

From: [Jared Rasmussen](#)
To: [BOCC](#)
Subject: Camping Ordinance - Comments on Ordinance 1338
Date: Friday, October 21, 2022 3:33:50 PM
Attachments: [BOCC letter Oct 2022.docx](#)

Attached is a letter of comments I have regarding Ordinance 1338. Thank you for allowing public discourse on the issue.

-Jared Rasmussen

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Lewis County BOCC Meeting - Comments on Ordinance 1338

I moved to Chehalis in 2004 and lived there until earlier this year. In March, my wife and I bought a home in Centralia. I work as a physicist and my wife manages a coffee shop, both companies being based within Centralia city limits. Both our places of work have seen a dramatic increase in transients during the past couple years. It's common to find drug needles, empty alcohol bottles, and all sorts of unpleasant litter when we arrive to work in the morning. Earlier this year, a homeless man had defecated in front of the door into my office. Earlier this week, my wife's coworker had to clean up vomit from someone who had spent the night below their drive-thru overhang. Just a couple days ago, a father of two young girls brought in a used drug needle that he had found in the coffee shop lawn where his daughters were playing. He didn't know where to dispose of it and my wife didn't either. This is becoming all too common in Lewis County, particularly in Centralia.

Recently, I've been seeing a lot of posts and blogs addressing homelessness and drugs in Centralia. Many of these posts revolve around Commissioner Sean Swope, who seems to be taking a deep look into local homelessness resources in our area. Some people have been upset that he has disclosed information about the needle exchange program run by Gather Church, or that he wants to make the location of homeless encampments public information. Personally, I appreciate having a commissioner who is willing to go against the grain and question the way our community is currently addressing homelessness. I've read posts by Mitch Guthrie, an elder and leader at Gather Church, that claim the needle exchange program has never been a secret. Yet when I first heard of the program several months ago, I tried to fact-check whether it actually existed by visiting the Gather website. Despite listing the other services and resources they provide, nowhere could I find mention of the needle exchange program. Other criticism has come from Kyle Wheeler, founder of the Lewis County Dignity Guild, claiming that making the location of encampments public information will put those communities at risk. But is it not risky to have encampments in our backyards without knowing it? Even Mitch Guthrie admits in one of his blogs, "Encampments can be dangerous to health and safety. Addiction, mental health issues, and trauma are all risk factors to a person finding themselves homeless." So shouldn't the public be able to look up the location of large encampments near their homes? When I purchased my home in March, I used the county-provided Sex Offender Watchlist to identify any areas near my home that might present a higher risk to my family should we walk by unaware. Does a community of drug-addicted transients with trauma and mental health issues not also pose a potential safety risk?

Lastly, I would like to address the core values of Gather Church as they pertain to serving the homeless and why I appreciate Commissioner Swope raising questions. According to another of Guthrie's blogs, two of the core values of Gather Church in serving the local homeless community are 1) Ensuring low barriers for escaping homelessness and 2) Harm reduction for both the homeless and surrounding community. It is because of these values that they offer free food, clothing, shelter, sanitary products, condoms, and clean drug needles to our local transients. But do these products really reduce harm to homeless individuals and the surrounding community? Do they really lower the barriers for escaping homelessness? I would

argue that they do not. In providing clean needles for drug users, free condoms to sexually active transients, and free food and clothing to jobless individuals, *they are actually reducing consequences, not reducing harm*. They argue that these homeless individuals are already vulnerable and criminalizing their behavior will only raise the barrier for them to escape their current situation. But shouldn't the fear of consequence be a motivator in itself? In their attempt to lower the barrier out of homelessness, they are lowering the barrier into drug use and other risky behaviors. It used to be understood that using drugs would cost you your job, reputation, relationships, home, health, and safety. But now a person can be addicted to drugs and acquire clean, free needles while living in a community of other addicted individuals, all of whom do not need jobs because they can get food, clothes, and services for free. Do we honestly expect this to lower the number of drug users in our area? Imagine addressing drunk driving in the same way. A whole slew of consequences keeps people from driving drunk, such as: driving off the road and killing yourself, driving over the centerline and killing someone else, getting pulled over and put in jail, having your name published in the paper, losing your license, losing your job, and many other potential effects. Should we avoid criminalizing drunk drivers and instead treat them as vulnerable individuals who need lower barriers out of drunkenness? Should we reduce their harm by providing safer ways for them to drink and drive? Should we spend taxpayer dollars on separate roads for drunk driving, with full length guardrails and medians to reduce the chance of the drunk driver leaving the road or crossing the centerline? Obviously not! Yet this is exactly what we are doing with our local homeless encampments. I believe homeless people should be treated with compassion, but it is not compassionate to supply them with everything necessary for them to remain in an addicted, degenerative state. It is also not compassionate to the surrounding families and businesses who are left to deal with the waste, vandalism, and lack of public safety that these encampments pose. I appreciate Commissioner Swope as he tries to tackle this issue.

