

Craig, Sondra

From: Beth Marie Hall <hallbethmarie@hotmail.com>
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To: ZZ City Clerk External
Subject: Common Council 8/8/24 Item 24-1068

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Dear Madams and Sirs;

I wish to submit a written comment to the Common Council pertaining to agenda item 24-1068 for the scheduled August 8th, 2024 Common Council Meeting. I wish to state my opinion that the proposed possible outdoor overnight shelter for the unhoused at Erickson park is poorly thought out and inappropriate.

Erickson park/pool is directly next door to Spence Elementary School where there is no delineation between where the park ends and where the southern playgrounds begin. Even if fencing were constructed, the encampment would butt up against the boundary of where pre-kindergarten through 2nd grade play during recess. While many unhoused individuals do not pose a risk to other individuals, one can't ignore that mental illness (often untreated) and addiction play a part with a portion of the unhoused population. Placing an outdoor encampment near the elementary school would expose students to these issues.

Elementary schools also need to operate with a higher level of security due to the realities of our time. The level of security would need to be even more so at an outdoor encampment at Erickson than at other locations in order to make sure the school boundaries were kept secure and safe. While the possibility exists that Spence may close and a newer elementary school built, the referendum vote has yet to occur. If it passes, construction of a new school would take time. The proposed timeline of the encampment being open from April 2025 into 2028 would coincide with the potential new school's construction timeline while Spence remains open.

Additionally, Erickson park and the ball diamonds are utilized all summer long by youth and adult leagues. Often, parents allow their kids to walk cross Erickson park to play at the Spence playgrounds while ball games take place. The community will no longer be able to utilize Erickson park in the same way either by no longer being able to play at the popular ball diamonds or be able to allow their children to play at the park or playgrounds outside of school hours.

Furthermore, Erickson pool is a popular swimming location in the neighborhood and is continually packed when not closed for repairs. Placing an outdoor encampment at Erickson with access to pool restrooms and showers would either put undue pressure on pool staff and patrons or effectively close a popular city pool that the neighborhood loves.

Lastly, an outdoor encampment for the unhoused is in general a poor idea because it is only a viable housing solution for maybe 6 months of the year. The population of the encampment would have to be moved during the colder months. A year round, indoor facility would be a more viable solution for the people the common council is attempting to help. I would urge the council to pursue an indoor location - possibly a large building that has sat unused for a long duration of time, such as the old Kmart site.

I wholeheartedly urge the Common Council to remove Erickson Park from the list of potential outdoor encampments for the unhoused for the reasons mentioned above. To continue consideration of it as a possible site demonstrates to the families of Spence Elementary and the surrounding neighborhood that the city doesn't prioritize our children when determining their agenda.

Thank you,

Beth Marie Hall
Call/Text (608) 738-2311