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251-2023

Communication

Request of Cristal Otero to address Council regarding concern with Urban Alchemy website

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A brief description of Communication: Concern with Urban Alchemy's website

Agenda Items

251 Communications in [April 5, 2023 Council Agenda](#)

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Requested Agenda Type

Communications

Date and Time Information

Requested Council Date
April 5, 2023

Agenda Item #251
Public Comment by Cristal Otero

To: Mayor Ted Wheeler, Commissioner Rene Gonzalez, Commissioner Carmen Rubio,
Commissioner Mingus Mapps, Commissioner Dan Ryan

Date: April 5, 2023

Hello,

I will be giving public comment in today's council meeting. My comments are addressing a concern I hold about Urban Alchemy's official website.

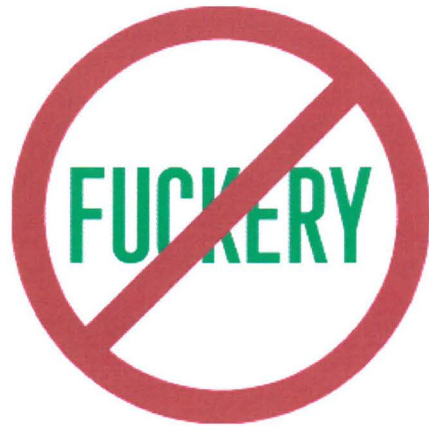
On the website is a slogan that uses the f-word. On the next page is a screenshot of that slogan from Urban Alchemy's website.

The screenshot was taken by me on March 21, 2023. The slogan remains on the website as of yesterday April 4, 2023. I first observed it in December of 2022, when they were announced as an official vendor to operate one of the sanctioned campsites in Portland.

Additionally, I have included the comments that I will read today on the third page.

Best regards,
Cristal Otero

*I have added a black border around the image to make the image easier to see on the page. This is not present on the website.



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Introduction

- My name is Cristal Otero and I am a resident of Portland, in the Brooklyn neighborhood.
- For most of my professional career, I have worked with people experiencing chronic homelessness. I hold an MSW from the PSU School of Social Work. Today I am here representing myself.

Concern about the slogan on Urban Alchemy's website

- Given everything that I have learned about serving people experiencing homelessness, I am confused and concerned by a prominently displayed slogan on Urban Alchemy's website.
- I have included a printed screenshot of the slogan in materials I shared today with Council Members and the Mayor.
- The slogan is visible on Urban Alchemy's official website located at the bottom of their webpage. For context, the slogan I am describing contains the f-word. For this reason, I will not state it here.
- Briefly, a slogan is an image or phrase that is now used to 'build a brand' and over the last 500 years has been used to mobilize people, and to indicate a private or double meaning.
- Slogans have power, and there are several used within the movement to decriminalize homelessness that have inspired me, including: 'House keys, not handcuffs' and 'Nothing about us without us'.
- The slogan being used by Urban Alchemy seems to signal a disgust for something-- what that is is not immediately clear to me, and I have never observed that type of slogan in promotional materials for a social service agency.
- I find Urban Alchemy's use of this slogan to indicate duplicity. What are their intentions? And by extension those that have chosen them to be a vendor in Portland?

Conclusion

- Beyond the slogan, I am observing an obsession with 'cleaning the streets' and while I can understand the desire to have a beautiful city I am worried that this is leading to the humiliation and degradation of people experiencing poverty.
- I acknowledge the extreme pressure that our city staff and non-profit services providers are under to decrease visible homelessness. Our challenge is the number 1 cause of homelessness: pervasive and life-long poverty.
- There are innumerable ways to support people experiencing homelessness in our city. We can do better than sanctioned parking lots and we must ensure all of our vendors hold compassionate and clearly stated values. As the saying goes, nothing about us, without us.