



# City of Seattle

**To:** Mayor Jenny Durkan, Senior Deputy Mayor Michael Fong, and Deputy Mayor David Moseley  
**Date:** October 17, 2019  
**Subject:** Impacts on the Elimination or Reduction of the City's Navigation Team  
**From:** Jesus Aguirre, Superintendent, Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation; Mami Hara, General Manager/CEO, Seattle Public Utilities; Patty Hayes, Director, Public Health – Seattle & King County; Jason Johnson, Director, Human Services Department; Sam Zimbabwe, Director, Seattle Department of Transportation; Carmen Best, Chief of Police, Seattle Police Department; Ben Noble, City Budget Office; Chief Harold Scoggins, Seattle Fire Department

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As part of Council's "Issue Identification" phase of the budget process, we are now aware that there is a specific Councilmember proposing to fully defund and eliminate the Navigation Team. Furthermore, last week, City Council staff formally inquired about the impacts of a \$5 million reduction to the Navigation Team. We hope the City Council maintains your proposed budget and staffing for the Navigation Team, which is a key part of the emergency response system for people living unsheltered in Seattle and whose continued work has saved lives and aids us all in delivering a healthier and safer city.

The Navigation Team is the City's leading street-level response to the unsheltered crisis impacting communities across Seattle. Since launching in 2017, the team has connected hundreds of people to shelter—helping vulnerable people move away from inhumane living conditions and into shelter resources, while removing the most unsafe encampments that harm people living unsheltered and the community.

The team has evolved its practices, partnerships and reporting since its inception. However, at its core, it remains a City-controlled resource for dispatching response to areas across the city, helping people in crisis. This is important to the City of Seattle for several reasons:

- The Navigation Team is the City's front-line crisis response to thousands of customer requests to assist people experiencing homelessness and respond to the associated impacts of people living unsheltered. The Navigation Team's outreach is complementary to the work of the 10 other outreach providers with City contracts.
- The City has a responsibility to ensure its rights-of-way are accessible and free of debris, sharps, litter and human waste – this includes maintaining public access to our sidewalks, parks, recreational facilities, trails, and athletic fields.
- The Navigation Team is uniquely situated to gather a wide cadre of City and community resources that are needed to properly help people living in unmanaged encampments and the surrounding environment.

We support your proposal to continue funding the Navigation Team, which works with many of our departments. Any reduction to this program will have a significant effect on the City of Seattle's ability to help

people experiencing the crisis of homelessness and maintain the city's public spaces such as rights-of-way and green spaces.

The 2020 Proposed Budget funds the Navigation Team body of work at \$8.4m in 2020, spread across several departments. Based on 2019 activity, it is anticipated this amount would fund 38 staff (30 City FTE and 8 contract outreach workers). The team would contact over 2,750 individuals approximately 6,150 times and would make nearly 800 referrals to shelter. The team would conduct nearly 100 72-hour cleans, nearly 1,200 obstruction cleans, and 21 hazard cleans to remove nearly 1,500 tons of garbage and waste.

**In an initial analysis prepared by HSD, the City is projecting that the impacts of a reduction on staff, outreach and cleans would be:**

### **Three-Quarters Strength**

A cut of \$2 million to the Navigation Team body of work in 2020 would amount to a 24 percent reduction in funding from its current level. At this level the team would be comprised of 29 staff, between City employees and contract outreach workers, which is 9 fewer than current capacity. The team would contact just over 2,000 individuals approximately 4,700 times, and would make an estimated 600 referrals to shelter. The team would conduct approximately 75 72-hour cleans, nearly 900 obstruction cleans, and 16 hazard cleans to remove roughly 1,150 ton of garbage and waste.

### **Half Strength**

A cut of \$4 million to the Navigation Team body of work in 2020 would amount to a 48 percent reduction in funding from its current level. At this level City staff and contract outreach workers would combine for a total of 20 staff, which is 18 fewer than current capacity. The team would have capacity to contact just under 1,450 individuals approximately 3,200 times, and would make just over 400 referrals to shelter. The team would conduct approximately 50 72-hour cleans, nearly 475 obstruction cleans, and 11 hazard cleans to remove roughly 775 tons of garbage and waste.

