

Just Housing Feedback on Amended Version of OMC 18.50

Firstly, we want to recognize and applaud the significant changes that are included in the proposed amended version of ordinance 18.50. If approved, we believe that most of the proposed amendments will improve our community's ability to meet the need for more legal shelter. Specifically, we enthusiastically support the following proposed amendments:

- Removal of the cap on the # of encampments that can exist at one time.
- Extending the time an encampment can be permitted in one location to greater than one year.
- Removing the ban on creating a new encampment on the same property as a previous encampment for a period of 1 year after the creation of the previous encampment.
- Including language that encourages harm-reduction practices and self-governance.
- Enabling the creation of both low-barrier and high-barrier encampments by removing bans on alcohol & legal weapons, and by empowering hosts/sponsors to decide on rules for the encampment they are hosting.

While we support and commend these proposed changes, we also recognize the absence of other changes we proposed. We feel strongly that their absence will significantly limit our ability to meet the needs of our community, despite the positive impacts of the previously mentioned amendments. Therefore, we believe that the following changes should be considered and discussed further, before omitting them from the proposed amended ordinance. We have also included our reasons for why we see these changes as being so important to the success of the amended ordinance and questions for further discussion and consideration.

1. **Allow for encampments to be permitted on public and private property.** The amended version of the ordinance still only permits encampments to exist on property owned or leased by a religious group or the county.

Why we believe this change merits further consideration and discussion:

- Enabling only religious organizations and the county to serve as host agencies limits our ability to find creative and effective solutions to our shelter crisis. Allowing for encampments to exist on public and private property drastically expands the types of solutions we can explore.
- If we limit host agencies to religious organizations and the county, it is unlikely that we will be able to create enough tent cities to significantly meet the need for shelter- particularly in a reasonable time frame. Religious organizations are already doing an incredible amount of work to meet the needs of our community. Their capacity to take on more is limited. Though the county is becoming more involved in finding solutions to our regional shelter crisis, they are still some ways away from hosting tent cities.

- Neighboring city governments have found ways to host temporary encampments. As our own crisis continues, it seems more and more unavoidable that we too will have to explore and embrace this type of shelter solution to meet the needs of our community. It makes sense for us to figure out how we can make this type of solution possible sooner rather than later.
- We know that there is an interest among some private property owners (from residential home owners to large property owners) in hosting people surviving in tents. Numerous existing encampments, including some of our communities largest, are currently located on private property with the knowledge and support of the property owners. Finding ways to support and embrace community-based solutions like this, rather than banning them, has huge potential for opening doors to new, creative, and effective solutions.

Further questions for consideration and discussion

- What are the specific liability risks/costs the city would take on, if they were to host encampments?
- Was there a change in city liability costs when the camping ban was enacted?
- How do other cities make it possible for their local governments to host encampments?
- How were encampments and the liability risks associated with them managed prior to the enactment of the camping ban ordinance?
- What are the specific liability risks/costs the city would take on if they were to allow for private property owners to host encampments?

2. **Lower-barrier background checks/reporting requirements.** The amended version of ordinance 18.50 has the same background check/reporting requirements as the original. The requirements are high-barrier and limit the potential effectiveness of the ordinance. Again, we ask that the city seriously consider replacing the background check/reporting requirements with an agreement like the agreement the City of Olympia has with The Interfaith Works Emergency Overnight Shelter. The primary aspects of this agreement we support are:

- Only required to screen the guest through the sex offender registry. No requirement to do a background check that includes screening for warrants.
- Completing background checks based on name given, rather than requiring ID.

We also support enabling host/sponsor agencies to determine who can and cannot access their shelter/encampment. (Ex. Allowing the agencies to determine what levels of sex offenders-if any- they will accept and whether or not they will accept people with active warrants).

Why we believe this change merits further consideration and discussion:

- The IFWEOS background check/reporting model has been successful enough to not require amendments since the shelter began.
- Background checks/reporting requirements are currently one of the most significant barriers keeping people from accessing shelter and services. Failing to adopt lower-barrier screening requirements will severely limit who the amended version of the ordinance will impact, as a sizeable number of people will still be unable to access safe and legal shelter.
- There are no laws that ban people with sex offenses (with the exception of sex offenses involving minors) from private, religious, or public property. In this way, by not enabling hosts to decide at their own discretion who they will allow at their encampment is creating an unnecessary barrier.
- Making it so that all sex offenders cannot access any sanctioned tent city makes our community more unsafe. It is statistically proven that the more unstable their living conditions are, the more likely it is that people with sex offenses will re-offend. This is why people's sex offender level increases when they become homeless. Enabling hosts/sponsors to determine what levels- if any- of sex offenders they will accept increases the likelihood that even people with sex offenses will be able to access safe and legal shelter, improving the general safety of our community.
- A considerable number of people living on the streets do not have ID and are unable to obtain it for an array of reasons (inability to obtain other proof of identification, costs, no address, etc).
- Requiring ID conflicts with our status as a Sanctuary City, as undocumented immigrants do not have and are unable to obtain legal ID.

3. **Finally, we encourage city staff to reconsider the amendment making "loud disturbances", a violation of the Code of Conduct.** Our main concern with this amendment is that it is one that is very likely to impact every encampment created under this ordinance, yet it is not defined in any way. If this amendment is to remain a part of the proposed ordinance, then we would encourage city staff to better define what "loud disturbances" would be significant enough to constitute a violation of the Code of Conduct.