

# Progressive Dane: Statement on City Sweep of McPike Park

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Real Solutions, Not Sweeps:

Removing camping from McPike Park contrary to CDC guidelines

Since last summer, some residents without housing have set up camp at McPike Park on Madison's near east side. At times, over 50 people were staying at the park. While it was never an officially approved Temporary Permitted Encampment (TPE), the City allowed the encampment to exist thrive for over 9 months, until now. The City has posted notice that as of March 1 camping will no longer be allowed in the park and any belongings left behind will be stored for 45 days.

Removing the people camping at McPike Park at this time goes against [CDC guidelines](#) and makes it harder for outreach workers to work with clients to focus on obtaining housing or better shelter. CDC guidelines clearly state that during the pandemic:

- “If individual housing options are not available, allow people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are.
  - Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread.”

The CDC recommendations take into account the greatly reduced likelihood of COVID-19 transmission outdoors. Going against these guidelines, especially with more contagious variants circulating in Dane County, is dangerous. Congregate settings such as homeless shelters are in vaccination category 1b but they are ranked last in priority order and the vast majority of people without housing have not yet been vaccinated.

Outreach workers have been put in a difficult position. Rather than seeking permanent housing options – a formidable task in the best of circumstances – outreach workers have been spending time getting people into hotels due to the excessively cold weather and then arranging for people to move their things from the park.. Assisting in removing people from the park distracts from other important work and makes it harder to maintain relationships with people they are trying to help..

Our community has received additional funds for homeless services during the pandemic, which have greatly benefited our neighbors who lack stable housing.

However, in some ways, we are facing the same issues we have faced over the past 12 years: affordable housing in our community and our shelter systems are still not adequate to meet the needs of all people experiencing homelessness.

There is no doubt that people experiencing homeless deserve better than camping in parks, but we expect Madison to pursue real solutions instead of pushing people to the fringes of the City. 1Progressive Dane calls on the City and County to to preserve people's safety and dignity by implementing the following:

#### Immediately

- Find a location for a TPE (Temporary Permitted Encampment) closer to the downtown area where many services are, including the day shelter. Currently the only places people are allowed to camp are Reindahl Park and a portion of Starkweather Creek by Hwy 30.
- Provide bus tickets for people experiencing homelessness to get from the encampments to the places they need to go during the day.

#### Shorter-term solutions

- Use COVID funding to establish more tiny house villages and other non-traditional housing solutions.
- Change ordinances to make tiny house villages a permitted use in the City.

### Longer-term solutions

- Ensure the new shelters have options for couples or families without children under 18
- Ensure the new shelters are inclusive of all gender identities
- Create a wet shelter for people suffering from addictions
- Create shelters that address significant needs of people with mental health wellness challenges
- Create 24/7 shelters which make it easier for people to obtain permanent housing
- Prioritize housing projects designed to provide permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness
- Ensure sufficient AODA and mental health services are readily accessible to those seeking them

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