### **Navigation Team Is Complementary to the City-Funded Outreach**

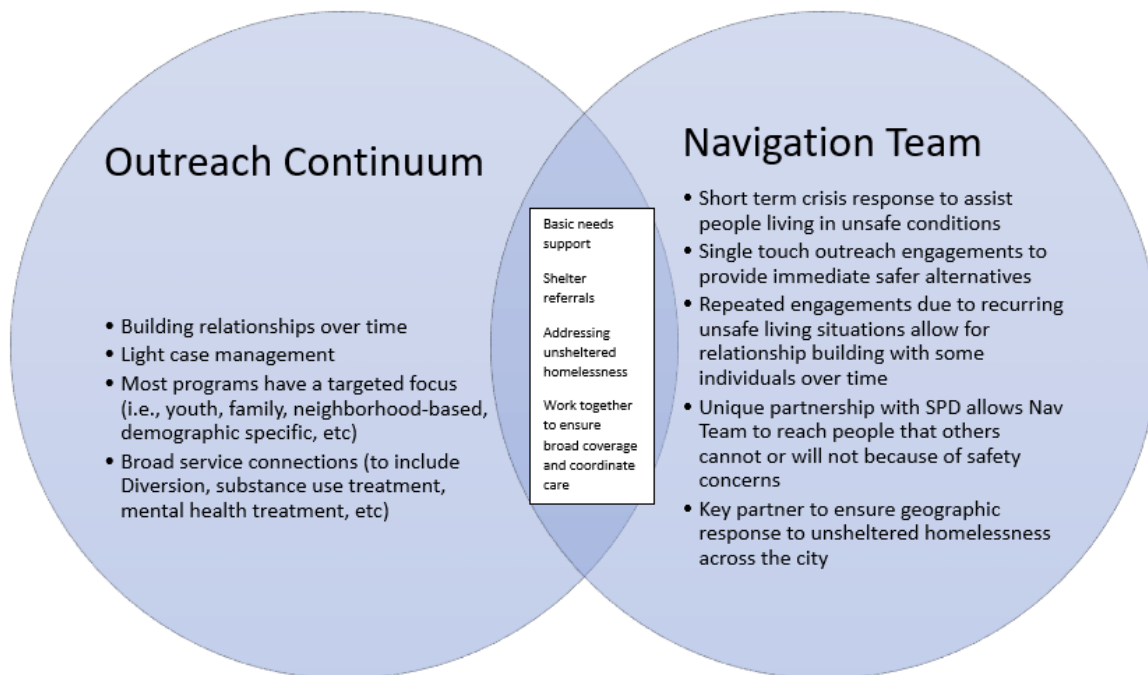
The City of Seattle launched the Navigation Team—a specially trained team for homelessness intervention—nearly three years ago to connect unsheltered people to safer spaces and services, while helping to address pervasive public health and safety challenges around the issue of unsheltered homelessness in Seattle. The Navigation Team is comprised of City staff who work as part of an inter-departmental response, supporting individuals in crisis. A key role of the Navigation Team is connecting people to services and shelter. In this way, the role of the Navigation Team is complementary to the work of the ten other City-contracted outreach providers. The Navigation Team's trained police officers, Field Coordinators and System Navigators engage people experiencing homelessness in some of Seattle's most dangerous and inaccessible locations, establishing the rapport and trust needed to provide critical services. Given the size and scope of the homelessness crisis, it is critical to have outreach from both the Navigation Team and its provider partners, working together to ensure coverage and coordinated care.

The Navigation Team has evolved to now include System Navigators, trained City staff who are outreach workers, who joined the team in June 2019. These social workers provide outreach leading up to and during encampment removals. The services offered—which include referrals to shelter—complement the outreach efforts of the Navigation Team's REACH workers and the City's other contracted outreach providers, who

conduct outreach in advance of any other environmental engagement. This also helps ensure the City’s outreach efforts remain in compliance with its encampment removal protocols in the Multi-Disciplinary Administrative Regulations (MDARS).

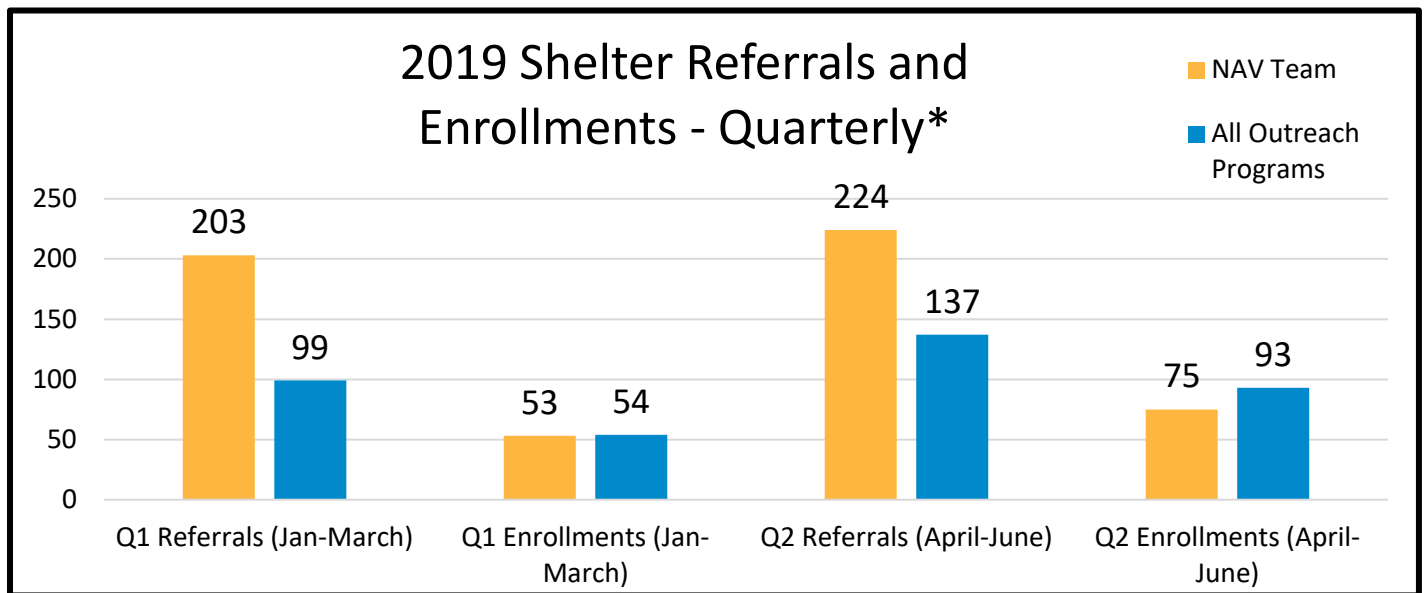
Through these outreach efforts the Navigation Team has been able to form and continue crucial community and neighborhood relationships with residential groups, small businesses and employers.

