

CITY of CARPINTERIA, CALIFORNIA



November 25, 2024

Hon. Pauline Maxwell
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
2024 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
Santa Barbara County Courthouse
1100 Anacapa Street
P.O. Box 21107
Santa Barbara, CA 93121-1107

SUBJECT: 2024 Grand Jury Report: "Homeless Encampments in Santa Barbara County, Becoming Part of the Community Again"

Dear Judge Maxwell and Members of the Grand Jury,

The City of Carpinteria 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 Carpinteria Response: Agree

The City of Carpinteria utilizes a variety of community resources in responding to encampments, including outreach and navigation services coordinated with community partners and agencies. The City also refers individuals to its Safe Parking program as part of its partnership with New Beginnings, which supports individuals living in vehicles. Additionally, the City is exploring opportunities to expand this program to provide more spaces for individuals residing in vehicles.

Recommendation 2

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

City of Carpinteria Response: Has been implemented

The City of Carpinteria prioritizes connecting individuals residing in homeless encampments to existing resources through the Continuum of Care (CoC). When possible, the City coordinates

with service providers to ensure their presence before or during contact with an encampment, facilitating contact with individuals and connecting them to services.

In instances where service providers are unavailable, Code Compliance staff actively encourage individuals to attend the City's weekly Wednesday lunch program. This program serves as an accessible entry point for homeless individuals to engage with the broader regional service network, including housing and healthcare resources. Through these efforts, the City ensures a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing homelessness.

Finding 3

Encampments lack basic sanitation services.

City of Carpinteria Response: Agree

The City of Carpinteria acknowledges the threat to public safety posed by encampments lacking access to basic sanitation services. Consequently, the City allocates substantial funding for environmental cleanup efforts following the abandonment of encampments. City-contracted cleanup crews are regularly dispatched to encampments in open spaces and creek areas to address biohazardous materials, improperly discarded needles, trash, and debris.

Recommendation 3

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

City of Carpinteria Response: Will not be implemented

The City of Carpinteria recognizes the significant health risks posed to both encampment residents and the surrounding community by encampments. For encampment residents, unsheltered living exposes individuals to a multitude of real and potential hazards and unhealthy conditions. Notably, these include a high propensity for alcohol and illegal drug use, sex trafficking, and exposure to safety risks associated with the use of propane and other fuels. Additionally, the real and potential fire danger posed by encampments constitutes a significant risk to public health and safety.

In response to these health and safety concerns, the City of Carpinteria prioritizes moving individuals from encampments into shelter or housing, and utilizing outreach teams and law enforcement. This approach ensures that individuals receive care while allowing the City to focus resources on providing housing solutions.

Implementing Recommendation 3 would divert resources from housing initiatives. Providing sanitation and waste disposal to encampments could prolong their existence, hindering the City's goal of rapid rehousing. Given the temporary nature of most encampments, providing these services is not an efficient use of limited resources.

Providing services directly to encampments has faced significant challenges in some metropolitan cities in California, and can sometimes unintentionally prolong encampment conditions by reducing incentives for individuals to transition into permanent housing. Such efforts may also encounter issues like reluctance to accept shelter and other unintended consequences. Implementing the Grand Jury's recommendation could inadvertently establish a de-facto shelter in locations not intended for long-term habitation, potentially hindering efforts to encourage residents to seek safer and more stable housing options.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Ramirez", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Michael Ramirez
City Manager

cc: Ryan Kintz, Assistant City Manager
Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
Digital Copy to: sbcgj@sbcourts.org