

City of Mount Vernon
Planning Commission Meeting
Minutes from January 16, 2018

Chairperson Shelley Acero called the meeting to order. Present were Planning Commission members Adair Orr, Al Lyon, Chris Bollinger and Development Services Director Chris Phillips and City Planner Rebecca Lowell. Planning Commission member Christian Carlson was absent.

Minutes:

Mr. Bollinger moved, second by Mr. Orr, to approve the minutes of December 5 and December 19, 2017, with corrections. Motion carried.

Public Hearing on Homeless Encampments:

Mrs. Lowell provided a detailed presentation outlining the background, definition, proposed regulations, procedural items and staff recommendations regarding Temporary Homeless Encampments. Permanent regulations have been developed for adoption following interim regulations being adopted and public hearings held last year. The RCW prohibits cities from imposing conditions other than those necessary to protect public health and safety that do not substantially burden a religious organization on the location of housing or shelter for the homeless. Over 100 homeless encampments have been identified in the city in 2017, with most containing garbage, drug paraphernalia and human waste.

Mrs. Lowell provided a summary of regulations for temporary homeless encampments as follows:

- Permit application (Type II Permit Administrative approval with appeal to Hearing Examiner)
- Notice mailed to neighbors and public meeting with neighbors required
- Basic health requirements such as restrooms, hand washing station and garbage receptacles
- No more than 100 residents allowed
- No children under 18 allowed
- Submit a code of conduct and transportation plan
- Requirement to complete warrant and sex offender checks
- Limit of 90 days

Mr. Lowell stated that the procedural requirements including SEPA, notification to Department of Commerce, Notice of Public Hearings had all been completed.

Discussion between staff and Planning Commission followed. Questions regarding cost of permit, duration of operation of shelter, number of residents allowed and ratio of staff to residents were some of the main concerns posed by Planning Commission members. Other concerns voiced by Planning Commission members included verification of background checks and if residents were required to be sober.

Mrs. Acero opened the public hearing for comments.

Tina Tate, Director, Friendship House, thanked staff and proposed the following changes:

- Differentiate between indoor and outdoor requirements
- Eliminate requirement for warrant checks as they do not have access to this information
- Pet allowance – in some cases pets provide services for health and safety

- Extend period of operation from 90 to 120 days

Ann Struthers, member of Seventh Day Adventist Church, thanked the organizations partnering with the church and is a proponent of the shelter.

Clive Bolton, Mount Vernon resident, thanked Tina Tate. He feels an occupancy of 100 people is too large, he wants to make sure there are enough staff to manage the number of potential residents, and he discussed having lower fees for encampments with fewer people and higher fees for encampments with more people.

Sister Susan Wells, Mount Vernon resident, provided the following comments:

- The ordinance shouldn't be so restrictive,
- Different requirements between indoor and outdoor facilities,
- Do not include a requirement for encampment staff to evict resident(s) if one has a warrant, make camps accessible,
- Encampment is a poor name choice.

Elizabeth Jennings, Skagit Community Action, thanked the other organizations and stated temporary shelters are not the solution to homelessness. Affordable housing is the solution.

Sue Brown, Mount Vernon resident, spoke in favor of the shelter and adding more locations. She also stated that the City should be collecting fees to cover actual costs.

James Stewart, Mount Vernon resident, inquired about what the permit fee covers and suggested a sliding fee scale.

Officer Leighton, Mount Vernon Police Department, spoke of his experience with the homeless population, adding large groups can be dangerous, favors warrant checks and supervision. He stated that he was aware that a different cold weather shelter had issues with homeless residents that bullied other homeless residents – he gave this as one reason for proper supervision within the encampment. He stated that homeless teen-aged children can be referred to Oasis Teen Shelter and that the police department does warrant checks for this Shelter.

There being no other public comments the hearing was closed.

Discussion between staff and Planning Commission members continued regarding different requirements for indoor and outdoor shelters, permit fees, warrant and background checks, ratio between staff and residents, allowing children and extending period of operation from 90 to 120 days.

Mr. Orr moved, second by Mr. Lyon, to recommend to City Council approval of the permanent regulations for Temporary Homeless Encampments presented by Mrs. Lowell with the following changes:

- Section 17.210.030(A)(2)(e) be amended to state that through the permit process a ratio of encampment staff to residents shall be established to ensure protection of the health and safety of the staff, residents and surrounding neighbors.
- Section 17.210.030 (A)(2)(4) to (6) be amended to reference outdoor encampments only,
- Section 17.210.030(A)(2)(8) be stricken,

- Section 17.210.030(A)(2)(16) be amended to no more than 120 days,

Motion carried.

There being no further business, Mr. Lyon moved, second by Mr. Orr to adjourn. Motion carried.