

Homelessness Solutions Task Force (HOST)

Regular meeting

October 8, 2018, 10:00am-Noon

310 Towler Hall, Clatsop Community College

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

1. Mayor Lamear and Chief Spalding opened the meeting.
2. Approval of Minutes of August 9, 2018 meeting. Raven Brown moved, Jonah Dart-Maclean seconded. Approved unanimously.
3. Conversation with Eric, a camper in the wooded area around 40<sup>th</sup> & Franklin. Eric was featured in the recent KGW-TV piece about Astoria's campers.<sup>1</sup> Chief Spalding and Detective Kenny Hansen met Eric during their survey of the camps in September, think Eric is articulate and sincere, and invited him to the HOST meeting.

Eric: Family could probably pull me out at any time, it's just a matter of asking. Camping is a choice. Chris Krone talks about four points: substance, mentality, housing, employment. They're knobs, you have to tune them right. No employment, no purpose. Being here today fulfills my purpose. Everyone listening to me now is very different from what I've experienced the last two years. No one touches you. You get feral. I appreciate your asking me here.

I'm interested in work, but not so much a job. Trying to line up my passions with purpose, but can only line up pouring coffee. If I was offered a job and shelter now, I wouldn't say Yes right away to getting help. I do okay. You can find a lot of cool stuff going through trash that you can sell on ebay. I get a lot of recycling cans, it's really cool; I feel I have purpose directing those materials to where they belong. I wouldn't do just anything.

If we have to move, my buddy and I have been thinking of maybe going to Hawaii for the winter. It's good to live in the rain forest when it's not so rainy.

Is there criminal activity in the camps? I don't feel comfortable answering that. The "homies", we have a familial sense of solidarity. Astoria's been very friendly. Hikers who come through with their dogs are friendly. I don't want to create divisions, that's not part of the solution.

Guest: I own a home and go to the forest to find music and community. The families there are rather sad, but the camps are a flourishing, almost artistic community.

Eric: There's a sort of "coconut phone" between the camps and the mini-mart to spread information. We used that to help federal agents catch a guy being sought for sexual assault. Sometimes people get reconnected with their families.

I went to Brad Johnston's task force a few years ago. Putting in the porta-potties on the Riverwalk was successful. We could enforce some rules, but some guys don't get that you don't poop where you eat. The hill itself bars some people. We should have some hiker-biker camps.

The hill behind the hospital is trashed.

There are maybe 13 campers in our area. A handful.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kgw.com/video/news/local/astoria-eyeing-camping-ban-in-citys-forests/283-8272212>

#### 4. Homeless crime and camping ordinance.

Chief Spalding: APD started counting calls related to homelessness in January 2018. There are 245 calls so far this year, with a big spike in September. There have been 78 calls about camping in the 40<sup>th</sup> & Franklin area since January, a 300% increase over 2017.

After surveying the campsites in September, APD started posting 24-hour notices to leave. Vern Hall offered to help. Then we looked at the existing camping ordinance and noted that the current code prohibits camping on public rights-of-way, waterfront areas, public parks and public and private parking lots, but not on public lands, so we drafted a revised ordinance. The first reading was at City Council on September 17. The second reading was scheduled for October 1, but the Mayor expressed concern about where the campers would go and sent the ordinance to our meeting today for discussion.

APD's plan is to post the 24-hour notice in English and Spanish, urging individuals to contact CCA for services. APD has had a humane social services policy in place for several years. Officers aren't excited about taking action but must balance the desires of the campers with citizen concerns and health and safety concerns. The City will have to clean the abandoned camps or hire a third party to do it. APD will retain for 30 days any property that isn't clearly garbage, so campers have an opportunity to reclaim. The ordinance is an emergency declaration because there's a public safety issue. It would be very difficult to get services into the camps should there be a fire or medical emergency. Even if Council approves the revised ordinance, weather may prohibit us from going to the camps to post the notices for some time. Detective Hansen and I saw two camps with Coleman stoves but no fire pits. We saw human feces, used needles, lots of health hazards, stolen property.