**Figure A: Intersection of Navigation Team Outreach and Outreach by City-Contracted Providers**



The Navigation Team has ten staff (eight REACH and two System Navigators) dedicated to outreach, compared to a total of 22 full-time employees (FTE) among all ten contracted outreach programs. In the first half of 2019, each of the Navigation Team’s ten staff were responsible for 13 referrals to shelter per person, compared to the City’s other contracted outreach, which were responsible for seven referrals to shelter per person. Chart A shows the comparison of Navigation Team and City-contracted provider referrals to and enrollment in shelter for the first half of 2019.

**Chart A: Comparison of Navigation Team Enrollments and Other Outreach Provider Enrollments**



\*NOTE: Data is unduplicated by quarter only. Total data through Q2 will have duplications.

### **Navigation Team Utilized During Life-Threatening Conditions, Including Snow Response**

The ability to rapidly mobilize this cross-departmental team has proven essential to supporting people in accessing shelter under life-threatening conditions. This was seen most dramatically this past February in the City's winter weather response in which the Navigation Team played a critical role. The Navigation Team worked extended hours to provide additional outreach and transportation to emergency shelters across Seattle for people living unsheltered. The team made 715 contacts and some 162 individuals were transported to emergency shelters by the Navigation Team (because of the emergency conditions, this data was not captured in the NavApp and therefore not reflected in any data sets). The Navigation Team also distributed essential food and clothing that were donated by Costco, Nordstrom, Amazon, and Starbucks. This outreach effort was the largest push done by the Navigation Team and service providers in recent memory.

### **Navigation Team Police Officers Connect with Unsheltered Persons**

For the Seattle Police Department, the Navigation Team has been an opportunity to create meaningful connections with individuals deeply in need of services and housing.

Before the team was created in 2017 officers tried to build trust and establish a dialogue with people living unsheltered, but it was difficult for patrol officers to make a sustained impact between their daily assignment of responding to 911 calls. There were very few clear protocols between city agencies in how to respond to the people most in need of help. Oftentimes efforts were duplicated or there was little to no follow through.

With the Navigation Team in place those much-needed lines of communication between City agencies and advocacy groups have been created. Nine patrol officers, two sergeants and a lieutenant are dedicated exclusively to assist people experiencing homelessness. These officers know the people living unsheltered, know what their needs are and offer a reference point for some of our city's most vulnerable residents. This police team builds relationships. They make referrals and are focused on linking people with services, shelter beds and, ultimately, permanent housing.

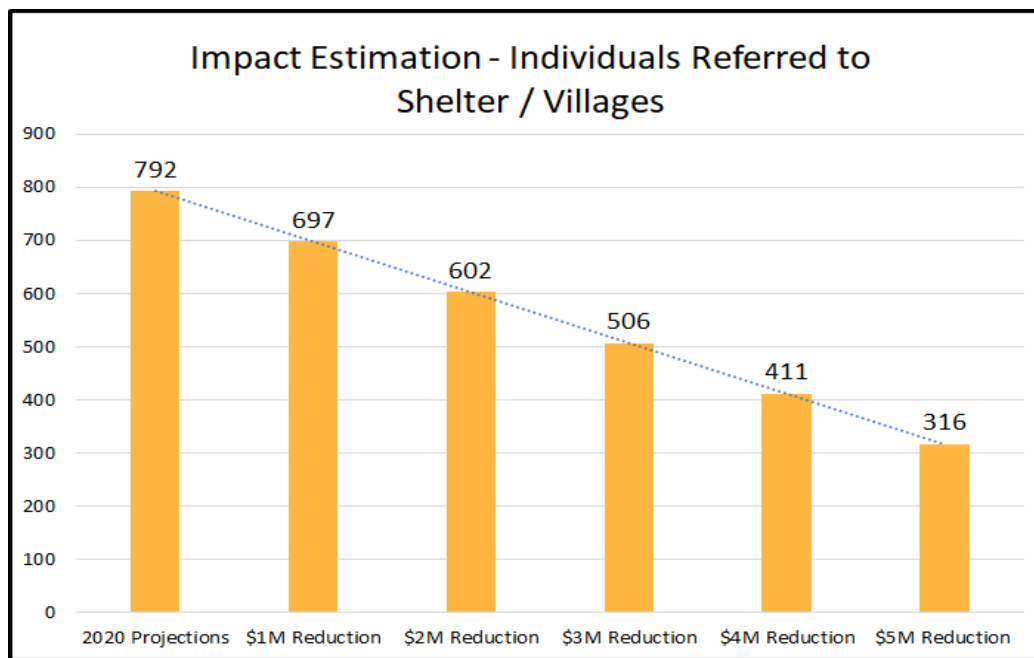
These officers work closely with other City departments to ensure trash is removed, public health issues are addressed, and individuals' property is properly stored once they move out of sites. They also focus on accessibility issues, making sure sidewalks and public spaces are safe and clear for the elderly, disabled, small children, as well as cyclists and other pedestrians.

If the Navigation Team is removed, these officers will be move back into patrol and other divisions of SPD, and they will, of course, continue doing great work for the City. What will be missing is that coordinated effort amongst a broad swath of City agencies, as well as non-profit providers. We will return to the more piecemeal approach, where each agency will no longer be in constant communication about how to move quickly and efficiently to get people living unsheltered the help they need.

