



September 3, 2024

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Robert Nisbet

Hon. Pauline Maxwell
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
2024 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
Santa Barbara County Courthouse
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

RE: 2024 Santa “Homeless Encampments in Santa Barbara County,
Becoming Part of the Community Again”

Dear Judge Maxwell and Members of the Grand Jury,

The City of Goleta is pleased to provide the following responses to the
above referenced report as requested in the June 25, 2024, letter to the
City:

Finding 2

The negative effects of encampment sweeps can be mitigated when a
variety of community resources are present at the time of the clean-up.

City of Goleta Response: Agree

The City of Goleta utilizes a variety of community resources in
responding to encampments. The City of Goleta passed a Homelessness
Strategic Plan in 2021 and has created a range of services from outreach
and housing navigation to Safe Parking for people living in vehicles, to
paying for bed reservations in interim housing programs, to directly
helping to fund Permanent Supportive Housing.

Recommendation 2

The County and the cities shall ensure that all sweeps occur utilizing a
multi-disciplinary approach.

City of Goleta Response: Agree: Has been implemented

Since FY 2021-2022, the City of Goleta has funded and implemented an outreach and engagement program that combines street-level engagement, interim housing, behavioral health, and public health as the first response to encampments on public property.

In general, when an encampment is identified, the outreach team enters the encampment into a cloud-based tracking system, Fulcrum, that is used countywide. This system is used by nonprofit outreach workers, government officials, including City of Goleta employees, and law enforcement.

Once entered and engaged by outreach, the encampment is reported to the City of Goleta's Neighborhood Services Department. City staff then coordinate the proper response with both contracted providers such as City Net and Santa Barbara County agencies such as Behavioral Wellness and Public Health.

Prior to any discussion of clearing an encampment on public property, the encampment residents receive numerous attempts to provide basic needs, shelter, housing navigation, and other help the person may request (e.g. rides to medical appointments).

Even in areas where public health and safety are deemed to be the primary issue—like fire zones and construction areas—the first response is provided by contracted outreach teams.

In short, the City conducts sweeps with significant efforts to help people find alternatives to living in their encampments, with offers of basic needs and assistance, and implements multi-disciplinary approaches in these efforts as described above.

Finding 3

Encampments lack basic sanitation services.

City of Goleta Response: Agree

The City of Goleta recognizes the threat to public safety posed by encampments that lack any access to basic sanitation services. As a result, the City spends significant funding on environmental clean-up when an encampment has been determined to be abandoned. City-contracted clean-up crews are regularly dispatched to encampments in open spaces and creeks to address biohazards, improperly disposed-of needles, trash, and debris.

Recommendation 3

The County and the cities shall make trash cans, port-potties, resources for handwashing, and sharps containers for safe disposal of needles and other hazardous waste available near encampment sites.

City of Goleta Response: Disagree: Will not be implemented

The City of Goleta treats encampments as hazardous to the health of both encampment residents and the surrounding community. For residents, the nature of living outside unsheltered exposes people to a host of real and potential hazards and unhealthy conditions. Not least of these includes the high propensity of alcohol and illegal drug use, sex trafficking, and lack of safety from the use of propane and other fuels. The real and potential fire danger posed by encampments also poses a risk to public health and safety.

Given this determination, the City of Goleta's policy has been to use both the outreach teams described in Recommendation 2, and law enforcement to rapidly move people out of their encampments to shelter or permanent housing. This approach ensures that unhoused individuals receive care of the type described in the recommendation, while allowing the City to focus its limited resources on providing the opportunities for shelter.

Implementing Recommendation 3 would require resources from the City of Goleta that are better used for moving people from encampments to housing. Providing sanitation and waste disposal to encampment residents further enables the perpetuation of encampments, when the primary purpose of the City of Goleta's Homelessness Strategic Plan is to rapidly house people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, these encampments are typically few in the City and are quickly moved. Providing these services to those encampments when the encampments will ultimately be removed is an inefficient use of limited resources to provide aid.

Providing services to encampments has been attempted in many major metropolitan areas such as Oakland and Los Angeles, and locally, in the community of Isla Vista with disastrous results. Rather than creating incentives for moving into permanent housing, such services help encampment residents continue to stay in those conditions and reduce the desire of people to seek shelter and housing when offered. The local experience in Isla Vista showed not only this reluctance to seek shelter but also reports of violence, illegal drug use, prostitution, theft, and vandalism. The Grand Jury recommendation would create a de-facto shelter in an area where the City does not want to create one and reduces the incentive to leave the encampment.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Grand Jury Report.

Sincerely,



Robert Nisbet
City Manager

cc: JoAnne Plummer, Neighborhood Services Director

Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
Digital Copy to: sbcgj@sbcourts.org