

Craig, Sondra

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It is disturbing to see that, once again, the City is considering yet another camping ban without a designated place for homeless people to go. We have been over this repeatedly. Homeless people neither suddenly find themselves housed nor magically cease to exist simply because the only option available to them is made illegal. None of the bans of the past year have made homeless people cease to exist, and this one won't either—except for the people who have died after their situation was made even more disastrous by encampment clearances, of course.

Requiring people to move every 12 hours to a location 500 feet away would do nothing but set up an absurd conga line of people moving from place to place, exhausting them, further erasing their chances at stability and safety, reducing the amount of personal possessions (including legal paperwork, identification, and medications) they can hold onto, and making it essentially impossible for service agencies to find them. This camping ban, like all previous camping bans, would drive more people into conflict with housed residents and further increase the burden on emergency services.

If the intention is to make conditions so unbearable that homeless people leave La Crosse, that is banishment. Not only is that a violation of these individuals' rights, but it forces the problem onto neighboring municipalities. What happens when those municipalities impose restrictions that are even harsher, forcing them back here? Do we just ping-pong them back and forth in an arms race to see which town can impose the worst torture?

Instead of petulantly throwing a tantrum and hoping enough violence solves the problem, the City needs to get serious about providing a temporary emergency camping location immediately, even if no services are provided, because people are already camping at locations which lack services, and an underused and out-of-the-way park such as Houska is a far better location than the marsh or riverfront. Yes, this would reduce the ability for other residents to use that space, but allowing people to engage in basic life-sustaining activities is a far better use for a parcel of public land than a playground. We are talking about people's lives. All other concerns should be considered secondary.

This camping ban proposal is particularly disgusting in the context of both the City-County plan and the recent resolution for staff to come up with ideas, both of which should be allowed to complete before any further camping bans are enacted.

Kevin Hundt