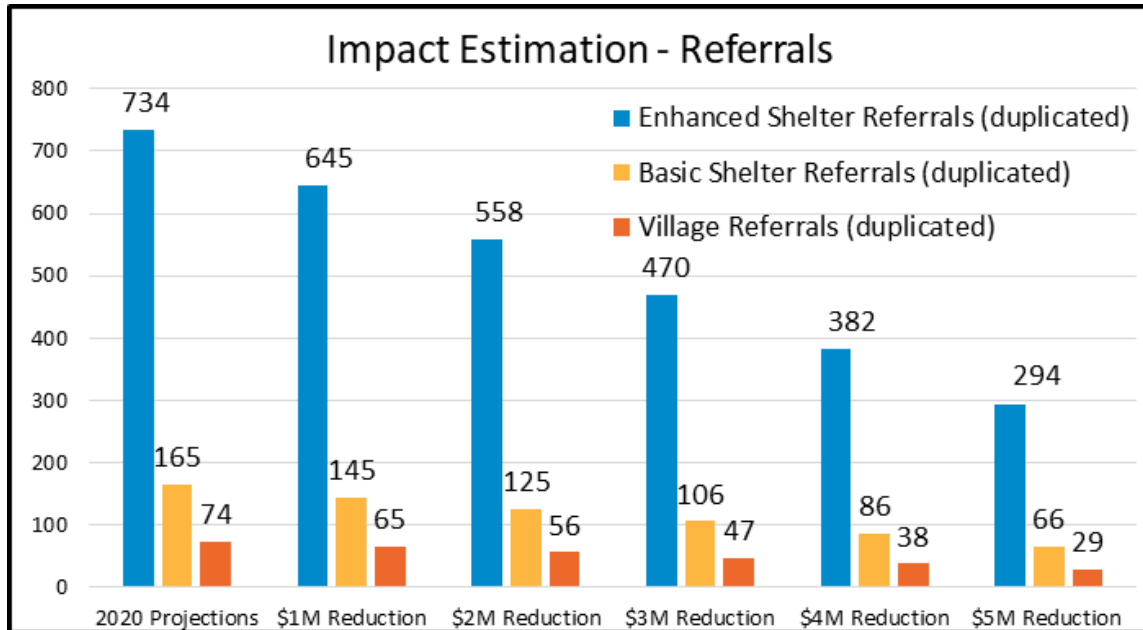
### Impact of Budget Cuts Requested by City Council

The following Charts B and C show the projected impact of budget reductions on Navigation Team referrals to shelter, in aggregate and by shelter type, from a 12% decrease with \$1 million to 60% with \$5 million fewer dollars.

**Chart B: Budget Reduction Impacts on Unique Individuals Referred to Shelter by Navigation Team**



**Chart C. Impact of Reductions on Unique Individual Referrals by Shelter Type**



*NOTE: Chart B estimates the number of unique individuals who are referred to shelter. They may be referred several times to different kinds of shelter (basic, enhanced or village) if they are encountered more than once by the Navigation Team. This explains why totals for these categories in Chart C do not match Chart B.*

### **Public Health Concerns Are A Key Reason for Navigation Team Action at A Site**

People living unsheltered in unmanaged encampments are among the most vulnerable Seattle residents. Conditions related to sanitation, solid waste disposal, rodents and other disease vectors can be detrimental to individuals' short and long-term health. The Navigation Team plays an important part in addressing public health issues at encampments that can become larger health concerns if left unaddressed:

- **Offering Sanitation Kits and Disease Prevention Information:** Lack of handwashing and sanitary toilets in encampments contribute to the potential for the spread of communicable diseases. The Navigation Team has delivered hand sanitation kits to people living in unmanaged encampments. Additionally, the Team has partnered with SPU, whose contract with the Hepatitis Education Project provides health kits and health information to some of the hardest to serve areas in order to prevent the spread of communicable disease.
- **Disposing of Solid Waste:** Solid waste in unmanaged encampments poses risks to health as well as the environment. The Navigation Team removes garbage, debris, human waste, and used sharps, reducing soil and water contamination and public-health risks.
- **Mitigating Rodent Populations:** Exposure to rodents, a major vector of disease, is a concern for people living outdoors. Accumulation of solid waste provides a food source for animals and rodents. Encampment cleanups remove waste and debris that would otherwise provide food and habitat for rodent populations.

### **The Navigation Team Is A Key Resource for Customer Requests and City Responsibilities**

The City's Customer Service Bureau received almost 14,000 calls about unmanaged encampments in the Motorola CSR application for 2019 YTD. The Navigation Team response is a critical response to community concerns about people in need and serious public health and safety concerns such as excessive trash, waste and debris stemming from unmanaged encampments. The table below shows the number of reported encampments by Council district for the first half of 2019. A and Attachment B show the number and frequency of cleans.

**Table 1: 2019 Customer Service Bureau Calls for Unmanaged Encampments by Council District**

| District     | Unauthorized Encampment Report |
|--------------|--------------------------------|
| 1            | 683                            |
| 2            | 1,653                          |
| 3            | 1,727                          |
| 4            | 1,944                          |
| 5            | 2,219                          |
| 6            | 3,343                          |
| 7            | 2,193                          |
| (none)       | 92                             |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>13,854</b>                  |

NOTE: The records with no district are exceptions that lacked a valid district value for any reason (location came in as outside the City limits or offshore/over water, etc.).

Additionally, the Human Services Department (HSD) directly receives and responds to over 600 emails each year from business owners and residents requesting that the Navigation Team provide relief from the impacts of unmanaged encampments in their neighborhoods. These emails, received from across the City, express concerns for the following – all of which are addressed via Navigation Team encampment cleanup work:

- Safety of people living unsheltered
- Neighborhood safety
- Safety of City and State infrastructure
- Loss of business revenue
- Environmental damage
- Difficulty accessing public spaces and public rights-of-way, and
- Accumulation of trash and human waste

As the Navigation Team has evolved over the years, there has been an increased focus on preserving the public's safe access to the City's rights-of-way such as sidewalks and parks, which is done by removing encampments that pose obstructions, by 72-hour-notice operations and larger posted events with advanced outreach. Maintaining access to these spaces is a core function of City government. The Navigation Team is a front-line response when issues arise. Chart D and E below show the estimated impact budget reductions will have on cleans and obstruction removals.

