I would like to begin by thanking the Planning Commission for seeking opinions from the citizens of Sammamish in regards to the homeless encampment code development. Homelessness is an epidemic in America with far reaching implications to all communities. It is altruistic of Sammamish to provide resources to the homeless community, but to a fault.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, “45 percent of homeless people reported indicators of mental health problems during the past year. About 25 percent of the homelessness population has serious mental illness.” In comparison, only 6% of Americans are severely mentally ill (National Institute of Mental Health, 2009). In addition, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reports that 34.7% of homeless adults had chronic substance abuse, 80% had experienced alcohol and/or drug problems and 54% had been incarcerated one or more times. Our small city has a population with one third of the citizens under the age of 18. The potential for interaction between such a large youth population with an at-risk group of individuals should illustrate that hosting the homeless poses a significant security risk for our community. The potential for something to go wrong, with the hugely dense population of children, is too great of a risk. The job of our government is to look after the best interest of the majority of its citizens; approving the permits that enables the local churches to support temporary housing for the homeless is not putting the citizens’ best interests and needs first.

It is also worth noting that the demographics of the Tent City homeless population consisted entirely of adults. The Mayor’s Message article in the Sammamish Review was misleading in its attempt to pull at heartstrings by detailing the suffering of young children. This message was manipulative and unnecessary as it is irrelevant to the current issue of the tent city code revision.

One of the greatest assets Sammamish has is an uncharacteristically low incident rate of crime. If we intentionally welcome into our city a group of individuals with a documented propensity for substance abuse, and a disproportionate ratio of serious mental illnesses, then we are inviting unnecessary risk. Our town is too small, and our child population too great, to take on such risk and liability. I ask that the Planning Commission consider what is right for our city, and our children, and put the needs of our citizens before the wishes of a local church.

Jason and Sarah Fournier