Hi Carl and Debbie,

I wanted to submit comments in response to last night's Planning Commission meeting. I was actually at the meeting last night but did not get up to speak.

Also, I wanted to know how I can get a hold of Police Chief Elledge's slide on the crimes that took place while Tent City 4 was here. Is that on the city's website somewhere or do I need to come into City Hall to get a copy of that? And I also wanted to know if the names of the speakers last night are in the public record and how do I access that information? I'm trying to reach out to one of the Redford Ranch homeowners.

Thank you for your help!

Here are my comments:

Dear Planning Commission members,

I'm writing to you with regards to the March 20th meeting on the homeless encampment regulations. I was at the meeting for the entire duration but did not submit comments in person. I’d like to address some of my concerns in the following points:

One, I would like the commission to know that the 8 arrests and various other calls made to the Sammamish police while TC4 was at Mary Queen of Peace were not isolated incidents in the camp. I’ve included a link to a Redmond Reporter article that outlined the crime within TC4 while it was at Redwood Family Church from July 13-Oct 19, 2013 (just prior to its move to MQP). http://www.redmond-reporter.com/news/230242051.html?mobile=true. In the article, you will see that Redmond police officer, Julie Beard notes 8 arrests were also made at that location for things such as disorderly conduct, domestic violence, drug possession, theft, etc…In addition to these arrests, there were close to 30 calls made to police for things like assault, intoxication, fugitive arrest, and trespassing. Clearly crime is a problem at the camp. I think it's very important to re-state the fact that a very large percentage of the camp population were arrested while in Sammamish (8 out 45 residents is 20%. If we were to extend that statistic to the city as a whole, we would see around 8,000 people arrested in Sammamish in a 3 month period. I'm certain we have no where near that level of crime in our community). While members of the church may have felt safe with the camp nearby (as many of them stated at the commission's meeting), many of the parents at Arbor most certainly did not feel safe. And we certainly became even more concerned when we learned about the drug use and rape at the camp. There can be no denying that this is not a safe population. Crime statistics clearly show as much.

Two, I would like to address the comments made by the woman from Issaquah who is a lawyer for the homeless population. I think she did a very good job of trying to scare the commission into adopting the least restrictive
codes possible. But I would urge the commission to ignore the opinions of one lawyer and look only to the codes that are currently in place in the surrounding cities. Bellevue has a 60 day limit for tent camps. We should adopt the same code. Several other cities, including Mercer Island, have an 18 month restriction on camps coming back to the same area. Most, if not all, of the cities have the 1/4 mile requirement from public transportation. These restrictions are all currently in place and have so far held up in court. If she, or other lawyers representing the camp want to challenge that, well then they will have to challenge the codes of ALL the Eastside cities. Sammamish will not be alone in that fight. Please take into account the concerns of parents and nearby residents when crafting these regulations, not only the comfort and convenience of the homeless population.

Three, how is it fair that one entity (the church) can unilaterally decide to hoist a homeless camp upon it’s neighbors? If I buy a house next to a church I can expect that there may be an Easter egg hunt in April or a loud Christmas concert in December. But how can it be fair that I am also required to host a homeless camp in my backyard? And contrary to what some at the meeting may think, my property values are absolutely something to be concerned about! My husband and I have worked very hard for 15 years to be able to buy a home here. If I’m forced to host a homeless camp for several months out of the year and my property values plummet, that is relevant. That is why it is vital that the commission adopt a policy that prohibits the camps from settling in one area of the community.

I realize that it’s not the Planning Commission’s job to solve or even address the issue of homelessness in Washington. You are simply tasked with coming up with a set of codes that tries to balance the rights of the community with the religious rights of the church. But I do think there are some bigger issues at play here. How can a camp that by it’s very nature is unstable be a path towards stability for its residents? How is it that in 10 years of traveling the Eastside, there has been NO real movement towards a permanent housing solution for these residents? The various hosting churches, together with SHARE and the cities have accomplished nothing towards solving homelessness on the Eastside. If anything, they make the situation worse. They put people in desperate need of services out in the suburbs where they can not easily access hospitals, jobs, job-finding services, mental health services, etc…

In closing, I would urge the commission to take the concerns of parents and nearby residents into thoughtful consideration. And to not be bullied into adopting lax regulations. The strict codes currently in place in other Eastside cites are certainly appropriate for Sammamish as well. We know there will be homeless camps in our city. Some may like it, others will not. The least we can do is ensure that there are very strict codes in place when they come.

Thank you,
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