To: Mayor XXX XXXX

From: Tyler Vermillion

cc: Spokane City Council

Date: May 5th, 20XX

Re: Stemming Our Housing Crisis

Dear Mayor,

We are writing to address the critical issue of homelessness in Spokane, particularly in light of the closure of the Trent Resource and Assistance Center (TRAC) and the escalating crisis faced by our unhoused community members. The closure of TRAC, which once provided shelter for up to 350 individuals, has left many without a roof over their heads. Last year, the emergency shelter exceeded its capacity, with over 375 individuals seeking refuge (City of Spokane, 2023).

The closure of TRAC underscores the urgency of our situation. The latest Point In Time Count reveals a growing unhoused population, with a corresponding rise in the death toll within this marginalized community. It is evident that critical decisions and miscalculations have led us to this moment, and we must learn from our shortcomings.

Key insights show the following policy failures and possible future goals to work toward:

- **Inadequate Service Provision:** Relying on only two agencies to provide wrap-around services was insufficient, leading to a lack of capacity to meet the needs of the unhoused population.

- **Failure of Massive-Shelter Model:** The massive-shelter model at TRAC failed to provide dignified accommodations and essential facilities for hundreds of people, resembling a FEMA camp rather than a supportive environment (Spokane City Council, 2023).

- **Mismanaged Funds and Opaque Partnerships:** There were issues with mismanaged funds and opaque partnerships, highlighting a lack of accountability and transparency in contracting practices (Spokane City Auditor, 2023).

- **Lack of Strategic Coordination:** The lack of strategic coordination and collaboration among service providers and stakeholders hindered efforts to address homelessness effectively (Spokane Regional Continuum of Care, 2023).

- **Insufficient Oversight:** There was insufficient oversight in the contracting and management of TRAC, leading to its closure and leaving many without shelter (City of Spokane Ombudsman, 2024).

- **Inadequate Planning for Closure:** The closure of TRAC without additional beds scheduled to become available indicates a failure in planning for the transition and continuity of services for the unhoused population.

Goal / Outcome	Indicator	Baseline Data	Target	Progress Monitoring
Reduce the number of unhoused individuals	Number of unhoused individuals	2,390 in 2023	Decrease from baseline	Annual Point in Time Count
Reduce the number of unhoused deaths	Number of unhoused deaths	177 in 2023	Decrease from baseline	Annual reports from relevant agencies
Increase availability of shelter beds	Number of available shelter beds	TRAC capacity: 350	Increase from baseline	Regular updates from shelter facilities
Improve quality and accessibility of shelter services	Perceived quality of shelter services	TRAC conditions likened to a FEMA camp	Dignified and accessible shelters	Feedback from shelter residents/community
Enhance coordination and collaboration	Level of coordination among service providers	Lack of coordination highlighted	Improved coordination	Stakeholder meetings, collaboration reports

From the closure of TRAC, we have gained insights that must guide our future actions. Relying on only two agencies to provide wrap-around services was inadequate b(U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2023). These agencies struggled to meet their obligations, highlighting the need for a more diversified approach to service provision. The failure of the massive-shelter model at TRAC was a sobering lesson. While the intention was to centralize services, the reality fell short, revealing the immense challenge of providing dignified accommodations for hundreds of people in a centralized location lacking essential facilities and services (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2023).

Moreover, our experience with TRAC highlighted the importance of transparent and strategic contracting practices. Mismanaged funds and opaque partnerships underscore the need for greater accountability and public oversight in future initiatives. Lastly, coordination and collaboration are critical in addressing homelessness. Without strategic coordination and a cohesive approach, our efforts are likely to falter.

Therefore, we urge you to prioritize a comprehensive analysis of our past failures and collaborate with community organizations to develop a strategic action plan. This plan should prioritize the creation of safe, accessible, and dignified shelter options for our unhoused neighbors. Only through a concerted effort involving all stakeholders can we hope to address this pressing issue and restore dignity to those experiencing homelessness in our community.

It is no secret that Spokane is amid a crisis. The unhoused population has reached an all-time high, and our streets are being ravaged by the illicit drug epidemic (Spokane Police Department, 2024). The rising cost of housing is pushing more people into extreme poverty and homelessness (Zillow Research, 2024). Each year, we see greater numbers of people die on the streets, often attributed to extreme temperatures.

In 2023, the Point in Time Count found at least 2,390 homeless individuals in the city, up from 1,757 in 2022 and 1,559 in 2020 (Washington State Department of Commerce, 2023). Forecasted outcomes show the 2024 count to be a record high. Anecdotally,

those interviewed shared similar stories of being forced into homelessness due to medical emergencies or job loss. Most people in the city are only one or two paychecks away from losing their housing (Federal Reserve, 2023).

The official death count of unhoused individuals reached a record high of 177 people in 2023 (Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office, 2024). These are our neighbors, mothers, fathers, children, and friends. We owe it to our community to do better.

Mayor, we urge you to provide the direction and leadership needed to navigate us out of this devastating catastrophe. The city is operating between two extremes, a devastating excess of folks losing their housing and being forced into inadequate shelter, and a growing deficit of safe, accessible, supportive long-term housing. We can do better, and we must do better.

Sincerely and respectfully,

Tyler Vermillion

Spokane Housing Advocates

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