



## MUSEUM PARK GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 2, 2017

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This month's MPNA meeting featured a panel discussion/presentation related to Houston's efforts to address homelessness, the current encampment under US-59. A list of questions was circulated to the panelists in advance of the meeting (see attached).

President Sandy Stevens called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM. Following a general overview, she turned the meeting over to Greg Quintero, Chair of the Safety & Security committee. Greg provided an overview of format, recognized the newly formed ad hoc committee tasked with formulating suggestions related to the current encampment situation, and asked the panel to introduce themselves.

### Kim Mickelson, MPNA Vice President, consulting city attorney

After thanking everyone for coming, Kim provided a general overview of the current state of affairs in Houston, some history about how the courts have viewed other municipalities' ordinances aimed at reducing encampments, and the importance of respecting and balancing the Constitutional rights of all citizens. Key points: it is not illegal to be homeless, sleeping on public land is not a crime, and personal possessions must be protected.

### Marc Eichenbaum, Special Assistant to the Mayor for Homeless Initiatives

The encampment under US-59 is the top priority for the City with regard to homelessness. Mayor Turner & Marc visited the encampment Aug 1. However, there is a lawsuit and care must and will be taken to ensure that future endeavors are not jeopardized by rash decision making. The Mayor views the ordinances pertaining to encampments and panhandling to be necessary, valid & constitutional.

- Other Texas cities have anti-encampment ordinances that have not been legally challenged; however, their ordinances are much older than Houston's.
- The City has secured storage space for personal possessions that exceed the size limits specified by the anti-encampment ordinance, and this program is up and running. There are twice weekly trash clean-ups by the Dept of Solid Waste at the Wheeler encampment.
- The Health Dept is in the process of assessing and preparing a report about the Wheeler encampment. Should they find that the area is a public health nuisance in need of full cleaning, there will be swift action to clear the area while respecting the rights and needs of those residing in the encampment. Enforcement of the ordinances would be the next step after the clean-up. No firm dates are available at this time.
- The City is focusing on providing housing to the homeless population. Houston, however, has fewer financial resources for this endeavor in comparison to other major cities. Federal funding for HUD vouchers has been reduced; the City is unable to issue any new vouchers. Two weeks ago, Mayor Turner proposed & Council approved redirecting \$2.4 million of other funds for housing. People living in the

encampment have been assessed for housing. At this time, the major need is to identify landlords willing to rent out appropriate units.

- In the near future, the area beneath US 59 between Austin and La Branch will be fenced in and used as a private parking lot for a local nonprofit organization.
- Report any illegal activity you observe to HPD. The City is working on a solution to allow HPD to address concerns related to small fires.

Lt. Shamara Garner & Officer Nick Vogelsang (Homeless Outreach Team), HPD

- Call 911 for immediate threats (eg, break-in in progress, life-threatening situations).
- Call HPD non-emergency [713-884-3131] for other matters, including crimes that have already taken place.
- HPD has identified and entered into a database the individuals currently residing under US-59. The new city ordinances have been explained to everyone in the encampment and efforts are underway to provide help and resources to those who want it.
- Regarding drug use: Kush is the #1 drug issue in the encampment. Due to the nature of this drug, immediate arrests are not possible as testing is required to identify the substances in the drug. Sales, possession, and use of illegal narcotics will be enforced, but such activity is nearly impossible for uniformed officers to observe.
- The Sobering Center Team is working in conjunction with the Recovery Center to address public intoxication.

Frank Carmody, Houston 311

- Do not contact 311 for crimes (eg, drug activity, theft, assault): these issues should be reported to HPD.
- Do contact 311 for non-police issues such as illegal dumping/accumulation of garbage.
- If you call 311, they can help to direct you to the appropriate person or city department. Clear descriptions of offenses will help to ensure that issues are routed properly.
- Sandy noted that the online 311 pulldown menu allows the reporting of human waste on public property.