Chart D: Budget Reduction Impact on Cleans

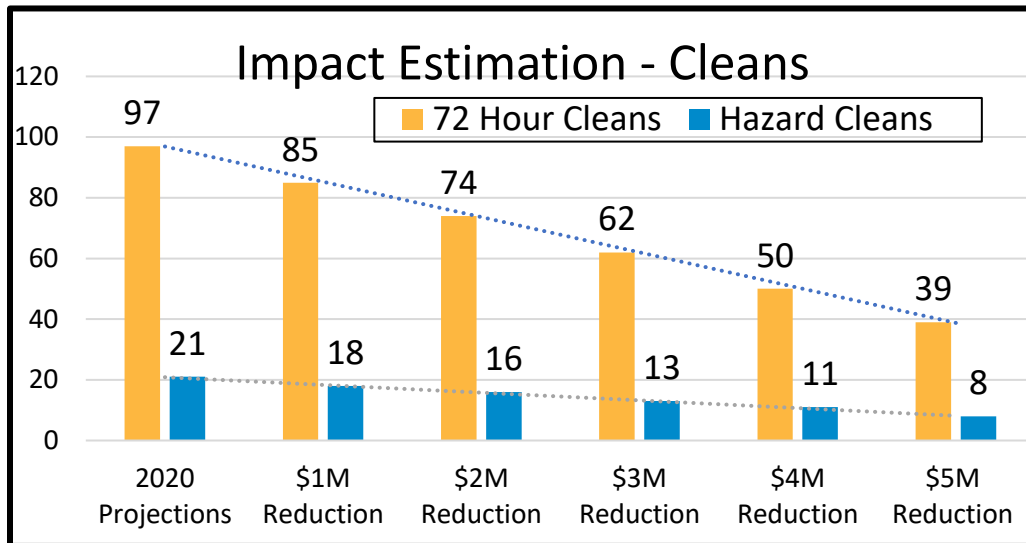
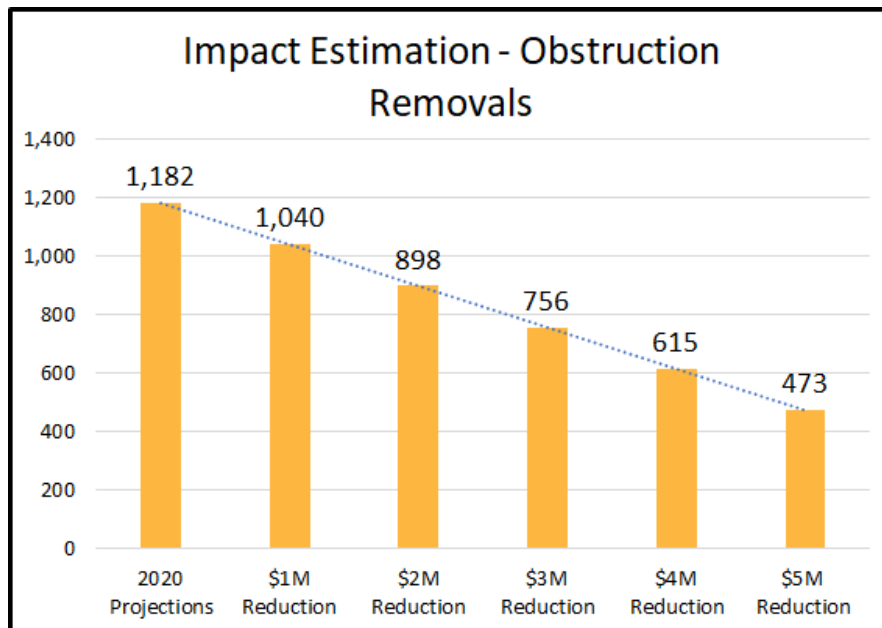


Chart E: Budget Reduction Impact on Obstruction Removals





## **The Navigation Team Supports Other Departments Addressing Unsheltered Homelessness**

The Navigation Team is comprised of multiple City departments who work cooperatively and holistically to address people living unsheltered in Seattle. Navigation Team members have advanced certification in crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques that lend themselves to the daunting tasks of reaching people when they are most in need, while having direct lines of communication with City staff in Seattle Fire (SFD), Seattle Police (SPD), Public Utilities (SPU), Transportation (SDOT), Parks (SPR), Neighborhoods (DON) and HSD as well as Public Health. This relationship allows one dedicated team to ensure that we are accountable to the City's protocols that when encampments are removed, they are done so in a manner that balances the needs of the greater community with the rights of people living unsheltered.

The Navigation Team has been an important resource for the SFD for example. In the past six months alone, SFD has reported 278 incidents of brush fires, illegal burns, building fires, and other related events – many in high-hazard conditions that put crews, people living in encampments and the public at risk. High-hazard encampments include those near highways, on steep slopes, or in close proximity to hazardous materials or critical infrastructure. The Navigation Team prioritizes cleanups at these sites, and budget cuts could jeopardize their ability to respond quickly to hazardous areas like these and others.

