



## AGENDA BILL APPROVAL FORM

**Agenda Subject:**

Ordinance No. 6817 (Tate)(30 Minutes)

**Date:**

April 6, 2021

**Department:**

Mayor's Office

**Attachments:**

[Ordinance No. 6817](#)

**Budget Impact:**

Current Budget: \$0

Proposed Revision: \$0

Revised Budget: \$0

**Administrative Recommendation:**

Schedule Ordinance No. 6817 for Council vote at the April 19, 2021 regular City Council meeting.

**Background Summary:**

City Council adopted Ordinance 6781 on September 8, 2020. Since that time City staff have conducted further analysis, collected additional data, and have observed an increase in homeless encampments that have been established throughout the city and within environmentally sensitive areas. The City has also received an increasing amount of feedback from residents and the business community requesting that more be done to address the impacts associated with the establishment of homeless encampments. Additionally, the Auburn Community Court will be opening within the next couple of months.

It is staff's opinion that the above collection of issues and the timing of the opening of community court is cause to revisit Ordinance 6781 and to recommend that City Council take additional action that emphasizes the City's service first philosophy while mitigating the environmental, financial, human, and economic impacts that result when individuals are allowed to remain within homeless encampments while shelter space and services are available.

**Environmental Impacts:**

Over the last 6 months city staff has encountered 43 separate homeless encampments. Not all of those encampments are currently occupied. Some individuals abandon their encampment and move to a different location. 29 of these encampments are located within wetlands or riparian river habitat areas. Encampments located within these environmentally sensitive critical areas impact the environment in the following ways:

- Native vegetation is heavily damaged due to walkways, tent sites, fire pits, and garbage that is dumped on site. Health native vegetation is crucial to the survival of both aquatic and terrestrial life that rely upon wetlands, rivers, and their surrounding buffers. Native vegetation also provides root structure that ensures soil remains intact and does not erode into creeks, ditches and other water ways.
- Debris is often placed in wetlands, creeks and other water ways. Staff routinely find

used needles, human waste, electronics, batteries, plastic, food waste, and other items within these environmentally sensitive areas. This adversely impacts water quality which impacts fish, aquatic life, terrestrial life, plants, and aquifers.

- Debris that makes its way into the Green or White Rivers is often deposited outside of Auburn in downstream communities and/or into Commencement Bay or Lake Union. This includes plastic, used needles, feces, cans, clothes, wrappers, toys, and food waste. The Puyallup Tribe has documented used needles in their fish traps and has requested that upstream communities provide assistance in reducing debris entering critical salmon rivers.

#### Financial Impacts:

Cleaning up homeless encampments is expensive. Haul costs alone range from \$10,000 to \$50,000 per encampment. These costs become more expensive when the encampment is located within an environmentally sensitive critical area because mechanized equipment or vehicles are not permitted to access wetlands and riparian river habitat. Hauling must be carried out by hand. And even then, the hundreds of trips back and forth from the encampment to the trucks will further damage these areas. And once clean, the city has an obligation to restore the vegetation that was damaged in order to eliminate the potential for invasive and/or noxious plants from establishing themselves.

Cleaning 43 encampments will range in cost from \$430,000 to \$2.125 million. These are one-time costs and, without intervention, will reoccur each year.

#### Human Impacts:

The homeless population is not thriving within the current City approach. People are being harmed and/or dying, drug addiction continues, children are not being protected yet the services exist to interrupt these alarming patterns.

- In the last 6 months several homeless individuals have died due to a drug overdose. City staff had already started working with these folks before they died.
- Homeless individuals have been stabbed, lit on fire, and boulders thrown at their heads by other homeless individuals.
- In a few instances, children are being raised within homeless encampments. Babies are born within encampments. And one mother has been raising 5 children within an encampment that range in ages from 6 to 14. Agencies that typically enter the home environment to address the welfare of children will not go deep into the woods.
- Drug addiction and use is rampant within the encampments. Of the 43 encampments, 41 had dozens of used needles. The 2 that did not have needles were littered with empty bottles of liquor.

#### Economic Impacts:

City staff and City Council have heard from a number of different residents and business owners who have expressed concerns over the issues that surround homelessness. Those issues include:

- Outside of the above city costs, private property owners are also incurring costs. Individual property owners and business owners routinely clean the sidewalks, doorways, and landscape areas of used needles, human feces, and general litter. Many do so on a daily basis.
- City staff routinely hear from business owners that their employees and patrons indicate that they do not feel safe within the community due to the portion of the homeless population that exhibit behaviors associated with drug use, unstable mental health, break ins and theft, etc. Whether real or perceived, if this becomes a narrative associated with Auburn, business owners will lose patrons and employees.

City staff acknowledges that we are asking Council to revisit a decision that was made in September 2020. It is our opinion that the last 6 months of experience plus the launch of the community court are reason to revisit the City’s codified approach to homelessness and Ordinance 6817 includes additional admonishment processes and an administrative appeal. City staff appreciates that some Councilmembers spent several hours in the field with Kent Hay to tour a number of encampments. To understand the extent of the conditions within a single encampment requires a firsthand view.

Ordinance 6817 was drafted in consultation with the Departments of Parks, Public Works, Community Development, Legal, Police, Administration and the Mayor’s Office. The representatives strongly urge City Council to adopt this ordinance in order to interrupt the environmental, economic, financial and human impact that the City’s current approach is allowing to occur.

**Reviewed by Council Committees:**

**Councilmember:**

**Staff:**

Tate

**Meeting Date:** April 12, 2021

Item Number: