

## **Copied and pasted from an email**

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a homeowner residing along a main thoroughfare here in Ashland. After meeting with several members of the community and gleaning what I could from city council meetings and other written testimonials the central issue confronting the homeless population of Ashland I've identified to be poverty, not financial poverty but resource and opportunity poverty. I'll speak to this in a moment, but first I'd like to discuss some of the preliminary concerns I feel must be addressed in order for the central issue of homelessness to be not necessarily solved but more adequately understood and acted upon.

The term 'homeless' carries with it many connotations. Bums, freeloaders, lowlifes, degenerates, etc. are terms I hear used when discussing the homeless. Many members that belong to this group of the community are victims of prejudice and misunderstanding; some choose to lead more ascetic lives, for others the choice is made for them. Whether it be a choice or not, these people are still people, human beings, and should be treated with as much dignity and respect as every other member of this city. This victimization leads to untold negative psychological effects these individuals must grapple with and contributes to a highly negative input-output cycle wherein

1. The homeless are labeled negatively.
2. Members of the community who are not homeless act negatively towards the homeless without necessarily questioning the label and why it persists.
3. Homeless individuals receive this negative input and have no other recourse but to respond in kind.
4. The cycle continues.

In sitting down to tea, hosting, and conversing with homeless individuals I've found that many of them simply want someone to hear their stories. Isn't this a fundamental human need that ought be honored? It is a sad fact that in this culture today storytelling has been supplanted by technological delusions and cultural deceptions which prevent us from keeping an open vision, ear and mind.

The solution. I'm not sure it is possible to definitively solve the issue of homelessness, but we can, and must, try. Aaron Fletcher, a leader, activist, and outspoken member of the homeless community, has many creative ideas for how to address homelessness. I strongly advise the ad hoc committee, if they haven't already, to consult him before submitting any information to the city council. One of his most intriguing ideas is to have a location here in Ashland for homeless individuals to stay where they would pay rent via work-trade in the surrounding community, in this case community being defined as a perimeter extending several blocks around the location in question. The logistics of such an idea are difficult, but I think it an interesting enough idea that it should be discussed and potentially pursued. This valley is one of the most lush I've experienced in my twenty-four years and yet there are acres upon acres of

arable land gone to waste growing grass and aesthetically pleasing flora when more productive crops such as spinach and watercress could be cultivated.

Regarding the question of resources: Once a homeless individual steps into the city of Ashland where are they to go to acquire information if they are in need of food, shelter, water, clothing or medical treatment, especially if they are averse to consulting "authority figures"? Create a position within the police department that acts as a liaison between the homeless, the wider community and the PD which will keep abreast of new issues that need be brought to the table and have this person be appointed by the community, not the police department. I've been helping Aaron circulate information currency cards he's created on a person-by-person basis but at times I feel this method to be ineffective as neither he nor I are in possession of the key resource required to speak with each and every individual, that resource being time.

This city has so much promise. I ask that we all bear this in mind whenever we interact with each other regardless of color, creed, race, size, or lack of a home. In parting, a quote from a poet that I cherish dearly who has recently passed on:

"Home is where the hatred is. Home is filled with pain, and it might not be such a bad idea if I never went home again."

- Gil Scott-Heron

Is this the type of home we desire for Ashland?

I am grateful for this committee's time and consideration and ever thankful that we've taken pause to ask ourselves and each other how we can turn our ideals into reality.

Sincerely,

Jeff McAllister  
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