



Update on Homelessness in Whittier March 8, 2019

Whittier is experiencing an increase in homeless encampments despite significant efforts by social service providers to offer a wide variety of services to those experiencing homelessness. Whittier's City Council, Police Department, and City staff share the community's concerns about this situation and we are working on a number of fronts to respond to this situation. This year alone, Whittier has committed \$274,766 for social service organizations to provide homeless services, outreach and coordination along with homelessness prevention activities. This amount is in addition to the City's expenditures for encampment cleanups and funding for our Police Department's Mental Health Evaluation (MET) Team, which pairs a specially training police officer with a County Mental Health Clinician. However, there are significant limitations that do not allow cities to enforce anti-camping ordinances and/or take other actions to remove individuals from public spaces as we have in the past.

The primary limitation in enforcing encampments is last year's 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision, frequently referred to as the "Boise" case. This decision effectively limits cities' ability to enforce anti-camping ordinances on public property if a jurisdiction does not have enough shelter beds to accommodate the individuals who are violating the curfew/camping rules. Like Whittier, most cities lack adequate shelter bed space to address the growing number of individuals experiencing homelessness. While Whittier currently has 45 year-round emergency shelter beds with an additional 40 shelter beds during the cold weather season, they are normally full and this does not provide sufficient capacity for the estimated 200+ individuals experiencing homelessness in Whittier.

As such, Whittier's Police Department and City staff are working with a host of social service partners to address the encampments that have sprung up in recent weeks. This includes Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), LA County's Homeless Outreach Services Team, Whittier First Day, Jovenes, The Whole Child, County Supervisor Janice Hahn's office, and others. Many of our local homeless service providers conduct daily outreach to each of our homeless residents and coordinate with our social services staff and Police Department where appropriate.

Whittier is continuing to aggressively seek ways to move individuals into shelter and not have them living in our parks and public spaces as housing is a fundamental part of basic human dignity. To this end, Whittier is actively working to create additional interim housing to meet the growing need in the community but this will take time to secure a site, construct improvements, and commence providing shelter services. Whittier is in conversations with LA County in an effort to obtain Measure H funding and other

funding for interim housing. Furthermore, Whittier is also working in a leadership role as part of the Gateway Cities Council of Governments' Homeless Task Force on seeking regional solutions to addressing the issue of homelessness in Southeast LA County.

Additionally, we encourage Whittier residents to assist in addressing the homeless issue by using the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) website for requesting outreach services for those individuals experiencing homelessness, <http://la-hop.org>. LAHSA is the regional homeless services agency, and the more often residents note that an individual is in need, the more resources they can allocate to assist us in ensuring folks receive appropriate services and case management to move them into shelter and more permanent housing situations.

The City shares the frustration in not being able to see each and every unsheltered individual moved to a safe housing condition. Quite often we encounter persons who decline the offer of housing and other services to address the fundamental reason they are homeless. We wish there were a simple solution but the causes and circumstances associated with homelessness are many and varied – which makes solutions correspondingly complex. Shelter is not enough, many individuals are in need of job training, counseling, mental health treatment, varying levels of medical health care, and assistance related to substance abuse and alcohol abuse just to name a few reasons.

Please be assured that issue of homelessness is the biggest issue the City of Whittier is focused on and all of our departments are working on a solution to the public impacts of unsheltered individuals in our community. We have posted information on our City website with regard to the City's Homeless Action Plan, which is a four-pronged approach to homelessness:

- 1) Coordination to increase housing stock and shelter beds
- 2) Increasing public awareness of homelessness and resources available
- 3) Ensure city policies support shelter capacity and affordable housing development
- 4) Maximize existing homeless prevention efforts and explore ways to enhance prevention efforts

Again, we are very concerned with seeing encampments along our major roadways and some of our parks. This is not an acceptable condition to allow to persist and that is why Whittier is working to bring solutions forward as quickly as possible.

You are encouraged to learn more about our efforts to address homelessness in our community. Information about the Whittier Homelessness Coalition, and other news and resources is also available on our website:

<https://www.cityofwhittier.org/government/whittier-transparent/current-interests/addressing-homelessness-in-our-community>