

Joint Meeting of the Executive Committees of the Railroad Square Association and Downtown Action Organization

June 4, 2020
12-1pm

Zoom Meeting ID: 899 8429 5183
Password: 052920
Dial In: 669-900-9128

AGENDA

- 1.0 CALL TO ORDER**
- 2.0 PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS (limited to two minutes each)**
Comments from the public will be allowed on all agenda items at the time each item is called.
- 3.0 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST OR ABSTENTIONS**
- 4.0 REVIEW OF ACTION MEMO FROM DAO AND HRSA**
Review and discussion of severe Impact of uncontrolled encampments on the community, including the downtown; specific proposals for immediate and necessary intervention
- 5.0 ADJOURNMENT**

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Historic Railroad Square Association
PO Box 4114
Santa Rosa, Ca. 95402



Downtown Action Organization
50 Old Courthouse Square, Suite 110
Santa Rosa, Ca. 95404

To: Mayor Schwedhelm, City Manager McGlynn, Assistant City Manager Guhin and Executive Director Gouin

From: Downtown Action Organization and Historic Railroad Square Association

Date: May 29, 2020

Re: Severe Impact of uncontrolled encampments on the community, including the downtown; specific proposals for immediate and necessary intervention

The boards of the Downtown Action Organization (“DAO”) and Historic Railroad Square Association (“HRSA”) authorized the executive committees of the two organizations to develop an action advocacy paper and to present this document to the Mayor and senior city management at the earliest possible time. This memorandum is that action advocacy document.

The two organizations fully understand the constraints operating on the City under both the federal injunction and best recommended practices to control the spread of the coronavirus. We also understand the various steps the City has taken in respect to the encampment/homeless issue. We recognize those constraints and efforts and express our awareness that these are unprecedented times which involve serious pressures on public sector personnel and resources. Our goals are your goals.

Nonetheless, it is urgent and necessary that the City take immediate steps to control existing encampments, limit their pervasive and adverse impact on the public and businesses, and provide enhanced public health and other services to indigent persons, all as allowed by the federal injunction and CDC guidelines. Efforts to date are inadequate.

It is equally urgent that the City work with affected groups to develop swiftly and then implement at the earliest opportunity plans to entirely remove encampments in the course of early summer so that property owners, businesses and the public can have safe and reasonable access to public spaces.

The catastrophic impact of continued encampments in the downtown and other community locations cannot be under-estimated.

Crime is endemic in parts of the community near the encampments. Refuse has piled up, with potential for infestation and the spread of pathogens. Illegal transactions are observed to regularly occur. Harassment of nearby property owners is continuing. Open barbecues are operated within feet of flammable materials and buildings. Public sidewalks in multiple locations on minor and arterial streets are now impassable. Public parking lots have been entirely taken over by encampments.

Despite urgent requests from numerous property owners, there has been – so far -- little or no evidence of public health, social service or police intervention to control the encampments, mitigate their effects on neighborhoods, or provide services intervention. The outline below provides specific and, we believe, urgent and necessary actions which, together with other City initiatives, can protect the public interest.

Our suggested actions fall into two categories: Immediate Mitigation Intervention, and Short-Term Effective Intervention.

We urge that:

A. Immediate Intervention to Control and Prevent Encampments, Mitigate Harm to Public, and Provide Medical and Other Services.

1. Consolidate the size of all encampments and impose delineated and enforced social distancing separations.

---The encampments at Railroad Square, adjacent to the Mall, and Doyle Park and, to a lesser extent, at Corporate Center, can be consolidated in place, reducing the land area absorbed by the encampments, and in the case of Railroad Square providing access to (presumably) the southern public lot for parking.

--- The under freeway encampments cannot be readily consolidated but social distancing requirements can be imposed.

--- CDC recommendations include intervention to provide public health protection to the unsheltered including social distancing measures.

--- Consolidation is not prevented by social distancing needs.

2. Install temporary security fencing (with green screening) around the Railroad Square, Corporate Center and Doyle Park encampments.

--- The purpose is to identify egress and ingress locations to minimize unmonitored influx of persons who may violate public health rules; to prevent the expansion of encampments; to create a sense of public safety; and to reduce petty crime and the spread of illegal transactions.

3. Provide twenty-four hour uniformed private security for all encampments, both fenced and unfenced, 1 FTE per encampment, twenty-four hours each, as well as security lighting.

---to monitor egress and ingress into the encampments; discourage violence and crime directed towards the homelessness and surrounding neighborhoods; provide greater safety for public health and homeless services personnel; liaise with Police as needed; establish enforceable rules with security personnel monitoring; illuminate areas that are dark and susceptible to surreptitious behavior.

---Ingress and egress by existing campers can only be monitored it cannot be regulated or prohibited.

4. Increase and regularize police patrols circulating near the encampments for additional disincentivizing illegal conduct. Provide in-person on-site police response to calls. Implement Fire Marshal review of encampments.

--- to date, there has been little visible police presence

--- At Corporate Center, callers have been directed to file reports on-line only and told police are not available to come to the property
--- Investigate and remove fire-generating barbecues and other hazardous materials and equipment.
--- Investigate and apprehend persons responsible for the profusion of bicycle chop shops in many of the encampments.

5. Intervene to identify, test and safely relocate at-risk or infected homeless persons, quarantining as necessary
 - to date there has been virtually no public health or homeless service intervention at any of the encampments*
 - Public Health and City teams should intervene*
 - Homeless persons who refuse testing should be identified and testing attempts should continue regularly*

6. Collect refuse from and ensure encampments are clean and orderly.
 - Currently, the City is taking no steps to ensure encampments are clean and orderly and not potentially subject to the spread of pathogens within and near the encampments.*
 - Refuse teams should intervene and immediately collect refuse and pressure wash*
 - This should occur on a regular basis*

7. Ensure that existing encampments do not continue to grow.
 - Fencing, social distancing, security patrols are tools for this purpose*
 - New campers on public property should be prevented by security personnel, with police backup as needed*
 - Potential miniencampments on the east side of the freeway in downtown need to be identified and campers removed from the public space before they grow*

B. Short-Term Effective Intervention

1. Establish a City-Public Health-Business-Ad Hoc Group (immediately) to develop plans for elimination and relocation of the encampments in the course of the early Summer.
2. Establish this plan in fifteen working days.
3. Clearly the plan requires an accurate census of available resources (including shelter capacity under current and nonsocial distancing rules), an accurate longer term evaluation of interim resources such as motel availability, and a consideration of additional capacity needed, what form such capacity may take, the minimum legal service needs for additional capacity locations, and the potential role of the private sector.
4. It also will require complete preparation and readiness so that when the encampments can be removed under health and legal rules, they in fact will be, and without delay.
5. The involvement of the DAO and HRSA, as well as other affected organizations and neighborhoods, is essential to ensure that actions are undertaken with urgency; to ensure

that the City communicates effectively with all interested parties; so that the City retains credibility with downtown organizations and other organizations and groups; and so that the dire impact on the community and the homeless of continued uncontrolled encampments is ended.