

Friends of

# The Commons



# Fertile Ground

August 22, 2017

Mark Rentfrow, downtown liaison  
City of Olympia Community Planning & Development  
601 4th Avenue East  
Olympia, WA 98501

Dear Mr. Rentfrow,

I'm writing you on behalf of Friends of the Commons at Fertile Ground. We are the non-profit organization which hosts one of the four "pilot program" 24-hour porta-potties the City deployed around town to address the needs of those experiencing homelessness and the community at large. While we originally welcomed this "experiment" as one more way we could contribute to the life of our community, we would now have to say the experiment has failed. We request the City make immediate arrangements to have the facility removed from the parking strip at the corner of 9th and Adams streets SE, adjacent to our property.

The Commons@Fertile Ground maintains this property at 911 Adams Street as a safe, shared space, open and welcoming for everyone to use and enjoy dawn to dusk, as a gift to the community. To maintain this welcoming feel for everyone requires a level of respectful consideration to be practiced by *all* our visitors. Unfortunately, the port-a-potty has attracted undesired behaviors and elements to our property that have frankly been disruptive and damaging to the positive beautiful community-oriented space we maintain here.

Since the Port-a-Potty was installed we have experienced:

- Dramatic increase in loitering, smoking and loud disruptive behavior
- Increase in drug use, including people using the facility to use and sell drugs
- Great amounts of trash and other debris being left behind by visitors
- Use and abuse of the port-a-potty often rendering it unusable
- Verbally and physically violent behaviors, including late night arguments and racial slurs

Over the summer, we developed and posted no-smoking signs and a code-of-conduct (which we've never had need of before) in order to get the situation under control. That improved things somewhat on our private property, however, most of the unwanted behaviors have continued just off our property on the sidewalk and parking strip, primarily our "Chicken Tractor Lounge" which is intended as a children's play area for Library patrons. Now most often there you will see people there lounging, sleeping, smoking, and behaving in a manner incompatible with a family-friendly space.

Part way through the summer the unit sustained damage including a melted floor and broken door hinge that makes it unpleasant to use at best.

We applaud the City's efforts to address the real needs of the most vulnerable people in our community for housing and basic facilities for human dignity. 24-hour restroom facilities will be important until and unless we can address the homelessness problem in our City and our Nation. As individuals we support the City's efforts to provide more transitional homeless facilities and permanent subsidized housing, especially for those who are most difficult to house. We send our thanks to the City Council for their decision to put the Home Fund bond measure on the February ballot. Please continue your efforts to provide for the critical housing and facilities needs of the most challenged among us.

Meanwhile, please make arrangements to have the Port-a-Potty removed as soon as practicable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris van Daalen".

Chris van Daalen, President  
Friends of the Commons @ Fertile Ground

P.s. To clarify, Karen Nelson, Gail O'Sullivan and fellow Board members of the non-profit The Commons at Fertile Ground originally accepted the port-a-potty experiment with the City. Since that time, we have formed a new state non-profit, Friends of the Commons @ Fertile Ground with a new Board chaired by Chris van Daalen. Friends of the Commons is assuming responsibility for the lease and management of the property at 911 Adams St. SE as of September 1st, 2017.