

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

July 12-18, 2019

PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE--Part 28



SHOULD HOMELESS CAMPERS SLEEP AT CITY HALL?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

CHECKING out Seaside's Homeless Committee finally happened Thursday, June 27, and it hit me like - KaPow, meaning "Kayla Power."

If you recall, Seaside's controversial twenty-something councilmember Kayla Jones proposed starting a Seaside homeless commission months before she resigned under pressure last December 1.

Since a committee can be as temporary as Jones proved to be (ad hoc, aka "as needed"), city council resisted the commission idea and, instead, okayed an experimental committee to see:

Would the public be interested enough to form a 5-member committee?

- (1) would there would be enough need to merit continuation of the committee?
- (2) could a group of citizens work compatibly with council, mayor, city attorney and staff?

Well, not only was approval given at the May 23 meeting to change the name of the committee to Seaside Homeless Commission, so much public interest was shown that membership increased from five to eight (seven members plus one representative of city staff, aka Committee Clerk/Fire Chief, Brian Dempsey).

Others are Jessica Hare, Chair; Natalia Molina, Vice Chair; Kenneth Raye Murray, Molly Fittro, Latoya Allen, Merrilyn Mancini and Lynda Cunningham, Members.

Go, Seaside Boondoggle Busters!

Here's How It Works

At each monthly meeting, usually the last Thursday of the month at City Hall, an agency or organization that serves the homeless provides one or more speakers to share their mission and impact on the homeless communities.

Prior to the June 27 special meeting at 656 Broadway Ave., Seaside, to which about 20 members of the public showed up, most homeless committee meetings were private events at city hall.

Members meet with representatives of such organizations as Gathering for Women, SAFE Place, Landlord Engagement and Assistance Program, Sun Street Center, the Salvation Army, Community Health Innovations—Thomas Muir, Seaside Police Department, and Veterans Transition Center.

The commission hears of, and discusses, various issues about homelessness; the pertinent topics are then recommended for consideration and/or action by Seaside City Council.

For instance, at the May 23 meeting, the then-Homeless Committee recommended amendment and restatement of an ordinance relating to camping and sleeping on public property.

This came about in the wake of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals' April 11 decision to uphold *Martin versus Boise*, in which a homeless individual's right to sleep/camp on public property remains intact if the city or county in which he/she camps can offer no alternative shelter.

If I understand the decision correctly, folks camping in Laguna Grande Park have the right to remain there if Seaside or Monterey, depending on whose side of the park the campers are staying, cannot provide shelter elsewhere.

For example, recently Monterey's Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (MDOT) helped move a family with two infants from a tent in Laguna Grande Park into a hotel, pending placement in transitional housing.

Go, Monterey Matchmakers!

Move Homeless Campers To Seaside City Hall?

On the Seaside side, the commission recommended that city council add a new ordinance related to the storage of personal property of homeless persons on city property.

Protocol then allowed public comments to be aired at the June 27 meeting and that's where fireworks began a week before Seaside's 4th of July spectacular at Bayonet Black Horse Golf Course!

Diane Nielson, Seaside resident, read her letter, excerpts of which said:

"If a modified ordinance allows camping in any city park and public property from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., enforcement would be impossible since our police force is short staffed. . . resulting in not enough officers to respond to calls. . . about hazardous conditions and illegal camping at areas like Canyon Del Rey & Fremont.

". . . it is a good idea to have one area and the most logical location would be at our city hall grounds.

". . . It would be much more practical, more successful and much easier logistically for police to monitor and manage the enforcement of the hours allowed to sleep, and any unlawful activities or disturbances that may occur, since the Seaside Police Department building would be located adjacent to the designated camping location.

"Other city/county services and outreach would be more likely to find and approach individuals needing services, having one place to safely locate them, rather than at numerous locations, gullies, city parks, along highways, etc.

"The storage container that will be on city hall grounds for storing overage of allowed property or unclaimed property would be close by as well.

“Also, Public Works. . . would be less impacted by not having to haul items and/or drive around locating reported abandoned belongings.

“Installation of portable restrooms with washing stands. . . near the storage building is all that would be needed to make this plan complete. This solution would lessen the impact on city staff like police and public works and reassure families and campers that their safety and wellbeing are a priority for the city of Seaside!”

Since Ms. Nielson’s suggestions weren’t agenda items, no decisive action was taken by the commission. However, three notable action items were included.

Pantries, Parking And Praise

After review, discussion and consideration, the Seaside Homeless Commission voted to recommend Seaside City Council approve placement of small neighborhood food pantries on certain public rights-of-way. Similar to tiny libraries, the shelving will hold donated foods, hygiene products and even baby diapers needy persons can take for free.

Homeless Commissioner Pastor Kenneth Raye Murray offered his Oceanview Baptist Church as first location for a tiny pantry.

According to Homeless Commission Clerk Brian Dempsey, Seaside City Council approved \$10,000 for the Safe Parking Program in which the parking lot of Bethel Baptist Church will be upgraded to accommodate those who now sleep in their vehicles on county property in Marina.

Date they will relocate is not yet known.

Finally, official recognition was approved for the agencies and organizations that helped kick off the committee-cum-commission.

How about adding a Kudo for Kayla!

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Photo courtesy of Clip Art/triple haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott

*could this be your town
outside the mayor’s office
at your city hall
is law on her side
if there’s no place else to go
can woman camp there
homeless commission
tackles issues such as this
monthly in seaside*

This column appears online in the weekly edition of the Cedar Street Times, Pacific Grove, California’s hometown NEWSpaper, at www.cedarstreettimes.com.

Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at 831-899-5887 amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com

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