Our downtown core also relies heavily on the Navigation Team every day. Budget cuts to this critical program would impact our rights of way in many ways:

- **Mobility on Sidewalks:** Campsites that are obstructing the right-of-way in the downtown core are cleared 7 days a week by the Navigation team. The impact of this work is significant in promoting safe and efficient pedestrian environment.
- **Maintenance and Operations:** Programs rely on the Navigation Team on a daily basis to help clean areas where people are living unsheltered which would otherwise interfere with critical maintenance actions including but not limited to: alley cleaning, vegetation overgrowth management, tree pruning, sign repair and replacement, stairway cleaning, sidewalk repair, and street sweeping.
- **Employee Safety:** The Navigation Team approach to removing unsafe encampments promotes a safe work environment for the employees who work in the field. Biohazard clean up and trash removal are handled by specially trained individuals, thus minimizing the impact of those hazards to the rest of the City's workforce.

## **The Navigation Team Assists with Trash and Debris Removal Associated with RVs**

Over the past few years, Seattle has been impacted by large recreational vehicles (RVs) parked in the public rights-of-way for prolonged periods of time, resulting in significant accumulation of trash and waste on sidewalks and public property. There are immediate and concrete steps Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) can do today to offer safer living alternatives to persons living in RVs. This work would not be possible without the support and expertise of the City's Navigation Team.

SPU's RV remediation pilot works closely, in specific circumstances, with the Navigation Team to provide outreach and shelter options for people living in RVs. Through the end of August, SPU made 1,065 contacts with people living in RVs. Of these contacts, 158 were referred to services through the Navigation Team. While this number may seem small in comparison to total contacts, it represents a significant success, given

the complexity of circumstances that result in people occupying RVs and their widespread reticence to move into shelter. The integration and leveraging of HSD’s Navigation Team has significantly improved access to services for people engaged by the RV remediation pilot and has played a key role in reducing the number of repeat contacts with people living in vehicles.

In addition to the RV remediation pilot, SPU works closely with HSD’s Navigation Team to address garbage found in unmanaged encampments. SPU’s encampment trash program is designed to explore service options and effectiveness for garbage collection at unmanaged encampments, including garbage container services, authorized garbage bag distribution and collection, on-call trash collection based on need, loose debris and bulky item collection, and hypodermic needle collection at a number of unmanaged encampments.

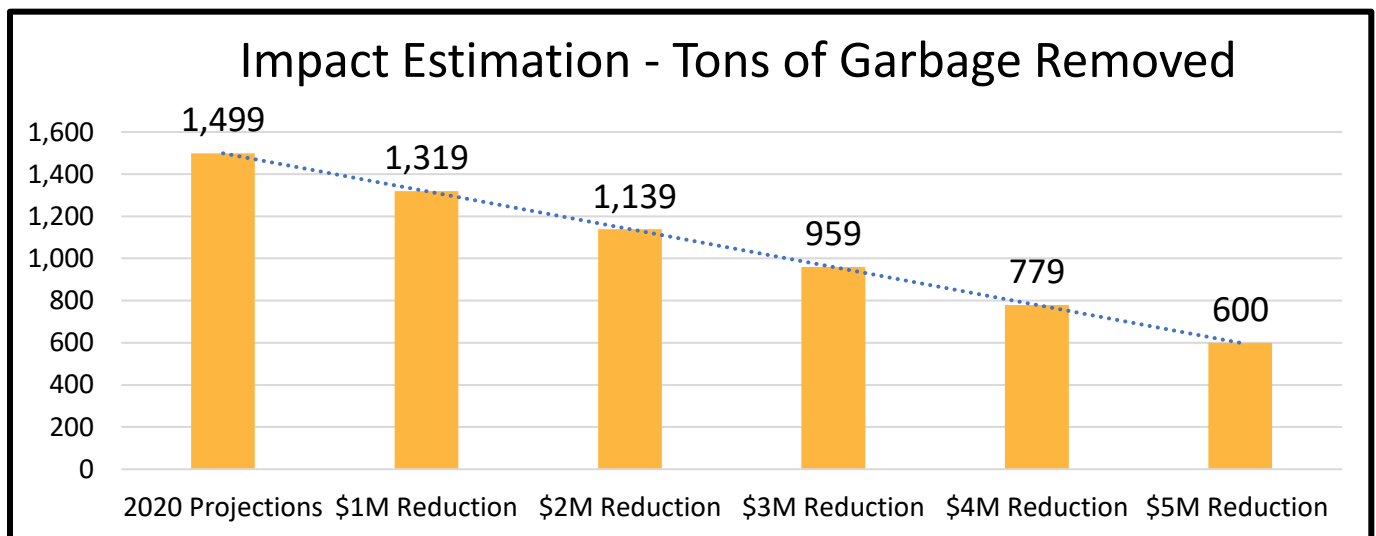
SPU provides encampment trash collection to ten locations on average, all of which are serviced weekly until the encampment has been removed or the project is deemed completed by SPU. Sites are assessed continually in coordination with the Navigation Team. This work would be hampered without full funding of the team.

To date, SPU has collected 970,576 pounds of litter, engaged with 6,128 people, has given out 60,457 trash bags, collected 17% of distributed bags and disposed of 31,666 sharps since the program launched in January 2017.

#### **Impact of Budget Cuts Requested by City Council**

Each site that the Navigation Team visits has associated trash and debris that pose both environmental and health impacts, if not addressed. The following chart shows the estimation of the reduction in total tons of garbage that SPU, the Navigation Team and other City departments could remove if their budget is reduced. the Navigation team is the only team that goes into unmanaged encampments and provides litter picks and trash disposal.

