From:	Bryan von Lossberg
To:	chad rankin
Cc:	Grp. City Council and City Web Site; Theresa Williams; Emily Armstrong; Montana James; Samantha Hilliard; Eran Pehan; Jessica Miller; Ginny Merriam; John Engen; Amy Allison Thompson
Subject:	Re: homeless population & public health
Date:	Thursday, December 17, 2020 4:42:58 PM

Mr. Rankin,

My apologies for the delay responding. In response to your main question I would point you to several City efforts, as well as some folks working at the City on this issue:
Details around the City's Homelessness initiatives can be found here:
https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/2124/Homeless-Initiatives

Our work is driven by a core belief that housing is the fundamental key to addressing homelessness. And we strive to make homelessness rare, brief, and one-time only. And while the challenge is enormous - and complicated further by a pandemic - we've made progress and are positioned to continue doing so.

I would note that we are in a transition with respect to the Reaching Home Program Manager position. Theresa Williams just left this role, and Emily Armstrong will be taking up the position in early January. Both are copied on this message. I worked closely with Theresa during her tenure, and we could not have had a finer, more skilled, strategic, and knowledgeable individual in this role. And based on Emily's experience and skill set, I am confident she will continue that standard of excellence. Fortunately, Theresa remains with the City in a program management role dedicated to something called CIT - Crisis Intervention Team - which is inextricably linked to this topic, as well.

As you recognized, the issue is extremely complicated. But the City is engaged with partners throughout the community to address it. I would highlight the coordinated entry system (explained among the materials online and here:
http://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/2612/Missoula-Coordinated-Entry-System-MCES) where we are collaborating with our partners in a fiscally responsible, data-driven way to provide housing to those in need.

Additional detailed information around associated projects can be found here:

- Trinity Housing: https://www.engagemissoula.com/trinity-housing
- Emergency Winter Shelter (Poverello and Johnson Street Center): https://www.engagemissoula.com/emergency-winter-shelter
- Reserve St Encampment: https://www.engagemissoula.com/reserve-street-encampment

I will ask our Citizen Services Manager, Jessica Miller, in the Mayor's office to look into the details you described about being fined if you did not make your property "less transient friendly." This sounds inconsistent with City practices based on my experience. Regardless, the City is simply not turning a blind eye to the problem. And while I respect your opinion - and recognize that it is shared by many - that "compassion and helping has stepped over the line into enabling a problem resulting in a very serious risk of public safety," it is fundamentally at odds with what I have witnessed, and I do not share it.

You are absolutely correct that multiple calls for service involving the same individual in short time periods is an inefficient use of resources. The City recognizes that, and there is work underway via the FUSE model (Frequent Utilizer System Engagement) to reduce interactions of that nature. You can find additional information about FUSE in the link above about the Reserve St Encampment.

I appreciate you asking about ways to help. There are countless opportunities to do so. Personally, I have been incredibly impressed by the work of the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) associated with the Poverello Center: https://www.thepoverellocenter.org/programs-services/homeless-outreach-team/

The Homeless Outreach Team can be reached at 406.493.7955, and is an exceptional resource to call "for community members who wish to deter the use of costly emergency services related to homeless issues."

Likewise, any of the nonprofits who collaborate around the Coordinated Entry System for housing are worthy recipients of donations.

Missoula faces very real and complex challenges around homelessness, and there are indeed times when there is an intersection among homelessness, mental health issues, and public safety. We recognize that and are working to address these challenges every day - and to learn from what works and what does not. Our recent budget investment alongside the County in a mobile crisis response unit based within the Fire Dept. is another example of that recognition - alongside the programs mentioned above.

My young daughter and I routinely walk from our home in the Northside across the pedestrian bridge and throughout downtown. And yes, we encounter individuals experiencing homelessness and mental health crises. Those we have encountered, we have found to be human beings in need. I'm confident in the programs, organizations, and professionals we're investing in to meet that need.

Regards,
Bryan

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On Nov 27, 2020, at 9:14 AM, chad rankin <rlmrankin@hotmail.com> wrote:

Dear City Council Members-

I am sure that this topic is not a new one, however one that I believe deserves additional attention and clarity. My main question is what is the plan to address the growing homeless population in Missoula, specifically downtown and North Reserve?

I personally own an apartment building downtown where I am included in the BID program. Last summer, I discovered homeless people living in an unsecured storage area of the building and called the police to have them removed. The police were great, and did what they could which is basically to escort them off site. The following day, a representative from the city contacted the property management company that manages my property to inform them that I was required to make my property "less transient friendly" by fencing off the storage area and if I did not do this, that I would be fined by the city. I do not have any issues securing my property, both for the safety of the tenants and preservation of the building. The issue that I do have is being told by a city that I am required to make my property inhospitable to transients or face being penalized and fined, while that same city seemingly continues to turn a blind eye to the very same problem where compassion and helping has stepped over the line into enabling a problem resulting in a very serious risk of public safety.

On any given day, homeless people can be seen sleeping in storefronts downtown and even on the sidewalks of the courthouse. Last summer, my wife was downtown and helped a homeless person that she thought was having a seizure and called 911. When the ambulance and police responded, they had told her that the person had overdosed on drugs and that this was actually the THIRD time that they have revived the individual that day. This seems like an incredible waste of public resources and taxpayer money. The growing homeless camps off the North Reserve bridge is even more alarming. I do not understand why this population has been allowed to continue to not only live in an area where they are trespassing and their associated garbage, but now they have even been supplied with outhouses and a biohazard container for their illegal drug use refuse. I am not blind to the fact that social problems such as these are extremely complicated in exactly how to remedy. What I do not understand is why this population that poses daily public safety risks is continued to flourish unchecked? Last February multiple emergency vehicles including fire engines, ambulances and police cars had to respond and shut down one of the Southbound lanes on Reserve Street to a fire caused by a propane tank explosion at one of the homeless campsites. This summer, individuals from the same homeless camp area assaulted workers on the bridge performing night construction on the road because the workers were "making too much noise" next to their "home." Last week, a colleague of mine witnessed a homeless woman pull down her pants and defecate in the street (Great Northern Avenue) in front of the Lambros Building and then get on the bus. There are likely hundreds of other examples that I could list, and more accruing daily.

The health risks, especially in the pandemic era that we are currently living in, are obvious. The associated violence and property damages are upsetting. The strain put on public services, paid for by tax-paying, law-abiding citizens is very upsetting as well. Why are these people not prosecuted and held to the same standards as other citizens? Continued inaction will only result in amplification of all of these issues and a sense of entitlement by the individuals that are taking advantage of the public's empathy.

If I am coming across as ignorant in this issue, then I apologize. Please tell me how I can personally help in addressing these various issues. If funds are needed, I have no problem donating and raising funds from others, as long as those funds and associated programs and policies result in actually addressing the problem as opposed to letting it continue to run rampant. I love Missoula and have lived here for the majority of my life. It has unfortunately over the past several years, devolved into a place where I do not feel safe having my wife and daughter travel alone. It is not too late to address these public safety issues, I just do not know how to accomplish this and I am hoping that someone on the council can tell me so that there is a tangible goal to work towards. Missoula is a great place to live, and can be safer once again.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration and I look forward to your response(s).

Sincerely,

Chad Rankin

Sent from Mail for Windows 10