

Memo

DATE: July 12, 2011
TO: Homelessness Steering Committee via email
FROM: Terry Holderness, Chief of Police
CC: Ruth Coulthard via email
RE: Response to Peace House Policing Proposal Statements

Thank you for the opportunity to address the statements included in the Peace House policing proposal submitted by Ruth Coulthard.

In her proposal, Ms. Coulthard made a number of assumptions. To my knowledge she did not contact the Ashland Police Department for information or clarification.

Citations and Police Profiling

Ms. Coulthard states *“the use of citations as a means of control on a population...”*

One of the main functions of any law enforcement agency is to control behavior of people by enforcing laws and ordinances. The same elected officials that write the laws and ordinances determine the penalties for violations. The majority of contacts with anyone for minor offences result in warnings. Citations for minor offences, especially for municipal code violations, are usually given only if that person has been warned in the past and continue to commit the violation.

While I agree that placing economic sanctions or fines on people who either cannot or will not pay is not very effective, it is often the only option we have under existing law. I recently told the Council that we were having a problem with a small number of multiple offenders who were continually violating municipal codes with impunity since they had no intention of paying the fines. I recommended that Council adopt an ordinance that is used in other Oregon cities that would have restricted multiple offenders from returning to the area where the offence occurred for a limited time. The Council was not interested in moving forward with that type of ordinance so at this time the only sanction available to the courts for violations of municipal codes are fines.

While people can do community service in lieu of most of the fines, the court cannot force someone to do community service. We have found that our multiple offenders, 90% of whom self identify themselves as homeless, almost never chose community service in lieu of fines.

“Many of the poorest Ashland residents believe they are victims of police profiling and attention that sometimes borders on harassment”, states Ms. Coulthard.

While I am not sure exactly what Ms. Coulthard means by the term “borders on harassment” I would agree that some groups of people do have significantly more contact with police officers than the general population. More specifically people with mental health problems, people with substance abuse problems and people who continually violate laws are more likely to have contacts with law enforcement than the general population. Those contacts are not based on profiling; they are based on



behavior. The fact that some of that behavior might be the result of intoxication or mental illness does not change the fact that we as police officers need to address behavior that is unsafe or illegal. A great many of the homeless in Ashland never receive a citation and many are never even contacted by the Ashland Police Department. The small number of homeless people that are frequently contacted and receive a great many citations are not being harassed; they are contacted because they repeatedly violate laws or engage in behavior that generates complaints.

Ms. Coulthard goes on to identify four solutions. Listed below are my comments related to those suggestions.

1. *“Appoint specific officers to interface with homeless and their advocates...”*

We do have one officer who works in the downtown and is assigned to work with the homeless and their advocates. Our Central Area Patrol officer has worked directly with several groups involved in outreach and rehabilitation programs for the homeless. This has included introducing case workers to individual homeless people in an attempt to get them involved in rehabilitation programs. In addition, all officers have received training in dealing with the homeless and services available to assist the homeless. That training stresses the importance of treating the homeless with respect and the importance of knowing what resources are available to help the homeless. Homeless advocates have been invited in the past to speak and provide training at department staff meetings.

2. *“Plaza foot patrol...”*

One officer is assigned to work full time foot patrol in the downtown and all officers are encouraged to walk on foot in the downtown area when they have time available. In addition, we encourage officers to write reports, conduct interviews, and take breaks at the downtown contact station.

3. *“Police should direct those in need of sleep to an appropriate legal sleeping spot...”*

Officers provide information and directions to legal camping spots. Camping within city limits is prohibited. I understand during a recent meeting with the Homelessness Steering Committee comments were made that the police should provide information about camping on US Forest Service or BLM property and provide maps. The police department has maps of legal camping areas posted at both our main station and at the downtown contact station. We make those maps available to anyone free of charge.

4. *“Citations as the primary police/homeless interface should end....free bus tokens, current information on free meals, available shelter, camping options...”*

As already stated, at least for minor violations citations are generally only issued if warnings have been ignored. We do have information available on free meals, available shelters and legal camping options. In addition, we have partnered with local churches to provide free bus tokens for people who need to go to Medford for services not available in Ashland. We also have available free of charge personal hygiene items such as tooth brushes, soap and shampoo and can provide emergency vouchers for food and gas. The bus tokens and vouchers are available at both of our facilities but the personal hygiene items are only available at our downtown contact station.



Proposals to forward to Council and Parking Lot Proposals
(as of June, 27 2011)
Ad hoc Homelessness Steering Committee

Forward to Council

- Chamber of Commerce Donation Boxes
The Chamber proposes paying for and placing “donation boxes” for people to deposit money to assist the homeless population. The Chamber is looking at possible non-profits to collect and administer the funds.
- Public Toilets
The proposal requests existing public restrooms be open 24/7 and to install portable toilets in locations where public restrooms do not exist. The proposal did not identify a source of funding or possible locations.
- Homeless Committee
The proposal requests the City to create a standing Homeless Committee.
- Day Use Center
The Salvation Army will provide day use services and is asking the City for a rent free building for one year. The committee requests the City provide space for three years.

Parking Lot

- Mobile Hospitality Center
The proposal is for a mobile drop in center that moves to different locations to distribute supplies and provide information and access to social services. It did not identify a lead agency for the project. The committee asked the submitter to provide more information on how the program works in other communities before moving forward to the Council.
- Jobs
A number of proposals were submitted related to providing jobs for homeless persons but none were considered actionable by the HSC. The committee does want to actively solicit job related proposals in the next go around.
- Peace House: Police
The committee asked Chief Holderness to respond to the proposal statements.

- Food Garden for Yard Privileges
There was general discussion on how the project is currently working and what the proposal is asking of the City. Seltzer contacted the submitter for follow up information. Below is the response received on July 6 from submitter Aaron Fletcher:

Issue to be addressed

Solution

Background of submitter

Costs/funding

The Ashland homeless need places to sleep and the residents with yards need food gardens. The Homefree Project plans to rent unused spaces for the homeless to sleep and then they garden in the neighborhood for an hour each morning. The Community makes donations to our NO-profit organization and it ALL goes to renting additional spaces(yards, porches, garages and houses) until every yard is a garden and every person has a home! My name is Aaron Fletcher and I have 3 years experience living on the streets of Ashland, directly dealing with the homeless. We already have 2 adjustable noise monitors that will insure our responsible noise levels by flashing their red light when we are too loud. The cost of starting this project is \$200 to rent the first space for 6 homeless for 1 week. (produces \$420 of service to the community at a theoretical \$10/hour) There are tents at Get N' Gear that simply unfold themselves to land on the ground already assembled, no need for stakes or tie ups. We need 3 of these uniform color tents that cost \$75 each for a total project startup of \$425.

Thank you