



**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS**

**September 19, 2018**

PRESENT: Andrea Smith, President  
Aaron Pointer, Clerk  
Erik Hanberg,  
Tim Reid

ABSENT: Jessie K. Baines, Jr.

PLACE: Metro Parks Tacoma Headquarters

The meeting was called to order by President Smith at 5:30pm.

**HOMELESSNESS IN TACOMA**

Pete Mayer opened the study session by introducing Linda Stewart from the City of Tacoma. Mr. Mayer noted that the homelessness issues brings a series of adaptive and technical challenges to the community and to the Park District. He commented that the meeting objectives include: increasing awareness for the complex and growing homelessness crisis in Tacoma, Pierce County and the region; increasing understanding for the City of Tacoma's homelessness services, emergency temporary aid and sheltering plan, progress to-date and costs; highlighting collaborative efforts with the City of Tacoma in planning and responding to the challenge, particularly around parks and public spaces; and illuminating key issues for further exploration as part of the 2019-20 MPT Budget Deliberations, October 2nd Park Policy Group Meeting, November 13th Joint City Council and Park Board Meeting, and future Park Board Winter Retreat.

Mr. Mayer commented that the presence of those experiencing homelessness is seen and felt throughout the park and recreation system. Accumulation of waste, garbage, prolonged occupation in parks, costs of removal of encampments and utilization of commons spaces and centers for sleeping and showering are resulting from the issue. In addition, navigating legal challenges resulting from the Ninth Circuit Court is an area that staff needs to consider. Staff then provided background and statistics on the homeless population in the area. Linda Stewart noted that the 2018 Pierce County Point in Time Count found 529 homeless individuals in Tacoma accounting for 32% of homeless in the County. Ms. Stewart and Mr. Mayer commented on the main causes of homelessness as being economic and housing related as well as mental illness and disability.

Linda Stewart then reminded the Board of the actions taken by the City Council. A State of Emergency regarding homeless was declared by the Council, \$10.9M is being invested in homelessness services and innovative approaches are being used to reduce chronic homelessness in the city.

Ms. Stewart briefly reviewed the three phased emergency temporary aid and sheltering plan that is currently being used by the city. The plan includes mitigation, stabilization, and short-term housing options. Ms. Stewart discussed the lessons learned from the three-phased approach. Ms. Stewart indicated that the City has learned the importance of building trust and providing services equates to higher levels of success in transition individuals to the stability site. It was also learned that services and city-wide enforcement was effective in eliminating large encampments. The city has also come to realize

that a second stability site was not feasible due to high cost and siting of a second site. Ms. Stewart commented 85% of the stability site residents still require permanent supportive housing. A quick snapshot highlighting those individuals being served at the stability site was briefly discussed including their educational level, employment status and if they were living with a disability.

Ms. Stewart specified that the initial strategy for phase three was to coordinate with existing service providers and neighboring jurisdictions to create pathways to permanent housing and enhance related policies at the state and local level. However, there were challenges such as implementing faith-based homeless shelters, housing readiness site was not feasible, transitional housing was not feasible and there is a lack of available housing. From those lessons, there has been some repositioning of phase three including tailored service approach, emphasis on faith-based temporary shelter and exploring shelter expansion.

The 2018 combined costs for the City are estimated to be at \$6.9M. Commissioner Hanberg commented that the amount of funding available for this endeavor seems low.

Pete Mayer stated that Metro Parks is continuing to see unauthorized encampments in its natural areas. In 2017, 83 encampments were cleared; with clean up costing approximately \$34,000. In the first half of 2018, 65 sites have been cleared. Staff is projecting that in 2019-20 that cost associated with clean ups to be \$176,000. Maps depicting the sites of the encampments was briefly reviewed. It was mentioned that the City and the MPT are combining efforts with mapping these sites. Ms. Stewart reported on encampment costs for the city in 2017 as being \$180,000 and 2018 thus far is \$117,000. Clean up challenges include finding immediate shelter options for people being displaced from encampments; coordinating with other jurisdictions and re-populate to another near-by location.

There was discussion that ensued about where MPT fits into the homeless solution. Staff is currently researching state and national policy to inform a potential spectrum of response strategies. There is also engagement with local and national park and recreation agencies to identify leading and best practices. Mr. Mayer commented on a January 2017 NRPA Survey conducted about homelessness in parks. Major findings from the survey included the following:

- Cities' efforts to mitigate homelessness involve a citywide, cross-agency, cross-sector strategy, incorporating governmental agencies, non-profits, and faith-based and community organizations.
- Nonprofit organizations, departments of health and human services, and the police are cities' most frequently leaders in combating homelessness. Roughly three in five park and recreation agencies are partners in their cities' mitigation strategies.
- Most urban park and recreation agencies do not permit people to encamp on public land overnight, with more than half of agencies permitted to remove people with little or no notice.
- Three in four park and recreation agencies are using, or are considering the inclusion of, design and infrastructure elements that discourage people from staying overnight in parks.
- A majority of urban park and recreation agencies rely on their cities' police departments to enforce anti-loitering rules on public park property.
- Over half of park and recreation agencies offer services to their homeless population, including access to restrooms and showers, shelter during periods of inclement weather and access to computers and telephones.

Additional examples of park and recreation response strategies in other cities such as Seattle, LA, Boston, and Las Vegas were briefly highlighted.

Mr. Mayer commented that the District is exploring whether changes to MPT's policy or practice may be appropriate to more adequately respond to this issue by looking at amenities and services MPT makes available for the purposes of serving the homeless population such as: exploration of how to best align policies and procedures, staff training, level of service associated with MPT visitor services, role in educating and increasing awareness for social and health services provided by others; and revisions to the City of Tacoma Municipal Code. Staff is currently looking at the daytime camping and overnight use code and exploring a proposed amendment (TNC 8.27.210), with the goal being to help reduce disruptive behaviors, maintain the ability for all park patrons to erect temporary structures while avoiding criminalizing the presence of persons in the park.

Both Pete Mayer and Linda Stewart commented on the collaborative efforts of their staff teams to further align services, GIS mapping tools and alignment of policy to address the homelessness issue in the city. The Board was informed that as a result of policy changes there are fiscal impacts to consider.

Commissioner Reid commented that actions taken should be with the safety of the citizens in mind. Commissioner Hanberg commented that he would like to see action steps that benefit not only those experiencing homelessness but also the entire community.

**Other**

President Smith indicated that she is considering canceling the September 24<sup>th</sup> Board meeting since the budget schedule has been realigned and that a number of executive staff members will be at AZA.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Being no further business, President Smith adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m.

**APPROVED:**

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President

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Clerk

Submitted by:  
Jennifer Bowman, Secretary