

On September 23, 2020 the Encino Neighborhood council passed the following motion:

MOTION; HOM 2020 09 01: the Encino Neighborhood Council Homeless Committee requests that Councilman Paul Koretz, CD 5, Council president Nury Martinez CD 6, and Councilman David Ryu (CD4) work with the Encino and adjacent Neighborhood Councils to investigate a location for a pallet shelter or similar community adjacent to and East of the Tillman Sanitation Plant, and also an RV Safe Parking location on Oxnard Street adjacent to the 405 Freeway

This entire memorandum will go before the Encino Neighborhood Council at its October 28, 2020 meeting.

Our understanding is that the Oxnard Street Safe Parking project is progressing, that is very good news.

The reason the motion was put before the Encino Neighborhood Council Homelessness Committee and the whole board is the persistent issue with allowing homeless encampments to exist in urban-wildland interface areas. It would obviously be best to find housing for the individuals camping in areas such as the Los Angeles River bottom, the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas, Hansen Dam, etc. Because placement in available housing is based on a triage system with the highest acuity persons being given priority, the people remaining in these interface areas are likely at the bottom of the list for housing. The danger involved in allowing people to continue camping in these areas far outweighs any COVID-19 danger from disrupting the encampments. The danger is to people in the encampments, the surrounding community, and the environment. If there is a nearby area which could safely accommodate even informal camping, it is negligent and irresponsible to allow people to continue camping out in dangerous areas.

Following the Skirball Fire in 2018, the following appeared in the Los Angeles Times editorial ***If we intend to clear the homeless from fire danger zones, then we need to have housing for them (August 31, 2018)*** “In the wake of the Skirball fire, L.A. City Council member Paul Koretz — whose district includes the fire area — prodded the Fire Department to lay out steps to make sure this didn’t happen again. And Mayor Eric Garcetti set up a task force of fire and police officials and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority to survey high fire danger areas across the city. Going forward, the city decided, when homeless encampments were found burrowed into canyons and hillsides, notices would be put up (on trees, fencing or stakes in the ground) that they were a danger to all and needed to be abandoned. Outreach workers would try to persuade homeless people to leave — for shelter or just somewhere else less risky — and would urge them not to use grills, generators, and the like. Finally, police and Bureau of Sanitation workers would be dispatched to dismantle the camps. People would be taken to shelters if they chose.”

Consider the September 6, 2020 fire at the Sepulveda Basin, which resulted in loss of life and destruction of a beloved wildlife area. This resulted from multiple failures of governance. The Los Angeles City Department of Recreation and Parks Ranger and maintenance divisions were aware of the dry brush, that there had already been multiple fires in the area, and that there were encampments embedded in the dry brush. There was apparently no ranger available to monitor the park area, even on a 115° day on a holiday weekend. The City of Los Angeles Fire Department had already put out multiple fires in the area just this summer. The Los Angeles Police Department was similarly aware of the situation, having been in the area with a Los Angeles Department of Sanitation crew three days before the September 6 Fire. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Rangers were aware of the situation. We recently learned that the individual who lost his life in the fire was a client of the Los Angeles Homeless

Services Agency, so obviously the Homeless Engagement Team was aware of the conditions. The Los Angeles Mayor is obviously aware of the dangers in the wake of the 2018 Skirball fire. The Los Angeles City Council and in the Sepulveda Basin case, Council District 6 was clearly aware of the danger, having corresponded regarding the previous fires and the conditions. The Encino neighborhood Council was aware of the situation and had been contact with both council Districts 5 and 6 regarding the situation.

It is now nearly a month after the September 6, 2020 fire. There are still encampments in the unburned areas adjacent to the burned land, including in the river bottom. Is our city government waiting for the rest of it to burn and more people to be injured or killed? If it torches houses in the surrounding community, will the hand-wringing and promises to do something begin again? If the issue has to do with injunctions against removal of encampments, the Los Angeles City Attorney should go to the court to request a modification of the order. Any and all nearby safe camping locations should be considered, and the high-fire danger areas secured. The Encino Neighborhood council welcomes the opportunity to work with all city agencies involved to find rapid solutions to this very persistent and dangerous condition.

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