

SOME PROPOSED SOLUTIONS REGARDING THE ASHLAND HOMELESS ISSUE

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None of the solutions to the Ashland homeless issue are easy or without funding implications. However, while a plan of action may reside with the City, the implementation of the plan should involve, and be the responsibility of the social service sector, the business sector and individual residents.

When one asks a sample of the homeless population in Ashland, why Ashland is not only a destination, but a place to “settle in”. Further, when the question involves why Ashland versus Talent and Medford, one gets a variety of answers. However, several answers seem common across the population, and these include:

- “Great parks and benches to hang out around”
- “Easy to get handouts and money”
- “You can basically ignore tickets and citations from the cops”
- “Can’t get money in Talent”
- “Too much drugs and alcohol in Medford shelters”

While we in Ashland can’t do much about Talent and Medford, it’s possible to address some solutions to the “parks/benches”, “handouts/money”, and tickets/citations”.

1. There should be a limit as to how much time a group can occupy a space in the downtown area. Some communities have loitering restrictions. It should be possible to craft an enforceable ordinance that would limit the time groups can occupy public spaces, particularly those in the plaza area so that both residents and tourists have shared and comfortable access to these selected areas. Don’t be intimidated by the ACLU!
2. Panhandling must be drastically reduced! Residents and tourists must be motivated to not provide funds to the homeless population. The business community, including B&B’s, should place notices in their place of business strongly asking people to refrain from giving money to homeless individuals and provide a secure box in the place of business where donations can be made. The donations should be provided to social service groups and churches to support meals and temporary shelter for homeless individuals.
3. Social service groups and churches should be organized to provide some level of support for the homeless population. This support might include meals and some form of temporary shelter. It’s important that the support from these organizations is short term for individuals and doesn’t become a means whereby homeless individuals are able to comfortably remain in Ashland for long periods of time.
Again, means must be taken such that Ashland doesn’t remain a long term destination of choice for homeless individuals.
The City might provide the initial leadership to help organize the service groups and church’s until a sustaining leadership emerges within the social service organizations.

4. The enforcement of existing and new ordinances affecting the homeless population must be rigorously enforced and the penalties should be such that to ignore them has significant consequences. The enforcement of Ashland ordinances is presently a joke within the homeless community. Penalties for breaking the City ordinances in Ashland, when ignored, should include jail time and exclusion from any sort of meals and shelter provided by the local social service organizations and churches. Forming a volunteer group under the guidance of the police department should be considered as one means of follow-up to ignored tickets and citations such that the police are able to take appropriate action in a timely fashion. It should not be ok for homeless individuals to break the Ashland law and laugh off the lack of consequences!

Donald Montgomery
Ashland
donm12@charter.net
(541) 482-2222