



June 10th, 2025

Mayor Anne McEnerny-Ogle
Members of the Vancouver City Council
Nena Cook, City Attorney
415 West 6th Street
Vancouver, WA 98660

RE: Response to City's May 2025 Letter on Proposed Public Camping Ordinance Changes

Dear Mayor, Council Members, and Ms. Cook,

Thank you for your response to our April 15, 2025, letter regarding our specific proposed changes to Vancouver Municipal Code 8.22.040 – the regulation of public camping. While we appreciate your response, we are deeply concerned by the City's insistence that stronger limits on public camping have no place as part of an overall strategy to end unsheltered homelessness in Vancouver. The current practice of using city streets, underpasses, and public rights-of-way as a "waiting room" for those in need of services, shelter and housing is inhumane and dangerous. The fact that Vancouver city government is defending this practice is inexplicable and unconscionable.

Let's be clear: the status quo in Vancouver is not working. The city's current approach enables public encampments to proliferate, creating legitimate problems for public health, safety, and environmental degradation across the city. It also puts lives at risk. In April, we suggested seven specific policy changes the city council could adopt to discourage public camping and protect quality of life. Some of our suggestions would simply align city camping policies with more restrictive County policies. Sadly, the City is clinging to homeless camping policies that are a proven failure in places like Portland, Salem, Seattle, and San Francisco. Vancouver doesn't have to end up like Portland, in fact, we should learn from their costly mistakes.

Contrary to your assertion, our proposals do not dismiss the importance of shelter or services. In fact, we explicitly support increased resources for those experiencing homelessness. However, services and housing alone cannot succeed in a vacuum. The assumption that expanding housing eliminates the need for enforceable public safety measures reflects a narrow, incomplete approach to a complex crisis. Sustainable progress requires both compassionate service delivery and clear, consistently applied regulations. A balanced strategy—including responsible enforcement—is not only legally permissible, especially in light

of recent court decisions, but increasingly demanded by residents who are directly impacted by the consequences of unregulated public camping. To suggest that allowing individuals to remain in unsafe, deteriorating conditions on the streets is a form of compassion is a deeply misguided and harmful notion.

Earlier this year, we conducted a poll of Vancouver likely voters. I encourage you to read the full poll on our website at www.clarkcountymatters.com. Not surprisingly, the poll reveals that local residents believe homeless camping is getting worse and want stronger action by city officials to limit public camping.

Local voters want action. The U.S. Supreme Court and courts in Washington state have both ruled that cities may ban camping. And just across the river, Portland and Multnomah County serve as a cautionary tale of what happens when elected officials let homeless camps get out of control.

Please listen to your constituents. Please listen to the hundreds of people who have sent your offices emails supporting stronger action to end public camping in our community. Doing nothing and defending the status quo is no longer acceptable. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Amy Harris

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Harris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Clark County Matters