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City Manager's Office

# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND  
CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Leslye Corsiglia

**SUBJECT:** SPRING STREET  
ENCAMPMENT RESPONSE

**DATE:** February 20, 2013

Approved

Date

2/20/13

## INFORMATION

Recently, a clean-up effort of the Guadalupe River conducted by an external agency has led to the establishment of a large and visible homeless encampment in the undeveloped parklands along Spring Street, and located in the Airport Approach Zone. The rapid and somewhat unprecedented growth of this encampment, coupled with illegal activities including fires, dumping, and drug/alcohol use, has heightened awareness of this concern and prompted the need for an immediate plan of action.

This memorandum has been prepared to inform the City Council of the planned response. Multiple City departments have been working together to respond to these concerns as well as to develop a more comprehensive solution to the ongoing encampment situation.

## BACKGROUND

On Monday, January 7, 2013, Caltrans conducted an encampment clean-up of State-owned property on the east side of the Guadalupe River north of Coleman Avenue. As a result of that effort, an unknown number of homeless encampment residents were displaced from the site. The City learned of this action only after the fact, so it was unable to conduct a full assessment of the population prior to the clean-up work of Caltrans.

The displaced encampment residents resettled at a small, known encampment – consisting of only a few homeless individuals at the time – in the undeveloped parklands along Spring Street, bordered by Hedding and Taylor. At the City's request, EHC LifeBuilders dispatched an outreach team from the Bill Wilson Center on January 10, 2013, to contact the new encampment residents. Nearly 40 individuals were informally counted during that initial outreach. Since that time, the encampment has grown to over 100 homeless residents with tents, fire pits, semi-permanent structures and other modifications to the surrounding habitat.

Due to the encampment's proximity to roads, easy vehicle accessibility and placement near services and transit lines, the site has continued to grow steadily. Independent groups, including churches, have also been routinely visiting the encampment to distribute food, clothes and other items, further contributing to a resource-rich and desirable environment for homeless residents. While outreach efforts have continued at the site, the general consensus of homeless individuals is that this location provides an area that is safe, convenient, and well-supported, giving them little incentive to move or accept alternative housing or shelter options.

### ANALYSIS

The potential for uncontrolled growth at this site remains extremely high and requires immediate action. Historically, the presence of park rangers and police officers has provided enough of a deterrent to keep open areas like this site uninhabited. With reductions in staffing, however, neither department has been able to deploy sufficient assets to maintain a continued patrol presence in the area. During the cold weather months, open areas such as this site require active management and enforcement to prevent encampment.

After discussion with multiple departments and stakeholders, we have identified the following steps to remove the Spring Street encampment and prevent re-encampment going forward:

- 1) **Continued outreach:** Beginning on Monday, February 11, outreach teams began to notify homeless encampment residents that the City was planning a clean-up effort within the next 30 days. This early communication allows outreach workers to begin the dialogue with homeless individuals at the site to help them prepare for the pending clean-up effort with property and trash bags, while also actively encouraging the people in the encampment to access housing services and secure alternative living situations such as emergency shelter. In the past, this early outreach has proved effective in reducing the amount of overall debris and the number of individuals living at the site by the time of the planned clean-up.
- 2) **Clean-up action:** We have targeted the week of March 4<sup>th</sup>, to conduct a full clean up of the encampment site, including: removal of all trash and debris, complete elimination of all existing structures and site modifications, and storage of any property and belongings for encampment residents. Staff estimates this project will take approximately 1-2 days to complete, with the departments of Housing, Environmental Services, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services, PBCE, and Police all contributing to the overall effort. Timing is impacted by the need to coordinate with multiple City departments and outside contractors, including the Conservation Corps (for trash and debris removal), Santa Clara County Household Hazardous Waste (for hazardous waste removal) and Tucker Construction (for removal of structures). Additionally, factors such as inclement weather or other hazardous conditions may impact the clean-up timing and execution. As required by law, we will post 72-hour notices prior to the encampment removal.
- 3) **Active deterrence:** As noted above, the site's size, accessibility, and proximity to roads and transit lines creates a serious risk of rapid re-encampment at this site. Maintaining an active security presence at the site immediately following the clean-up is essential. The

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Police Department has committed to responding to the site on an as-needed basis. Staff is currently assessing additional deterrent options, including hiring a security company for three to four weeks following the clean-up to provide a first response to homeless individuals seeking to re-establish at the site. In the long-term, the addition of City Park Rangers focused on encampment patrol would provide a viable strategy to ensure the preservation of the site; current staffing is not available, however, so alternative approaches are needed.

This is a complex problem with no easy solution. However, the City must have a response that, while understanding the needs of the homeless residents, immediately addresses this issue in a direct and assertive manner. Rapid encampment of open and exposed areas, such as the Spring Street site, represent a clear and present challenge for the City. We recognize the need to actively manage the encampments to protect our neighborhoods, prevent pollution, preserve safety, and provide viable housing and shelter alternatives for the homeless persons living in unsafe and unsanitary conditions.

To that end, we are working closely with our partners - Destination;Home, the County of Santa Clara, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, SamTrans, Caltrans, and Caltrain - to develop both short- and long-term responses. We will be coming back to the City Council during the budget process to ensure adequate resources are available to address the clean-up and enforcement needs. Additionally, we are working with shelter and service providers to discuss and plan for the need for housing resources, which we recognize is a key element in responding to this issue.

/s/

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Director of Housing

For questions, please contact Leslye Corsiglia, Director, at 408-535-3851.