

Craig, Sondra

From: Janet Koppelman <kentonjan@aol.com>
Sent: Monday, August 5, 2024 4:50 PM
To: ZZ Council Members
Cc: Reynolds, Mitch
Subject: Homeless camping in the marsh

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City Council member and Mayor Reynolds:

I am writing in support of the proposed camping ban for the list of parcels proposed in agenda item 24-1037, and specifically the parcels in the marsh adjacent to the Asfoor and Vietnam Veterans trails.

In March when you cleared the encampment at Riverside, you provided no designated place for those people in the encampment to go, so they simply moved, hmmm..., I don't know..., about 500 feet up the La Crosse river. At that point the citizens you represent asked you to add several parcels to the list of those already posted as no camping to protect the marsh area and her trails for biking and walking that serve the entire La Crosse community. Since then a very large encampment (50 or more tents) has developed with no supervision and no sanitation, and reportedly some structures that appear to be "homesteading" on public lands.

Beginning with the April Public Works meeting you have deferred, stalled, and postponed for over four months making the tough decision that you all know needed to be made. And now you continue with another distraction/diversion of pulling Houska park from the no-camping sites in the city (supposedly to move the current encampment from the marsh). I assume you are smart people and you are aware of the negative reaction that proposal has already stirred with citizens of other parts of the city (as evidenced by the letters in the agenda attachments). Is your mission to get all the NIMBY arguments raised to a fever pitch as a diversion to allow you to drag your feet and do nothing yet again?

"There's no where else for them to go!" seems to be a popular refrain. Your job as governmental officials serving the whole community is to find a viable place for the unsheltered to go, and we now have a detailed list of sites. Unfortunately I imagine nearly every one of these locations will be discounted and discarded as "too expensive" or "impractical" or "unsafe" or "an eye-sore" or "fill-in-the-blank". You also have a very logical and well thought out proposal before you from Marsha Kurth for consideration on how to achieve success. Perhaps you should consider hiring her to help coordinate your efforts.

Everyone knows that these are hard decisions, but the longer the tough decisions are delayed the larger the impact and complications. Had you acted definitively in early April with a "no-camping ban" in the marsh, you would not be facing some of the decisions you have to make now.

I understand the passion of those who are strong advocates of those who are unsheltered for whatever reason, but this is a small number of our population - approximately one half of one percent. It seems to me that as City Council members your responsibility in your decision making needs also to consider the benefits and risks of the other 99.5% not only in your district but the population as a whole.

The Council's lack of action over the past few months under the guise of supporting the admirable "Pathways" program has already caused the marsh trails to become unusable and unsafe for use by families in the community as a whole. If any property own in this city had even a fraction of what is going on in the

marsh the city inspectors would spring into action. At the same time the city is touting and pursuing of a wonderful plan for pedestrian and biking access while inadvertently "hosting" a subculture of illicit activity that no one wants in their neighborhood or anywhere in the community.

I and all of my neighbors in this beautiful community are begging the Council to take immediate action to (1) ban camping in the marsh areas in addition to those areas already identified, and (2) to find a viable and appropriate place to take care of the TEMPORARY needs of the unsheltered until a more permanent solution is active and effective.

Thank you for your hard work to move forward expediently on this difficult issue.

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