

From: [Wren Bonkoski](#)
To: [Council Clerk – Testimony](#)
Subject: 500 person camps
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I live in the Lents neighborhood, less than a block from the 205 pedestrian bridge. On either side of the bridge, spanning blocks, are camps of people, living as well as they can in terrible conditions. The worst thing I've seen them suffer is sweeps, when what sense of ownership and stability and home that they've cobbled together is torn apart. I watch, sick in my heart, as powerful people hurt powerless people. And they do this over and over.

People in the camps near me are generally quiet; they tend to keep to themselves, and are generally friendly when engaged (not that they owe us their quietness or friendliness; plenty of my housed neighbors are neither). Disturbances in the camps are almost always mental health crises, nothing more or less (I look forward to when PSR is 24 hours). While I don't want anyone to have to live in tents at the side of a highway, I do want people to be able to make choices that are best for them in really terrible circumstances. And I don't mind living near camps. I try to be a good neighbor by periodically picking up trash and saying hello and trying to afford people as much privacy as possible, when I am walking by their makeshift cloth homes.

The first thing I thought, when I heard about these 500 people camps that people would be forced to stay in, was "internment camps." The polite term for what were prison camps holding innocent Japanese Americans during World War II. Another concept that comes to mind is redlining. You are proposing to separate out a class of people that you deem problematic, and put them out of sight so they can be out of mind to homeowners. Houseless people have been so utterly othered, and this is the ultimate version of society rejecting houseless people, literally separating them from the neighborhoods where other people are allowed to live.

We need much much more health care--physical and mental, including a wide range of addiction services. We need more and better funded hygiene services and trash collection and social services. We need services tailored to a person's culture and background and goals and mental/emotional/physical needs. We need to do all of it with a trauma informed lens and, *most importantly*, with houseless folks themselves having a say over what is done and how; they are the only ones who truly know what they need, and what will be supportive and what will exacerbate their situations. We need to meet people where they are. We don't need to take away what little agency people have to decide where to sleep and who to form a protective community with.

I have housed neighbors who sell drugs and have chop shops. I have housed neighbors who play loud music and have loud and profane arguments at any time of the day or night (mind you, I also have some lovely housed neighbors, and I love living in Lents). The houseless folks are just trying to live, and your tactics are not helping them. Do not agree with or encourage selfish, myopic, housed people who think that trash is what we should care about, and not the people living outside among the trash. This also begs the relevant question, where in the absolute world are houseless people *supposed* to put their trash? Public trash cans are few and far between. And anyway, people who have been thrown out by society have no motivation to follow the rules of society. Remember the proverb, "a child who is not

embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth."

Karen Bonkoski

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