

## Agenda Item 8.1: Sanctioned Encampments

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Mon 5/17/2021 9:32 AM

To: The Office of Mayor Sam Liccardo <TheOfficeofMayorSamLiccardo@sanjoseca.gov>

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Dear Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers:

I support the proposal for a sanctioned encampment program because it is the quickest way to resolve the ongoing conflict between the unhoused and housed communities in San Jose and Santa Clara County. Offering alternative sites or upgrading safety at existing encampments can also be a tool to prevent vegetation fires during our severe drought conditions, so perhaps some funding would be available from related programs. Reducing fires at encampments would benefit both encampment residents and the rest of the community. A reduction in firefighting costs may cover the costs of upgrades to sanctioned encampments.

However, I have some additional recommendations.

1. The sanctioned encampments should be extended until the City and County can place everyone in affordable housing. As we know, the construction of affordable housing under County Measure A is behind schedule. Programs such as hotel conversion for interim housing are excellent (and I support that as well) but will not accommodate everyone by whenever the official health emergency ends.
2. The program should provide some type of outdoor cooking facility, at least at existing SOAR locations at risk of grass fires or brush fires if those people will not be relocated to a safer site. If you look at a log of where SFPD needs to respond to vegetation fires or outdoor fires, most of the locations are recognizable as encampments. From what I have heard from unhoused advocates, this is typically from campfires used for cooking. As cooking is a necessary activity, some type of field kitchen would be much safer for the residents of the encampment and the community. It would save more in firefighting costs than it would cost to install.
3. If fires are also starting because encampment residents are using open flame for lighting, donations of solar-powered or crank-operated lights could provide a safer alternative.
4. Perhaps the tech companies near encampments could make donations to cover all or part of the costs. After all, they are the primary driver of high rents in the SF Bay Area.<sup>1</sup>

I am glad that the City is finally considering sanctioned encampments as an interim solution to the lack of housing that leads people to live in unsanctioned encampments. I hope the proposal is adopted (and includes my suggestions).

Kind regards,

Kathryn Hedges

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