**Chart F: Budget Reductions Impact on Garbage Removal (in Tons)**



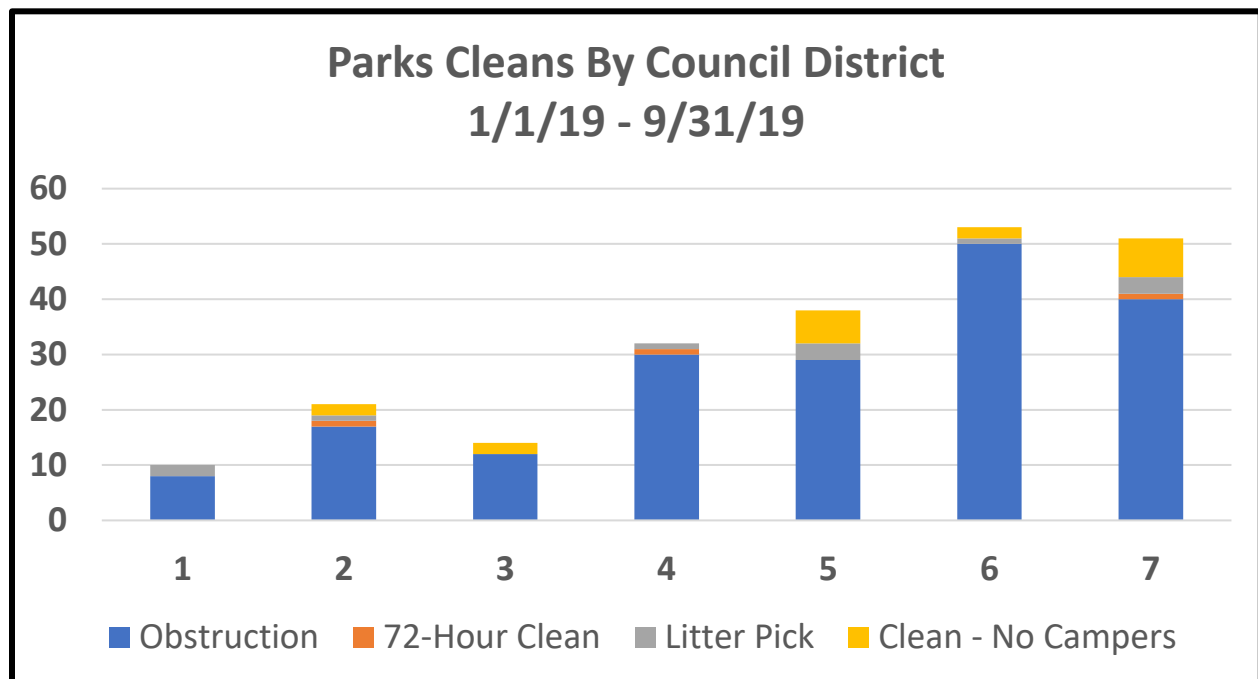
## Seattle Parks and Recreation

In 2018, Seattle Parks and Recreation formed a 12-person Encampment Team to support the Navigation Team as they respond to the increasing number of needed cleanups of unmanaged encampments on public property. Parks Encampment Team is a key partner that works with the City's Navigation Team and other City departments in the cleaning of unmanaged encampments.

Parks works on three types of cleans on properties owned by SDOT, WSDOT, Parks, and other public property, including:

- Large encampments, in collaboration with Navigation Team, which involve Multi-Departmental Administrative Rule (MDAR) guidance, referrals to shelters and services, biohazard and debris removal, and storage of personal property of people living unsheltered;
- Tents or obstructions on Parks properties and within rights-of-way which involve MDAR guidance and coordination with the Navigation Team; and
- RV remediation in coordination with SPU's RV remediation pilot, debris cleanup, and inventory of personal property.

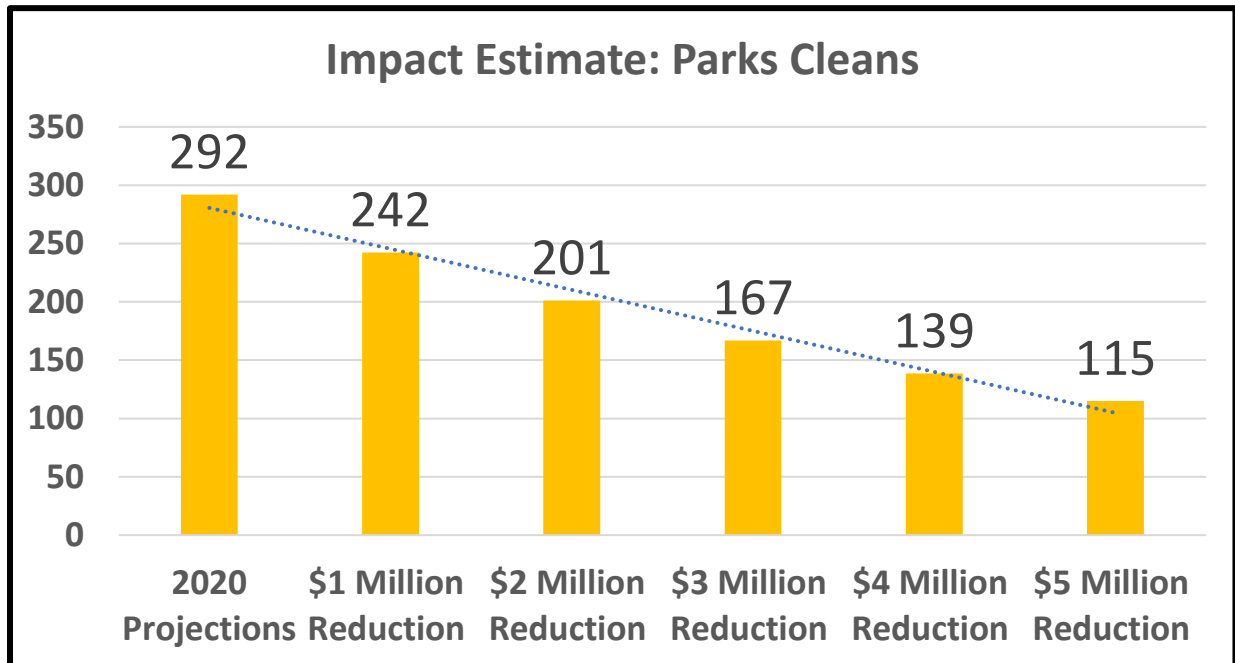
**Chart G: Distribution of Parks Cleans by District (Subset of Charts D & E)**