Marilyn Brown, Houston Coalition for the Homeless

The Coalition for the Homeless ('Coalition') is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide leadership in the development, advocacy, and coordination of community strategies to prevent and end homelessness. The Coalition is tasked with bringing together all local organizations dealing with various aspects of homelessness in the collaborative effort, The Way Home Houston (<http://www.thewayhomehouston.org/>). Their goal is to prevent and end homelessness by providing housing and the necessary wraparound services (eg, health care, job training, counseling, child care). Over 11,000 people have been placed in housing, with 95% still in housing at the 2-yr mark.

- Outreach requires federal (housing) and state (mental health & substance abuse treatment) funds. These budgets often change (and often decrease) creating gaps in funding, and consequentially difficulties in long-term planning. A lack of dependable funds also harms the credibility of homeless advocates whose promises of help/resources sometimes are unable to be honored. Local companies and philanthropic organizations are key partners, with federal dollars providing a match for private donations.
- Approximately 150 individuals are residing at the Wheeler/Chartres encampments.
- ~2/3 of those living in Houston encampments self-identify as having mental health issues. Mental health problems can quickly lead to substance abuse issues through a cycle of self-medication.

- Texas lacks long-term mental health care; the maximum length of a mental health ‘hold’ is 11 days—rarely sufficient time to make a meaningful difference.
- Shelters are not a long-term solution; the solution to homelessness is homes.
- In addition to the need for housing units for those transitioning from the street or shelters, there is also a need for affordable housing that is accessible to public transportation and support services.
- Public awareness campaigns (radio, billboards, meetings with faith leaders) are underway for the Meaningful Change, not Spare Change initiative (<http://meaningfulchange.org/>). Rather than giving money or food/supplies directly to people who are in need, residents who would like to help can direct funds to agencies capable of assisting the homeless (and former homeless) with long-term help & support. Note: donations are placed in a general fund so that they may be directed to helping those most in need.
- A handout was provided (see attached) regarding funding for homeless initiatives and steps that residents can take vis-à-vis contacting representatives.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:27 PM after Sandy thanked the participants.

## **Panel issues categorized**

### **Housing for the Homeless and associated funding**

1. Attached is the acknowledgement that I received for my recent contribution through The Way Home's [www.meaningfulchange.org](http://www.meaningfulchange.org) website.

Although the website stated that contributions could be designated for a specific purpose and I stated that I wanted my contribution to be used specifically for "relocating the homeless from the Under 59 Encampment in Museum Park", the response I received makes no mention of my designation.

Please share this email with Marilyn Brown, who signed this letter. When she speaks next week at the MPNA meeting, perhaps she could address how designated funds, like mine, will be used to work toward ending the Hwy 59 Encampment in the Museum Park neighborhood by relocating and providing housing to those living there.

Also, if there are no plans to properly account for and use these designated funds, then the website should be modified so that it is not misleading people.

5. What is the status and timeline of available permanent housing for the homeless? (direct to Mayor's office?)

9. What has been done, or can be done, to come up with a specific relocation plan for the transition population under HWY 59 in Museum Park?

what can you do to remove these people and ensure true homeless have help in adequate shelters?

10. What funding plan can be established to implement relocation of the transient population under US 59 and how can Museum Park residents contribute, if they so choose, to assist these efforts and be assured that donations will be used for this specific plan?

### **Ongoing dangers associated with the encampment**

2. There are new gang tags on The Southmore (new Hines Project corner of Oakdale/Caroline) and two on sidewalk in front of adjacent private residence. This type of gang activity has not been seen by the resident over the last 25 years. What do these tags indicate?

6. What is the best method to report illicit activity under US 59? (direct to HPD or 311?)

The area currently has more structures, larger piles of furniture and other belongings and increased trash piles than ever before.

- Will the area be cleaned up of any hazardous human waste?
- Are they aware that the number of rats in the area of the encampment have greatly increased?

17. Since the delays in removing homeless encampments under Hwy 59 created health hazards for property owners and residents with contaminated land from human waste and now we are overtly challenged on our streets by confident transients, there is no recompense from the city cleanup since we pay, again, through taxes,

Seriously, do we wait for something as drastic as a hospitalization from battering or a death to take promised, recognized-as-just action.

