (which is planned to open in a few months), there are significantly more shelter spaces and choices available. We believe that they are adequate to address near-term needs.

Although we may ultimately disagree on the best approach to address those who are currently unsheltered, I am sure that you share my concern regarding the safety of those who have gathered on the City Hall and Library lawn. Upon receipt of advice provided by the Fire Marshal, Public Health Department, Whatcom County Sheriff, the Chief of Police, and other public officials, the City has concluded that the current encampment is unsafe and presents a significant public safety and health risk to campers, volunteers and community members. It is clear to us that the encampment must come to an end in the interest of public health and safety.

I am asking you and your colleagues to work with us to ensure a safe transition and that all who are on-site now can be connected to appropriate services and shelter. As I understand it, both Base Camp and Homeless Outreach Team (HOTeam) may be willing to assist in this effort if you and your group ask them. We will be working over the coming weeks to ensure that this happens. Please advise as to whether you and your colleagues will assist in facilitating the outreach that is planned.

Seth Fleetwood

Mayor

City of Bellingham

360-778-8100

smfleetwood@cob.org

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