

6-17-20 Supt Remarks

Discussion Item: MPRB Response to Homelessness in Mpls Parks

I would like to provide an update on the encampment at Powderhorn Park, our response, and our work with local and state agencies on a solution.

I believe everyone experiencing unsheltered homelessness is vulnerable and deserving of being treated with dignity and respect.

Last week the Midtown Sheraton Hotel evicted 200 to 300 people who had been experiencing homelessness and had been staying at the hotel. Thursday night I learned that people who were experiencing homelessness were setting up tents in Powderhorn Park. By Friday morning, there were already 25 tents set up. I was concerned about the size of the encampment, the lack of resources in the park, that encampments do not represent a dignified form of shelter, and that encampments pose a serious health and safety risk for those staying within the encampment.

I had notifications issued to those at the camp Friday morning, hoping I could work with local health and human service agencies to find a solution within the next 72 hours. It's our job to implement policies, ordinances and direction approved by this Board collectively.

Based on conversations with health and human service agencies and park commissioners, by early Friday afternoon I rescinded the notifications once I realized 72 hours was not enough time to work with local leaders and local agencies to find the resources and connect people to the housing, shelter and services they need. I am committed to working with the community, local leaders and the MN Interagency Council on Homelessness on a solution.

Since Friday, the encampment has grown from 25 tents to approximately 180 tents as of this morning. Park staff have provided the following park services to the people at the encampment:

- We immediately moved two existing portable restrooms nearer to the encampment, have since brought in eleven additional portable restrooms and tomorrow will be bringing in six more portable restrooms. Rental and daily cleaning of these portable restrooms is at a cost of \$7,391 per week.

- Tomorrow we will also be opening the standalone bathroom building at Powderhorn Park.
- Today, we hooked up the mobile shower trailer provided by a community group and are providing running water and electricity.
- We added 30 trash receptacles on site and are working with the City to provide daily trash pick-up services.

I am in daily dialogue with city and county health and human service leaders. As you know, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board does not have staff adequately trained to fully serve the needs of a homeless population. City, county and state agencies as well as non-profit providers have staff resources more fully aligned with the needs of that specialized population. Currently there are 102 known encampments throughout the city. Though the majority are small, there are two other locations with more than 50 tents: The Greenway between 12th and 14th and 13th Ave and 24th St.

On Monday, the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness held a meeting with representatives from multiple city, county and state agencies.

On Tuesday, the City of Minneapolis Health Department was onsite to assess the encampment at Powderhorn Park and provide guidance for the health and safety of occupants.

The level of physical care required of encampments and associated facilities is beyond the capacity of park staff. Special circumstances related to COVID-19 suggest that extraordinary maintenance may be required for some facilities. The MPRB will rely upon guidance from the City of Minneapolis Health Department to determine cleaning schedules for facilities based on objective public health standards correlated to the encampment's population. MPRB staff will provide the level of attention required to maintain facilities in alignment with recommendations from the Health Department, relying on overtime to accomplish after hours cleaning.

I have asked David Hewitt, Director of Hennepin County's Office to End Homelessness, to provide information to the Board. After that, we will answer any questions you have and ask that commissioners provide clear direction for staff.