



# Seattle City Council

March 10, 2011

The Honorable Michael McGinn  
Mayor, City of Seattle  
600 Fourth Avenue, Floor 7  
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Mayor McGinn,

We are writing in response to legislation recently forwarded to the Council about the City-owned Sunny Jim site. The legislation would amend the City's Land Use Code and the Comprehensive Plan. A second bill would make a significant financial commitment to allow a temporary transitional encampment on industrially zoned land.

We share your concern for those who are homeless and your willingness to consider innovative ways to get people into safe, decent shelter. Seattle and our regional partners must continue to stretch our policies and dollars to save lives.

Unfortunately, at this time the Council cannot legally take action on the land use legislation and therefore we are returning it until the environmental review required by State law is complete. Both State law and the City's own Land Use Code preclude the Council from acting on either the proposed land use changes or the requested Comprehensive Plan amendments at this time. While we share a sense of urgency in addressing the underlying issues, the timeframe for completing the required environmental review is not under our control. The Council will consider the proposed legislation when we can legally do so.

The second bill you sent to Council would fund a transitional encampment on industrially zoned land. We will retain that bill and discuss the merits of moving forward to fund the remediation of a site and staffing of a project despite the uncertainty of the outcome of the land use decisions yet to be made. The financial strain on the City continues to grow and new expenditures must be considered in the context of our larger budget challenges. Additionally, there may be other alternatives to explore that may help more individuals find safe shelters and permanent housing, and at a lower total cost.

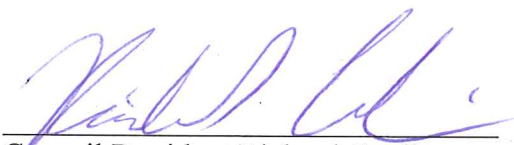
The discussion about the use of these funds in the manner proposed will include the fact that the \$1 million that is proposed for establishing the Sunny Jim site to house 100 people for two years could fund rental apartments for 300 to 500 families for that period of time. Other ideas may be proposed as well, such as, 1) a similar project on another site with a lower cost to remediate; 2) finding a way to make Fire Station 39 a long-term location for a new shelter or housing facility; 3) working with the faith-based community to support shelter space in church buildings or their parking lots as appropriate; 4) purchasing another motel to operate like the Aloha Inn; and 5) providing additional rent assistance vouchers.

We share your interest in addressing shortcomings in the City's current provision of permanent housing, rental assistance, shelters and other related programs. Consistent with this concern, Council requested, and the Human Services Department is preparing, a report that seeks to determine whether current City-funded shelter programs effectively meet the needs of the full range of individuals seeking temporary shelter. Based on the findings of this report, Council may support spending existing dollars and new dollars to enhance our current successful programs that assist homeless individuals obtain and maintain permanent housing. Still, in January, we counted 1,753 children, adults, and seniors, sleeping outside in doorways, in cars, in green spaces and makeshift campsites, and we understand that as long as we have a shortage of shelter to meet the needs, there will be those that will ask the City to sanction and offer available property to a self-governed encampment to help meet the immediate survival and safety needs of individuals in our community who have no access to safe shelter.

In closing, we appreciate your commitment and engagement in making shelters accessible and a true path to permanent housing. The Citizen Review Panel on Housing & Services for Seattle's Unsheltered Homeless Population focused much needed attention on the immediate survival needs of people unserved by the existing shelter system. We applaud the quickness with which community advocates, the Human Services Department, the Department of Administrative Services and other city staff have opened and operated Fire Station 39 and expanded the nights of the City Hall shelter.

We look forward to working collaboratively with you and your staff in evaluating options based on this report's findings.

Sincerely,



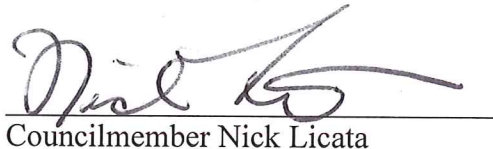
Council President Richard Conlin



Councilmember Sally Bagshaw



Councilmember Sally J. Clark



Councilmember Nick Licata