

From: ██████████ Zack
To: [Mary Gourley](#)
Subject: Public Comment 9/20 re: Dissolution of Ad Hoc Committee for the Unhoused
Date: Friday, September 16, 2022 4:40:49 PM

Dear City Council,

It has come to the attention of Friends of NW Sebastopol that the Ad Hoc Committee for the Unhoused may soon be dissolving. The Committee was originally formed in October of last year to find a location for a temporary encampment to relocate RVs illegally parked on Morris street. Less than two months into its formation, a site was chosen at 845 Gravenstein Highway which, when proposed, met “significant public pushback” as the Press Democrat put it. In one meeting approximately 35 out of 40 public commenters were opposed to the site, but in order to satisfy a grant deadline for SAVS, a non-profit, the city council moved forward with sanctioning the encampment.

This decision to relocate the Morris street encampment was justified by a claim that new parking laws could not be established without first relocating the RVs, a premise that city manager/attorney Larry McLaughlin only shot down after the fact, at a council meeting early in 2022, clarifying that there was never any need to create an “RV village” in order to pass the new parking laws as written.

In March 2022, the Ad Hoc committee was back on the agenda with plans to do the following:

Creation of a new Ad Hoc RV Village Property Search Committee, to last until November 1, and to be tasked with the narrow assignment of assisting SAVS in **identifying a viable option for a future relocation site for the lived-in vehicles currently housed temporarily** at Horizon Shine. Appointment of two City Councilmembers to the new Ad Hoc RV Village Property Search Committee.

To Friends, this search for a new location seemed a natural and necessary response given the major pushback (including our group’s lawsuit) that the city received in approving the encampment at 845 Gravenstein in the first place. It only took the Ad Hoc Committee for the Unhoused two months to find the 845 Gravenstein site, and yet, here we are almost a year into this search and no options for an alternative property have been put forward.

The council’s agenda for this meeting reads like a wink and a nod toward extending the encampment at the current location for yet another year, despite continued opposition from residents and business owners in the area. Meanwhile, as our case remains stuck in the appeals phase, we still have had no hearing on the merits to address to the following legal issues with the encampment:

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Zoning Code - the city’s zoning codes strictly prohibit lived-in RVs and only allow for stored / unoccupied RVs.

Homeless Shelter - to qualify as an “emergency homeless shelter” the city or county must own or lease the land. Yet SAVs is on the lease and St. Vincent de Paul owns the land. The encampment site is not controlled by the city or county.

Use Permits, Environmental Review, etc. - the city planning due-diligence process that all developers must undergo was totally bypassed. Only two residents and businesses within 600 feet of the site were notified just days before the encampment was sanctioned by the council.

With the first year of the encampment's opening, we have heard much from the non-profit side celebrating what to them may feel like a success; meanwhile, the actual residents and other stakeholders in the immediate area are left to live with the reality of its everyday impacts. So, it seemed like an important time to share the below Impact Report. The descriptions and images will show precisely what many of us argued from the beginning - that the site would become a magnet for transients - and indeed the character of the area has changed dramatically as a result of the city sanctioning the encampment at 845 Gravenstein.

To be clear, our group remains absolutely opposed to any extension of the city sanctioned encampment at its current location. The location (and its proximity to a school, houses, etc) is as unacceptable today as it was last year, which is why we expected - and still do expect - the Ad Hoc Committee to follow through on finding a better location for the encampment ahead of November.

Impact Report

(Feb-Sept 2022)

Mid-late February

The RV encampment begins to be occupied without a formal opening date. Heavy construction occurs even as lived-in vehicles arrive. There is no electricity or running water.

March - May

Dumping of trash begins in the parking lot across from the RV encampment. Occasional solo campers begin to appear outdoors. RVs (see the black one that moved up from Morris street) and vans begin to stay weeks on end and trash/shopping carts begin to pile up. Neighbors report panhandling by transients and a grocery store employee is spit on.



People sleeping outside in the lot becomes an everyday event. Police respond to shoplifting.



Some vehicles like the red van are from out of state (Idaho) and appear to be gravitating toward the area. The Mary's Pizza and Burger King in the shopping center close within a month. The former CVS site is put up for sale.

June - July

With Mary's Pizza closing and no one to stop loitering, multiple people now sleep in the parking lot across from the RV encampment every night. A dozen homeowners that back up to the shopping center have complained of hearing very loud noise at night from the lot. A neighbor has had gas stolen twice from a vehicle in their driveway.

It becomes clear that some vehicles that occupy the parking lot are connected to the RV encampment. The man pictured below walked from the blue pickup truck (parked long term next to black RV) with belongings and is seen entering the RV encampment (Jun 1).



On June 11 a man verbally assaults a woman after she jumps out of his car (see below image and video link). https://youtube.com/shorts/zhSn0Ock-_Y?feature=share

On June 15 he is seen again as two people from the RV village come out and talk to him about why "someone was kicked out."



Multiple transients congregate outside the closed Mary's Pizza location effectively establishing a new encampment in the lot. Campers are also reported sleeping behind the O'Reilly Media building at 1005 Gravenstein Hwy N.

August - September

Neighbors report more disturbances in and around the neighborhood, including one woman who came home in tears after being harrassed/panhandled trying to re-enter the neighborhood from the parking lot. The entrance is frequently blocked by campers and their trash which overflows from the Redwood Marketplace's dumpsters.

Neighbors report being afraid to walk through the sidewalk (off Tocchini) leading to the Redwood Marketplace and Exchange Bank entrances where lived-in vehicles and campers set up overnight and sometimes mid-day (see below). People walking dogs encounter transients with dogs off leash.