The recent 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit decision said that Boise's policy violated the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment against cruel and unusual punishment because Boise was charging people with a misdemeanor -- ie, criminalizing homelessness. Violations of the revised camping ordinance could only result in a citation. APD won't be handing out many citations because they recognize the fines can't be paid or the individual won't appear in court, which would lead to a warrant -- and therefore the citations have little deterrent value.

Guest: I'm a homeowner in the neighborhood of Franklin and 40<sup>th</sup>. There is garbage, defecation, yelling well into the night. We have a camp right in front of our house. Maybe if they would clean up and the City gave them a porta-potty and a dumpster, they could stay.

Kate Allen: Could we find a balance between the unnerved homed and a humane way of approaching the unhomed? How much is the increase in reports to APD a result of the "buzz" about homelessness versus true crime?

Chief Spalding: There is real crime.

Guest: People plant stuff in our camps to make us look bad. I choose to live in the forest. I'm a veteran with PTSD. A job is OK but paying to live isn't something I want to do.

Guest: I want to come in from the forest. I chose to live in Astoria because everyone is nice. I have a job. Now people are slashing our tents and our belongings. We're just like everybody else. Kick us all out and you'll still find needles and garbage. I don't want to live in a shelter with all those rules. I want my own home.

Raven Russell: Helping Hands offers emergency shelter for about four days, time enough for an individual can decide whether they want to participate in our re-entry program. The length of that program is entirely based on the individual's circumstances. Ninety percent of individuals graduate from the program; after three years, 80 percent are still in independent living. We are not closing Seaside and moving everyone to Astoria. Opening Uniontown will allow us to provide emergency and long-term housing in

both Seaside and Astoria, with up to 70 beds in Astoria. There is no gap between the count of homeless people and the capacity to serve them.

Elaine Bruce: Permanent housing is everyone's goal. Send the campers to CCA. We'll create a long-term plan of assessment to keep them housed. We'll send them to Helping Hands for transitional housing. We can provide rental assistance. We have many options.

5. Relocation. Cindy Price, Kate Allen, Raven Russell, Elaine Bruce, Amy Baker, David Reid, Sarah Lu Heath. Will meet in advance of October 15 City Council meeting to develop a plan.

6. Roundtable/guest discussion.

Bruce Williams: Before enacting the new ordinance, look at long-term solutions like providing a dumpster, toilets, and self-governance

Rick Bowers: The gap will be veterans and other people who don't feel safe inside. Where will they move? They need a safe place with sanitation and a dumpster.

Mary Minor: Resident of the area for 37 years. There has always been some camping, but it escalated in the last three years. There is a good deal of criminal activity -- stolen mail, stolen property, arrests. People go in to the forest and stagger out 20 minutes later. Traffic at all hours -- cars with illegal plates, taxis, truckloads of pallets. Cars and trucks camping. I have no problem with Eric, but there are many transients. Do you want dumpsters and bathrooms in your front yard? Everyone wants to be secure in the neighborhood.

Vern Hall: I had a 780 credit score and I'm homeless now. Medical problems wiped me out. I'm \$85,000 in debt. I've been in the hills five years now and I keep a very neat camp. The trash some people create makes me sick.. I have severe PTSD and I like to be alone. I can't sleep at the Warming Center because of all the noises the other people make. I go to work every day. Where does the City want me to go? I have to survive. Dumpsters and bathrooms aren't a solution -- they'll only be abused.

Michael Miller: We're using very prejudicial terms. We're saying all homeless people are drug users, and that's not true. You don't just need money, you need to be good with money and good with people. Moving the camps breaks up a family, instead of empowering them to get rid of the bad elements. These people don't know people like you do. They don't have the power to get things done the way the people in this room do.

Todd Johnson: Lives above the Goonie House. Property has been stolen. Garbage collects and I take it to the dump. There are loud noises late at night. People are always coming through my property. There are human feces.

Pastor Bill: I came here with two solutions but we've spent two hours talking about the ordinance. I'm sorry I relinquished my position on the board to help redirect it. This has not been a good use of time.

7. Motion to adjourn. Raven Russell moved, Cindy Price seconded. Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cindy Price