



Payne-Phalen

COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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Information for our communities about the rise in homeless in and around Payne-Phalen this Fall

We recognize your concerns and we're here to help:

The Payne-Phalen Community Council is aware of tent encampments in our district, including those at or near Lake Phalen and on Mounds Boulevard. We appreciate residents and members of the community reaching out with your compassion, concern, and questions about water, sanitation, food, and safety as the weather turns colder. Like you, we are keenly aware that many people in our community and across St. Paul are in new and dire circumstances due to the many, many challenges of this year, this season, and the difficult times we live in. We're moved by your empathy. And we understand that many of community members living nearby are looking for ways to cope, building compassion amongst your neighborhoods, and simply trying to find out what's next and what you can do to help.

Based on the calls, e-mails, and conversation at our community meeting, here's what seem to be main topics that folks in our community are wondering about and could use some better information and guidance on:

- Recognition of the immediate circumstances and what is going on this Fall; something that connects the issues of COVID, high unemployment, spacing requirements in shelters, etc.
- Some sort of recap of what City/County officials know so far, what is being done so far, and 'what the plan is' for helping folks as winter approaches. What's being tried and what's the status of those efforts – and to whom should ideas from the community be sent?
- Why don't encampments have port-a-potties, water taps from the hydrants, sanitation, hand washing and other public health basics?
- How can people help and be supportive? Who are the non-profit partners and what are the specific ways to donate food, time, or money – and where to donate?
- Who to contact in what circumstances? This is especially important since there are many people who are not comfortable calling the police. Also, folks are wondering whether to approach encampments or stay away. People don't always see or know

what is being done to help the unhoused and they are worried and concerned about whether needs are indeed being addressed.

- How can community members keep up with and stay informed about what sorts of decisions are coming up and what to expect (or not expect) in the coming weeks/months?

What PPCC has learned so far:

On your behalf, we have been in contact with various colleagues and departments in the City of St. Paul and Ramsey County. As always, we've been in regular contact with Councilmember Nelsie Yang and her staff.

The City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County prioritized responding to the housing crisis in our community long before the COVID-19 pandemic began. The pandemic and its economic impacts have further exacerbated that crisis. There has been a dramatic rise in homelessness in the last 6 months and there are many, many St. Paulites who are new to homelessness this year than in previous years. As you've likely seen, this includes many newly unhoused families as well. We understand that the City is trying to balance the basic human needs of those who have no other shelter available, manage the various safety and security risks at encampments, all while trying to contain the spread of COVID-19. We know that the City of Saint Paul is providing sanitary services for some, but not all encampments on City properties. We have not yet found out why some encampments have these services while others (like the encampments in our community) *do not have* these basic services yet. We appreciate the brainstorming you've done with us and we're trying to elevate the list: Portable toilets, temporary water supply, hand washing stations, trash removal, first aid and other basics.

We're told that the City has been and will continue to work closely with Ramsey County, and partner with Union Gospel Mission, Catholic Charities Higher Ground, as well as non-profits like Involve MN (www.involvemn.org) and People Incorporated (www.peopleincorporated.org/program/homeless-outreach) to provide shelter, food assistance, sanitation, needed identification documents, mental health support, and independent living skills to the unsheltered homeless members of our community. We've also heard that the City is working with partners in Ramsey County to find and create additional low-barrier indoor shelter. We haven't heard yet what the timelines are for implementing these strategies.

As you've noticed, the tents in encampments are spread out; this is in an effort to protect against the spread of COVID. The courts have ruled that encampments cannot be closed unless there are documented public health concerns. Likewise, the courts consider tents as the equivalent of a house in terms of private residence and police entry; therefore, the police can't just open a tent and enter but must get permission or follow proper procedure just as they would when attempting entry into a more permanent house.

What you can do to help too:

Thank you for your willingness to help! We're a community that supports one another and there are ways you can help by donating money, time, or talent:

- The City is partnered with InvolveMN to provide daily meals to those sheltering outdoors. You can sign up to donate or help with that effort at: <https://www.involvemn.org/take-action>.
- Another need is supporting trash pick-up at encampment locations across the city – please contact the City's Parks and Recreation Department at ParksCustomerService@ci.stpaul.mn.us or by phone at 651-266-6400.
- To help your neighbors, housed and unhoused, please sign up for Neighbors Helping Neighbors at <https://www.stpaul.gov/serve/neighbors-helping>. You can select which service opportunities, locations, and times you're interested in.

The Department of Safety & Inspections (DSI) is the primary City department working on the tent encampments and with the unsheltered.

- For safety and health issues, contact DSI at 651-266-8989 or email DSIComplaints@ci.stpaul.mn.us.
- If you or your neighbors notice refuse, please call the City's 24-7 complaint line at 651-266-8989.
- If you witness non-violent illegal activity at an encampment (ex: drug use, small controlled fires, disruptive behavior), please call the St Paul Police Dept's non-emergency line at 651-291-1111.
- For emergency situations (ex: large fires or fires adjacent to structures, violence, medical emergencies), call 911.

Let's stay connected and stay safe, together:

PPCC has asked our colleagues in the City of St. Paul and Ramsey County to please provide a single go-to place where the public can find up to date information about their efforts and the efforts of the non-profits working with them to address these issues: A website, a single phone number, or even just a one-page flyer that explains what's going on, what you can do to help, and what you can expect going forward.

As the Fall continues into Winter, PPCC will do our best to update you on the current circumstances in our community amidst the realities of the very difficult times for so many in our communities. We'll do our best to keep you informed of any new developments or information as we hear more. And we'll continue to work on getting your questions answered as information becomes available to us.

- A good way for you to stay informed is to sign up for PPCC's weekly email newsletter, where we will include updates on the encampments as we find out more from our partners in government and in the non-profit sector. Sign up at

<http://paynephalen.org/news/sign-up-for-updates/>, or send us an email requesting to be added to the newsletter list.

- PPCC is planning a special online meeting with representatives from the City and non-profits that are working on these issues directly. We will post details once we know more.
- Please continue to help us help you by sharing what you see or hear, too. Let us know how we can help support you. Call or write to us at any time at 651-774-5234 or email district5@paynephalen.org.

Thank you for your messages and phone calls so far - and for attending PPCC's community meetings. We appreciate you helping to keep us updated so that we can help keep the community updated. ***Thank you for staying interested and involved in Payne-Phalen!***

Engage * Educate * Empower