From: [Luke Moerke](#)
To: [BOCC](#)
Subject: Camping Ordinance
Date: Friday, October 21, 2022 5:00:24 PM

From my own personal perspective, **I support the ordinance to limit camping** on county property. I wish the state would do so likewise.

To allow the self deprecation of rogue drug sites for "homeless" is not helping anyone.

Clean it up, get them services, and if they don't want them, make them move on.

The people of Lewis County **don't** want a Portland or Seattle "camping" environment in our backyard. It is insanity and we are smarter than the elitist leftist cities than that.

Luke

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From: [Mitch Guthrie](#)
To: [BOCC](#)
Subject: Camping Ordinance
Date: Saturday, October 22, 2022 9:52:39 PM

To the Lewis County Board of Commissioners,

Ordinance 1338, regarding the prohibition of camping on Lewis county property, will only result in the displacement of a population into an area already experiencing housing unavailability. I respectfully ask the board to consider other non-coercive options to address the encampment issue and to vote against ordinance 1338.

While I understand the concern regarding the health and safety of local encampments, approving ordinance 1338, with little to no housing available outside of a night-by-night shelter, is simply punitive and recklessly burdensome to the very population this ordinance seeks to address.

Many in our area, including members of this board, found it intolerable that the governor imposed restrictions on our local population in response to a public health crisis brought on by a pandemic. I find it amazingly hypocritical that this board is now so willing to do the same for an issue far less threatening.

Sincerely,
Mitch Guthrie

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From: contact@lewiscountywa.gov
To: [Rieva Lester](#); [Tammy Martin](#); [BOCC](#)
Subject: Email from Commissioners Contact Form
Date: Wednesday, October 19, 2022 3:47:05 PM

Name: Larry Kerschner

Email: peacepoet@gmail.com

Message: ATTENTION ALL COMMISSIONERS: The best way to prevent nuclear war is to eliminate nuclear weapons. The best way to eliminate unhoused people is to provide housing that is affordable. Studies in many communities show that human beings with social problems such as mental illness, substance addiction and chronic medical issues are seldom successfully dealt with unless safe and secure housing is available. I suspect that living without heat, power, clean water and security is not the first choice for the folks living in tent communities around Lewis County. So many of the comfortable people with the power to change things in our community see poverty as some sort of moral failure that is purely the fault of the poor. The proposed Encampment Removal and Clean Up Policy proposed by Commissioner Swope is a heartless and thoughtless approach to punish the powerless while totally ignoring the only real and humane solution which is to provide affordable housing for the unhoused. There are houses in our community that sell for over a million dollars while there are people who can barely afford a piece of plastic to sleep under. Criminalizing and pushing the poor out of Lewis County is a cowardly and odious plan. There are many comfortable people in this community who promote themselves as followers of a gentle and humane Jesus. Where is the compassion?

From: [Rieva Lester](#)
To: [BOCC](#)
Subject: FW: Homeless Camping Law Lewis County
Date: Wednesday, October 19, 2022 1:14:44 PM

Rieva Lester

Clerk of the Board
Lewis County Board of County Commissioners
351 N.W. North St.
Chehalis, WA 98532
360-740-1419 | Rieva.Lester@lewiscountywa.gov

From: Sean Swope <Sean.Swope@lewiscountywa.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, October 19, 2022 8:51 AM
To: Jeremy Corwin <jeremy@corwinhp.com>
Cc: Rieva Lester <Rieva.Lester@lewiscountywa.gov>
Subject: Fwd: Homeless Camping Law Lewis County

Hi Jeremy

Thank you for the feedback. I will have Rieva take care of this.

Sean

Begin forwarded message:

From: Jeremy Corwin <jeremy@corwinhp.com>
Subject: Homeless Camping Law Lewis County
Date: October 19, 2022 at 8:38:01 AM PDT
To: "Sean.swope@lewiscountywa.gov"
<Sean.swope@lewiscountywa.gov>

Commissioner Swope – I'd like to submit a letter for the upcoming hearing regarding the Lewis County Homeless Camping law:

I appreciate that the county is addressing the homeless camping issue. Many, if not all, of those that are camping are causing a significant health risk to themselves and others. They have no sanitary sewer and they have no running water. They have little to no shelter when they are camping. As a society we have designed laws to ensure our public safety. We have building codes and electrical codes, and for our own safety and our neighbors we are required to follow those laws. I appreciate that the county has compassion on these folks and is creating a place for them to go that will provide the shelter, bathrooms, and necessities to ensure adequate public health. It is the right and compassionate thing to do. I know that many argue that we are taking away

someone's dignity and their rights by not allowing them to camp where they want. But I would argue that you are recognizing their value and ensuring that their needs are met in a safe manner by requiring them to use a provided shelter. Regarding their rights to camp wherever they want: we all have to obey laws that infringe upon our rights but are made for our own good. For example, walking across a busy road anywhere we want is our right, but it is against the law as it is not safe. An alternative is provided with a cross-walk. I would argue that the county is providing the same concept to those that are homeless: they are providing a safe alternative.