### **The Mayor's plan for the Encampment and homelessness**

3. What is the City's current position and timeline for action regarding dissolution of the encampment under US 59? (direct to Mayor's office?)
4. What is the status of litigation between the City and the ACLU related to the encampment? (direct to Mayor's office?)
7. Clarify what actions are "allowed" under US 59 (loitering, camping, living, etc.) (direct to City attorney's office?)
8. Clarify who or what entity is responsible for enforcing any laws related to activity under US 59. (direct to City attorney's office?)
12. Why has the mayor chosen to not enforce his ordinance? (Mayor's Office)
13. Why is the city/HPD is not enforcing the drug laws? Or even the public intoxication laws?
14. What possible rationale exists for the Mayor to refuse to enforce the ordinances he and his staff spent so much time and effort upon? Laws are not self-enforcing, and are meaningless absent their good faith enforcement. The ACLU suit is just a suit, under which there has been no injunctive relief granted. There is nothing to stop or impede enforcement, and the mere lawsuit per se presents no justification, no basis, for its lack. The Mayor exercised his leadership in drafting and passing the ordinances; now all he has to do is step out of the way of our excellent law enforcement officers, so that they can do the job they are ready and well trained to do.

What is the status of the 6 point plan?

- What is the expected timeline for the encampment to be removed?

18. What is the status of the panhandling media campaign, meaningful change not spare change? I would love to see billboards or signage in the big panhandling areas to direct donations to the proper channels

### **Fencing and fencing consequences**

11. Last year TXDoT installed fencing under US 59 between Main and Fannin. Has fencing under remaining portions of 59 between Caroline and Alameda been considered? If not, please explain decision not to implement fencing. (Mayor's Office)

15.

- Please give us an update on the efforts to relocate the camp to a "Low Level" shelter.

16.

- Has fencing been considered? Would entire area under 59 be fenced from Wheeler to Alameda? Would it be on all four sides of each section? Can fencing be put up while transient population is still there? How would existing transient population be moved when fencing occurs?
- If fencing occurs, how do we prevent the transient population from just going out onto public property (sidewalks, etc) in our neighborhood?

**Basic City services as part of solution**

Did the city ever conduct the bio hazard cleanup they promised?

- How do we get 24/7 patrols to manage crime and health/safety issues under Hwy 59? How can Fiesta, and other businesses in the area, get more security? They are losing business every day because people don't feel safe going there.
- How do we get better lighting under Hwy 59 to discourage crimes?

**The solution to homelessness is housing.  
The key to helping someone be successful in housing is supportive services.**

**Supportive Housing takes:**



**Money**



**Increased Services**



**Affordable Housing**

### **Federal Government**

Each year, Congress passes a budget allocating funds to federal programs on the discretionary side of the budget, including homeless assistance programs. The federal government's largest homeless assistance program is HUD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program.

**FY2018** - On May 23, President Trump released his full Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 budget proposal, beginning the FY 2018 budget season. The budget **proposes to cut HUD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program**, the federal government's primary response to homelessness, **by \$133 million**, setting it at its FY 2016 level of \$2.250 billion. The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that this cut alone would cause approximately **25,000 more people to be homeless** in FY 2018 than in FY 2017.

For information on your US representatives, go to: [www.govtrack.us/congress/members/TX](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/TX)

### **State Government**

**The majority of the people still living on the street suffer from severe mental illness and/or substance abuse. More access to longer term mental health services and/or substance abuse programs are needed.**

For information on your state representatives, go to: [www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/](http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/)

### **Local Government**

**Local government (City and County) distribute many of the federal funds, pass local ordinances, have the responsibility for local public health and manage local development issues.**

Homeless individuals and families need an acceptable, affordable place to live with access to the services they need, to transportation, to schools, to jobs, etc. We must have more safe, secure and stable affordable housing.

For information on your local representatives, go to: <https://directory.tml.org>