

Craig, Sondra

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Allowing camping in Houska is not an ideal solution, but it's a necessary temporary measure while an actual plan is developed and implemented to house the homeless. They have to go somewhere. There are neighbors everywhere. Riverside North, neighbors complained. Marsh, neighbors complained. Houska, boat owners complain. Everyone is saying "not by me" but not proposing a location which wouldn't be near anyone else. That's because there's nowhere in the city that isn't near someone. One of the opponents of the Houska location suggested "one of the public lands or unused parks over by the bluff" but does not actually name a location, because no such park exists. If the people who say "not by me" want to suggest a location, then we should entertain that proposal, but they haven't because there's nowhere that's not by someone.

I find many of these neighbors' complaints to be viscerally disgusting. In the discussion about the marsh camping, housed condominium residents were complaining that they didn't want to use their balconies because they overlook a campsite. In other words, the condo residents were upset that they couldn't be outside because others were forced to be outside. Now, there are people who own boats worth thousands if not tens of thousands of dollars complaining about the behavior of people who have nothing. If they are upset about homelessness, the easy solution is that they can sell their pleasure-craft and donate the money to provide housing (any Christians reading this, please refer to Matthew 19:21). If they are merely upset about unpleasantness happening near them or to them specifically (but not to others) then I don't have much sympathy.

That said, there are some measures that could be taken in this instance to potentially ameliorate the boaters' concerns. The north and north-west dock entrances could be fenced off, and better security added to the remaining entrance. Security cameras could be added. Proper organization of the Houska camp could be established and funded. Consider purchasing insurance protecting marina patrons, at City expense. In contrast to my lack of sympathy for the boat owners, I'm very concerned about the safety and comfort of the houseboat residents- special attention needs to be paid to them (fences? security guard? can the houseboats be moved?). At the very least, the City should waive their taxes and other fees for the duration.

These measures need to be established immediately, meaning fully planned within one week and implemented within two weeks.

Also, consider opening additional sites, such as the City Hall yard and the area north of Riverside, to reduce the load on any one location, allow campers to move in order to avoid having to live near people they may have personal conflicts with, and quickly have other options in case one site has to close due to an emergency.

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