



Mike McGinn, Mayor
City of Seattle

May 13, 2013

Honorable Sally Clark, President
Seattle City Council
2nd Floor City Hall
Seattle, WA 98124

Dear Council President Clark,

As you know, Nickelsville residents have been camping outside on City-owned property on West Marginal Way for two years now. Signs of fatigue are obvious and growing. Highland Park residents have identified an increasing number of concerns. A neighboring land owner is preparing a lawsuit, citing decreased land value. Questions have been raised recently about Nickelsville's ability to govern itself and protect the health and safety of its residents. The current encampment situation is not sustainable.

I thank the Council for its previous work tackling the encampment issue: First, by adding a Comprehensive Plan goal to "Guide the operation of safe and healthy transitional encampments to allow temporary shelter for those who are homeless"; and second, by passing legislation that created a pathway for encampments to be hosted by religious facilities.

Unfortunately, no religious facility has come forward to host Nickelsville, and without another City-sanctioned solution, the need to identify a workable path forward has become more acute. I hope you will agree that the City cannot ignore the health and safety issues at the current Nickelsville site. Likewise, we must also address the concerns of neighbors and the adjoining property owner.

As you know, Food Lifeline has expressed interest in buying the Nickelsville site to develop a new facility for its operations. Food Lifeline now has property conveyance agreements with both Washington State and the adjoining private property owner. Both of these agreements are contingent upon the City selling the parcel it owns. I think that we all agree that Food Lifeline's proposed development has many humanitarian and economic advantages to Seattle and our region. But support for the Food Lifeline project means we must also find a way to facilitate the removal of everyone living in the Nickelsville encampment.

Given this situation, I believe we need to discuss the merits of providing additional location options beyond those sponsored by religious entities for a properly run interim temporary encampment. To that end, I support Councilmember Licata's proposed legislation to permit transitional encampments that meet certain criteria for up to a year at non-church owned sites,

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subject to a plan that addresses site management, maintenance, and security. To assist those Nickelsville residents who want an alternative to living in outdoor encampments, I will also transmit a supplemental budget request to Council to provide additional housing options and services.

With this legislation enacted, I would then work with Council to expedite the sale of the current Nickelsville site to Food Lifeline. I believe that this approach serves the interests of the Highland Park Community and Food Lifeline, while also meeting the Comprehensive Plan goal to "Guide the operation of safe and healthy transitional encampments to allow temporary shelter for those who are homeless." My preferred option is for Council to adopt Councilmember Licata's proposed legislation and expedite the sale of the current Nickelsville site to Food Lifeline.

There is a second option. We could retain the West Marginal Way property to provide space for a properly run encampment to remain on a semi-permanent basis. If we follow this course, we will need to first identify problems with drainage and pests. We will also need to provide access to running water and other basic amenities, and establish a relationship with a non-profit provider who can facilitate services on the site. HSD could contract with a non-profit partner to oversee this encampment. We are open to discussing governance models. The first step on this second path is to conduct an environmental assessment of the property. Accordingly, I am offering an alternative piece of legislation that would provide funding for this initial environmental assessment. If campers are to remain on the site, we should begin this work as soon as possible.

Either of the options above requires Council action. I look forward to an open dialogue with you about how to serve a local homeless population that is larger than our shelter system can accommodate and thus includes people who have few options but to continue to sleep outside. I look forward to working with you to identify a long term solution.

Sincerely,



Mike McGinn
Mayor
City of Seattle

Cc: Honorable Seattle City Councilmembers