

CITY OF REDDING REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

Illegal Encampments



DATE: December 8, 2014
FROM: Safe City Project
SUBJECT: Illegal Encampments

Recommendation

The Safe City Project recommends the proactive code enforcement of existing city code regarding illegal camping in public spaces with the intention to increase public well-being, health and sanitation standards, economic opportunity and safety for Redding citizens. Currently, there is a significant presence of illegal camping near Redding parks, trails and alongside the Sacramento River. With the aim of “reclaiming” these public spaces for public benefit, we propose the following:

1. Encourage local citizenry to utilize the Redding Police Department website to directly report transient encampments.
2. Prioritize city staff to assist in the locating, processing, and cleanup of illegal encampments, as well as periodic patrolling of frequently used illegal campsites after cleanup to prevent the re-establishment of campsites.
3. Make more easily obtainable “Consent to Enforce” permissions to address illegal encampments on private properties.

The Safe City Project proposes both to address the issue of illegal encampments in public spaces, and also provide an avenue for these transient individuals to receive the assistance they need. Already, there is transient outreach program that collaborates between the Homeless Continuum of Care, Redding Police Department, Shasta County Health and Human Services and the Good News Rescue Mission. This transient outreach program directs individuals towards charities that can provide housing, mental health counseling, life skills coaching and job training.

Background

One of Redding's greatest assets is the access to beautiful, scenic outdoor spaces. Local citizens and visitors benefit from the Redding public parks and the Sacramento River. Access to these natural resources enhances individual, communal and economic wellbeing.

The City of Redding focuses tax dollars and legislature to create parks, trails and waterways. Unfortunately, the citizenry's ability to enjoy these resources has become limited because many of these public areas no longer feel accessible nor safe. Many illegal encampments are spontaneous and organized near access to water. Individuals live at the camp, creating space to sleep, eat and perform natural functions. This creates numerous social, health and economic problems. These issues include:

- Public health concerns with the presence of open defecation in public spaces and in waterways.
- Social issues with the presence of a transient population significantly involved in drug use and substantially plagued with mental illness around families with children trying to access public spaces.
- Ungoverned behavior within the camp environment including predators taking advantage of younger and newer transients by pushing them into a deeper drug culture.
- A lack of safety for Redding citizenry to enjoy public spaces purchased by tax dollars.
- Natural wildlife damaged due to fires started in illegal encampments.
 - According to CalFire, within the past 3 months they have worked on two separate wildfires (the Canyon Fire and the Wonder Fire) that started in illegal encampments.
 - The total cost to fight these fires, not counting expenses to the Sheriffs Department, CHP, Cal Trans, PG&E and REU, was \$168,000 and 44 acres of land burned.

iVisitRedding invests significant funding each year to attract tourists to the Redding area. Often these promotions emphasize the beauty of our trails, rivers and parks. The Fly Shop is one of the largest tourism draws in our county drawing around 3,000 people annually to spend their vacation money in our area. However, the presence of illegal encampments is a detractor to returning tourism to our area.

One major issue is that the City of Redding has difficulty enforcing the current codes designed to regulate illegal camping. The scope of this problem is significant. The existing requirements in processing an illegal camp are extensive and challenging. This process is taking significant time and focus from the Redding Police Department.

With the newly proposed Reserve Police Force, these individuals could assist in the processing of encampments and the supervising of cleanups, facilitating an increased

frequency of cleanups and adding capacity to our existing Redding police force, allowing them to be focused on addressing more serious criminal activity.

In addition, law enforcement faces challenges dealing with illegal encampments set-up on private property. Often, squatting happens on land or in buildings where the property owner is out of town. These situations require a special "Consent to Enforce" in order to move forward with clearing out the encampments on private property. The ability to easily and quickly obtain this permission can be very challenging and time consuming. The current laws contribute to yet another challenge in addressing illegal encampments.

Issue(s)

The issues addressed by a campaign to reclaim our public spaces from illegal encampments would include:

- Increased sense of safety,
- Increased social wellbeing while visiting Redding's public spaces,
- Addressing economic and social deterrents that hinder the growth of tourism,
- Over-extension of the Redding Police Force,
- Public health hazards,

Alternatives; Implication of Alternatives

The alternatives to adopting a campaign to reclaim public spaces from illegal encampments include:

- Inactivity or a "Status Quo" approach would result in:
 - Ongoing frustration by the Redding citizenry toward the usage of public spaces,
 - An increasing lack of usage by the Redding citizenry of the public spaces,
 - Decreasing value and care placed on Redding's public spaces,
 - Absence of future tourism dollars invested in the Redding economy,
 - Increased draw of transients to Redding,

Fiscal Impact

The fiscal impact should consider increased staff time in locating, processing, and cleanup of illegal encampments, as well as periodic patrolling of frequently used illegal campsites after cleanup to prevent the re-establishment of campsites. Also consider an educational campaign to communicate "no camping" in sensitive spaces within our city. As well as providing accessible educations, perhaps a webpage, that instructs citizens in the process to obtain a "consent to enforce" when an illegal encampment is located on private property.

Total fiscal impact is yet to be determined.

Conclusion

The Safe City Team appeals to the City Council to prioritize the reclaiming of public spaces and waterways from illegal encampments. We propose this three- tiered approach with the foundation being the prioritization by the City of Redding to proactively enforce current city code. This is a serious issue for Redding that has now reached a tipping point. Redding's future social and economic wellbeing hinge on this issue.