## Impact of Budget Cuts Requested by City Council

Reductions in General Fund would significantly reduce the Parks Department's response to encampments, as shown in Chart H.

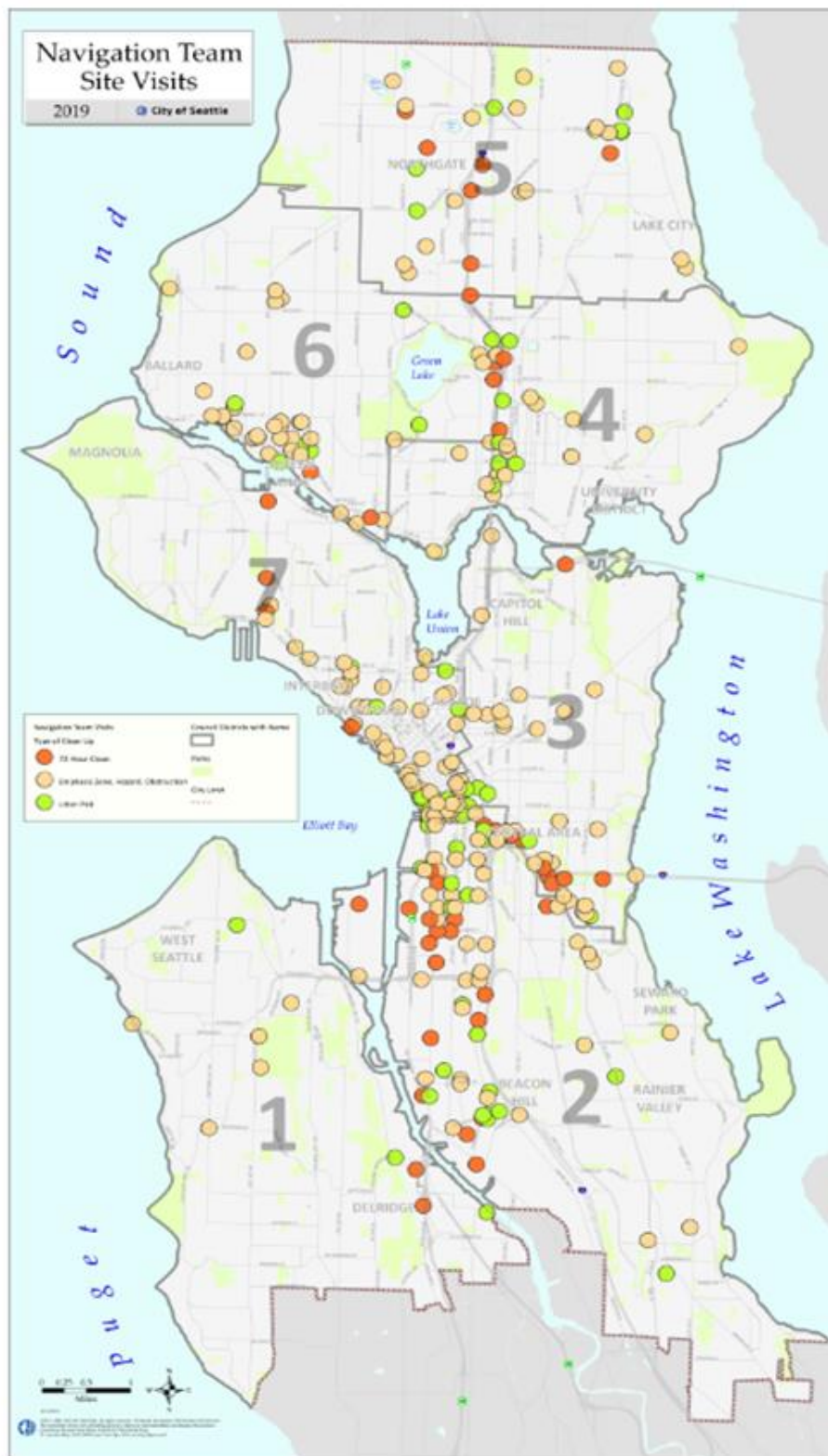
**Chart H: Budget Reductions Impact on Parks Cleans**



**Maintain Funding As Proposed in Mayor's 2020 Budget**

In closing, we hope that City Council will fully fund the Navigation Team as a critical part of the City of Seattle's response to people living unsheltered on our streets and the associated environmental issues. This is a complimentary, city-run response team that provides services for our community members and uses uniquely City-run resources to meet the challenges of the crisis of homelessness in Seattle.

**Attachment A: Navigation Team Site Visits (Note: Multiple sites could be represented by each dot)**



## Attachment B: Navigation Team Frequency of Visits

