



June 7, 2017

Downtown Action Organization  
ATTN: Rolf Nelson, Chair  
50 Old Courthouse Square, Suite 110  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

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RE: Homelessness and Crime in the Downtown Core

Dear Mr. Nelson, 

CHRIS COURSEY  
Mayor

JACK TIBBETTS  
Vice Mayor

Thank you for your letter regarding the Council's May 2, 2017 quality-of-life study session. I understand the concern that the Downtown Action Organization (DAO) Board expressed regarding homelessness and criminal activity in the Downtown and would like to address your concerns.

JULIE COMBS  
ERNESTO OLIVARES  
CHRIS ROGERS  
JOHN SAWYER  
TOM SCHWEDHELM

As you know, the City Council and staff are focused on the potential impact homelessness and crime can have on the enjoyment of the Downtown. And we have taken action to respond to that issue. Last year the City increased the number of Police Officers assigned to the Downtown Enforcement Team from four to six and renewed funding for the Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST). These officers and team members are assigned to deal with many of the issues facing our city center. I believe you and members of your organization, as well as the general public, have noticed improvements in the downtown related to these changes.

Regarding the concern expressed about when the City will begin misdemeanor enforcement, Police Chief Hank Schreeder has assured me that Officers are already enforcing these laws. In fact, over the last 12 months, there have been 299 felony arrests, 1,458 misdemeanor arrests, and 242 individual citations for City ordinance infractions within Beat 9, which includes Downtown and Railroad Square. We take the matter very seriously and staff continues to assess all risks, respond to complaints and pursue criminal violations in a way that preserves the Officers' discretion.

We need to be clear, though, that the enforcement of misdemeanors is only one part of a strategy that must be applied citywide, and by itself is not a solution to the issues of homelessness and crime. The reality is that no level of misdemeanor enforcement will be effective without the support of the Sonoma County District Attorney, the County courts and

the County jail. Staff is actively working with these partner organizations to develop strategies that will be effective without criminalizing homelessness.

Across Sonoma County, recent data identified approximately 1,900 unsheltered people, and City staff has identified 44 encampments located throughout Santa Rosa. These encampments pose significant health and safety risks to those who are unsheltered and have far-reaching negative impacts on the broader community, including downtown Santa Rosa.

These known encampments have been evaluated based on the number of individuals estimated at the site, as well as associated health, safety and fire risks and property ownership. Through this process, staff identified these priority encampments: the 101 underpasses at 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets, and Farmers Lane Extension at Bennett Valley Road at Farmer's Lane. The latter has been identified as the highest priority, based on the imminent fire risk. Services will be offered and clean-up undertaken in July of this year at the Bennett Valley encampment, followed by the 101 underpasses. The goal of this effort is to abate hazardous conditions, secure the site, provide on-going management to maintain the abatement and link those living in the encampments with permanent housing so as not to displace them to other areas of the community.

The City also is implementing other strategies to reduce homelessness in the Downtown core and city-wide, which include continued support of HOST, adoption of a Housing First Strategy and Housing Action Plan, participation on the Board of the Sonoma County Continuum of Care (CoC), partnering with the County of Sonoma, and funding of emergency services and other homeless prevention programs. We have had some successes, but remain very much aware of the frustration still felt in the community related to this issue.

I hope this information has helped to clarify questions and concerns expressed by the DAO Board. I truly appreciate the Board's time taken to share their concerns and ask for clarification around this issue. I invite you to our Homelessness Solutions webpage at [www.srcity.org/HomelessSolutions](http://www.srcity.org/HomelessSolutions) for updates, information and specific actions we can each take to help reduce homelessness in our community. Depending on our progress, we may have future community meetings on the homelessness issue and will keep the community and businesses updated on these meetings as details are solidified.

Finally, I want to repeat the offer I made in our meeting at City Hall several weeks ago to make myself available to personally address these issues with your members, and/or with potential members of your organization.

Sincerely,



CHRIS COURSEY  
Mayor