



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember David Cohen

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: May 2, 2022

Approved

Date: 5/2/2022

SUBJECT: ENCAMPMENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

RECOMMENDATION

1. Direct staff to return to Council through the Smart Cities and Services Improvement Committee with recommendations for developing an internal City application that will track outreach and services to encampments. The application should be readily accessible to City departments and Council offices, and should include the following:
 - a. A history of contacts and interactions between City personnel and the encampment
 - b. Outcomes from each interaction
 - c. Follow up actions and referrals to other City departments
 - d. Wherever possible, details of outreach efforts from the county and our community partners.

BACKGROUND

The success of our encampment management strategy will rest on its reliability. Every department within the City involved in homelessness response, as well as each Council office, must be able to track not only where an encampment is or how many people live there, but also the history of City interactions with that encampment. What departments have visited the encampment, and for what purpose? What was the outcome of each visit—how much trash did we clean up, or how many residents were we able to connect with resources and services? Perhaps most importantly, what follow up is needed?

With multiple city departments working to address different facets of homelessness, as well as the County and local community organizations, there is an inherent risk of information being lost at various points in the outreach process, and this can pose a very real danger to our efforts to house the homeless. When we have residents at encampments who express interest in being connected with services or shelter, whether they're speaking with City personnel, with the County, or with a nonprofit service provider, it's imperative that we follow up. Too often, these residents appear to fall through the cracks. Services that have been requested or issues that have

been observed aren't followed up on. This isn't a failing on the part of City staff, who work conscientiously to address the needs of our unhoused residents; it's a symptom of the enormity of our homelessness crisis, and an inevitable byproduct of a response system that involves multiple departments within and outside the City.

The County addresses this risk by using a robust internal database that collects and tracks data on services provided to the unhoused, incorporating information from a diverse array of local agencies and organizations. As a result, the County has at its disposal a comprehensive record of cases, outcomes, and follow-ups that enables it to identify service gaps and make informed outreach decisions. This is what we need as a city: a system that can serve as a bridge between the different bodies that make up our homelessness response, track outcomes and follow-up, and inform outreach efforts from both City staff and Council offices. It would also enable Council offices—which often serve as a point of connection between unhoused residents and the City—to learn about the history of City interactions with a site before we visit it or provide feedback to residents about it.

Currently, we have no such exhaustive application tracking our encampment management operations; today's discussion is an opportunity to meet that need. The City's Salesforce application, while it may provide a solid foundation, doesn't meet the crucial criteria of being user-friendly, field-ready, and easily accessible to all relevant departments and offices. It may be feasible to build on functionality to rectify these shortcomings; other options may be to work with the county to loop City departments into their system, or to contract with a third party. Without being overly prescriptive, my proposal is simply that staff conduct its own analysis and return to Council through the Smart Cities and Service Improvement Committee with their own recommendations.

I think all of us can agree that the end goal of our encampment management strategy should be that we have connected all the residents living today in encampments, in our creeks and on our trails, to a safe place where they can benefit from essential services and get back on their feet. This is a purely aspirational goal, of course, but we will only make progress towards it if we are consistent, if we ensure that residents who want to be housed don't fall through the cracks, and if we have a way to measure progress. A comprehensive, readily accessible application would be an invaluable tool for bringing us closer to the ideal of a San José where every unhoused resident who wants shelter can find it, quickly and safely.