

SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Briefing

On the Homeless Encampment on the Garabedian Private Property

Pledge of Allegiance

In collaboration with the Community Action Partnership of Strafford County (CAPSC) and other local, state and federal agencies, the Cities of Somersworth, Rochester and Dover are working closely to provide a wide variety of services to a significant homeless encampment located on private property in Somersworth.

City Manager Belmore mentioned that they have set up some triage dates and times listed below for people to get a meal, ability to use the shower and laundry facilities at Willand Warming Center.

- Monday October 18th from 2:00 – 7:00 p.m.
- Thursday October 21st from 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
- Monday October 25th from 2:00 – 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesday October 27th from 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
- Friday October 29th from 2:00 – 7:00 p.m.
- Monday November 1st from 2:00 – 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesday November 3rd from 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
- Friday November 5th from 2:00 – 7:00 p.m.

In addition to the use of facilities there will also be some agencies there to assist people with applying for housing, medical care, food and supplies, pet care, and substance use treatment. The welfare offices from Rochester, Dover, and Somersworth are involved as well because the encampment consists of people from all three Cities. CAP has developed a flyer with this information and has passed them around at the encampment. This past Monday two people visited the center and around five today, there were not many applications for welfare.

CAPSC has agreed to lead the outreach effort with the help of non-profits and local, state and federal agencies. The agencies involved in helping provide services include SOS Community Recovery Organization, Seacoast Mental Health Center, Pope Memorial Humane Society Cochecho Valley, New Hampshire Legal Aid, New Hampshire Harm Reduction Coalition, Waypoint, Cross Roads House, Greater Seacoast Community Health, Families First Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Somersworth and Dover Housing Authorities, Community Partners, Wentworth-Douglass Hospital, The Doorway, and the welfare departments of Somersworth, Rochester and Dover. CAPSC are also seeking the following donations.

- Wagons to help people move their belongings to their destination
- Sleeping bags
- Tents
- Gift cards to local restaurants or supermarkets for meals or other necessities
- Gas cards for individuals with vehicles
- Meals on triage days for both clients and volunteers at the site
- Monetary donations that can be used to support services for those in need

On November 8th the Police Department will begin the process at the site starting at 9:00 a.m.

Chief Kretschmar stated that they plan on going to the encampment one week prior to visit the site and inform people that they will have to clear the site by November 8th. He mentioned that he has spoken with several departments for information and guidance and believes that this situation is being handled correctly. Chief stated that the department goal is for this to be done peacefully, but can't ignore any violent situation if there is any.

Councilor Gerding inquired about where the people are being guided that are willing to leave and if there are going to be social workers present when they visit the site a week prior to November 8th. Chief Kretschmar stated that they are encouraged to take advantage of the services being offered at Willand Drive Warming Center, and that he is not sure if a social worker is available to accompany them for the visits but he is trying to make that happen.

City Manager Belmore stated that the Police Department and all the agencies involved are and will continue to handle this situation with empathy and compassion.

Councilor Gerding mentioned that he has gone on ride a long's with the Police Department and believes the officers are well trained in dealing with people with mental health issues, and believes that will be helpful during this process.

Councilor Witham inquired about the amount of debris in the area and understands and hopes that most of it will go when the encampment is removed, and is wondering who is responsible for the debris that is left. City Manager Belmore stated that it would be the property owner's responsibility.

Councilor Austin inquired about a central contact for the press, City Manager Belmore stated the contacts are the three City Managers and CAP representative Betsey Andrews-Parker.

Councilor Dumont is happy that this situation is being handled with compassion, but is concerned about where these people are going. The Warming Center will be helpful but feels they will need more. Mayor Dana S. Hilliard mentioned that this is a work in progress with many agencies involved and the Tri-City Memorandum of Understanding is also in place.

Mayor Dana S. Hilliard also mentioned that there has been some misinformation out there and they are working on getting the correct information out to the public. Hilliard stated that one item of misinformation is that there are children at the encampment, and he wants to reassure the public that there no one under the age of 18 at the encampment. Another important fact is that this property is not City owned.

City Manager Belmore mentioned that the people at the encampment are from all three Cities, and that there are several pockets of homeless encampments all around all three Cities.

Councilor Witham inquired about why this is taking place now because the encampment has been there for some time. It was explained that the property owner contacted the City and requested assistance to remove the encampment. Belmore stated that the owner, Corey Garabedian, is trying to market the property for development.

Councilor Gerding inquired about the services that the Welfare Departments are able to provide. City Manager Belmore stated that they can offer Coast Bus passes, a list of shelters in the area and attempt to provide a referral to a shelter or make other agency referrals. It is possible to get further help but there are certain criteria that needs to be met and they are handled on a case-by-case basis. Belmore also mentioned that there have been no welfare applications submitted from the homeless encampment to date.

Councilor Dumont believes the plan is a good plan but is concerned because we are moving the problem before we solve the issue of housing. Dumont would also like to make sure the property owner understands that he is responsible for the clean up after.

Councilor Cameron inquired about monitoring the property after to ensure they do not return to the site. Chief Kretschmar stated that the Police Department will monitor the property.

Councilor Michaud made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cameron and passed 6-0 .The meeting adjourned at 6:27 p.m.