Jeremy Corwin
Centralia, WA
360.269.2144

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From: [Debra Parnham](#)
To: [BOCC](#)
Subject: Homeless
Date: Thursday, October 20, 2022 1:21:24 PM

Thank you so much for your compassion in being proactive in our homeless crisis. The camps are dirty and spreading diseases through garbage and human waste. Drugs and mental illness needs to be addressed. You have my support in dismantling the camps. Vagrant laws need to be made and informed so there can be support and places to send those that need help in drug addiction and mental illness. Stay strong. Thank you so much, Deb Parnham Centralia

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From: [MATTHEW ROTTER](#)
To: [BOCC](#)
Subject: Ordinances 1338 Unauthorized Camping on County Land
Date: Thursday, October 20, 2022 4:25:20 AM

Dear Commissioners Grose, Pollock, and Swope,

I would like to begin by thanking each of you for your public service in your positions as Commissioners, and I am sure beyond. Representing the citizens of Lewis County and the management of the county's resources is of great importance and responsibility. Your time and energy are appreciated.

I have taken time to read several articles of recent publication discussing the proposed Lewis County Ordinance 1338, which would prohibit camping on county property not designated for camping. I understand there is concern for the increased population of citizens who are without a home and are taking shelter in areas not designated for residence. The articles specifically focused on the WADOT property in Centralia known as Blakeslee Junction as an immediate concern. I do not believe this ordinance is in the best interest of the citizens of Lewis County as it is merely pushing a very serious problem to the side and taking no steps to deal with solving the needs of Lewis County and its residents. Our citizens needs are many, and it will take many hands and heads to both identify these needs and work together towards solutions.

Here are a few concerns that come to mind as I read the very broadly written ordinance as well as the articles offered by the Chronicle:

1. The ordinance has no provision for advanced notice given prior to action taken by the county. The article inferred there would be 72 hours notice, unless there was imminent danger present such as human waste, garbage, or needles on site. The ordinance does not address this. I also wonder what situation of camping without the resources of garbage collection and available toilets do not have at least two of these things present? The assumed intent behind this (immediate removal) does not offer good faith efforts to protect these individuals' rights by providing time to address the county's requirements of removal.
2. The article refers to Commissioner Swope's desire for the county to reconnect residents impacted by this ordinance with their families and loved ones. The ordinance does not address this, nor should it. However, there is no immediate plans currently shared for how this would be addressed. There are a multitude of reasons why these individuals are not currently with their families, so why would Commissioner Swope assume that this is the solution?
3. The county has contracted annually with organizations to offer cold weather shelters, which will continue to be needed. However, there does not appear to be any plans or requests for proposal to pursue any other solutions to the significant need these individuals have in locating shelter offering an opportunity to make advances toward permanent shelter. There appears to be a need for planning and action towards more permanent solutions.
4. Commissioner Swope indicated that these individuals are not taking on the responsibility of employment which would lead them out of their current situation. These individuals are far

from being prepared and able to take on employment without resources to get proper sleep, bathing, food, and transportation; not to mention any additional barriers they may be experiencing such as a disability, illness, or a mental health condition. We must find ways to connect them with navigating these barriers so that they can gain the ability to pursue and obtain gainful employment. Maybe the county can begin by considering employing some of these individuals.

I ask that the BOCC call together various agencies and organizations to work together to identify the needs of those living in our community without homes or shelter and together work towards solutions. The issue of residents without homes is growing in complexity and will require multiple community organizations, including the faith community to address the many needs. There are many organizations and communities of faith currently making significant contributions towards serving the needs of these individuals, but it is far from meeting the needs of our citizens as the needs continue to multiply. I ask that the BOCC please share any current plans for supporting citizens' movement out of homelessness and towards inclusion in the community and workforce and remove this ordinance from the table of consideration at this time.

Kathryn Rotter
Evaline area, unincorporated Lewis County

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From: [Janet Burt](#)
To: [BOCC](#)
Subject: Removal of homeless camps on Lewis County Property.
Date: Thursday, October 20, 2022 12:30:51 PM

I totally support the initiative by Sean Swope to clean up our Lewis County Public Property. My Father always said “give them an inch and they will take a mile”. It is time that we stand up for the citizens of the County to provide the kind of Community that Lewis County stands for. Nothing against the homeless population, but in most cases, when help is given, it is not appreciated or the help never really goes to those that need it.

I do not want to help people on drugs who have no desire to clean themselves up. There are multiple programs available for them, but in most cases, drugs are chosen over rehabilitation!!

Please stand firm on this initiative to clean up our County. The citizens and taxpayers, I might add, want a clean and safe environment for family and friends. Nothing more than that!

Regards,
Chris Burt

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