

City of Shoreline Tent City Frequently Asked Questions July 2008

The Prince of Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church located at 14514 20th Avenue NE in Shoreline will be hosting Tent City starting at the end of June 2008 for approximately three months. We hope the following information is helpful.

Q: What is Tent City?

Tent City is a group of homeless adults who share cooking and bathing facilities and sleep in tents. The managing agency is a non-profit organization called SHARE/WHEEL, (206) 448-7889. SHARE/WHEEL is the combined advocacy efforts of the Seattle-Housing and Resource Effort (SHARE) and the Women's Housing Equality and Enhancement League (WHEEL). According to SHARE/WHEEL, most of the residents have jobs and are temporarily in need of housing. Their length of stay varies, but many residents stay only a few months or less. The typical stay is about six weeks, but there is no limit, and persons can reside in Tent City for as long as they have need.

Tent City moves from location to location. The following cities have hosted Tent City: Shoreline (Shoreline Free Methodist at 510 NE 175th Street), Seattle, Burien, Bothell, Woodinville, Tukwila, Finn Hill, Kirkland (Kirkland Congregational Church, Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Kirkland Congregational Church and Lake Washington United Methodist Church), Bellevue (Temple B'nai Torah and Episcopal Church of the Resurrection), Redmond and Issaquah.

Q: Has there been an increase in crime associated with Tent City?

Cities that have hosted Tent City have reported no greater incidence of crime than in the general population. The City of Shoreline Police and Fire Departments will closely monitor the Tent City site and its impact on the surrounding neighborhood and will promptly respond to police, fire and medical assistance requests associated with Tent City.

Q: Can the City prohibit Tent City from locating in Shoreline?

No. There has been prior litigation involving Tent City when located in the cities of Seattle, Bothell, Kirkland and Bellevue in both King County Superior Court and the United States District Court. These decisions held that when a church wishes to use its property for the purpose of sheltering the homeless, this act constitutes religious expression and thus, is protected by both the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and Article 1, Section 11 of the Washington State Constitution. Although these same courts have recognized the government's legitimate interest in enforcing its land use regulations, there is a constitutional balancing test that the City must apply in imposing its regulations. An outright ban is unconstitutional.

Q. What can the City do to protect the residents?

Although the above described constitutional protections prohibit the City from imposing regulations that constitute a restraint on religious protection, the City does request that the church and SHARE/WHEEL apply for a Temporary Use Permit to regulate the encampment. This permit ensures the safe temporary use of the Church property and limits the duration of the homeless encampments to 90 days.

Q: Will there be an opportunity for the public to comment?

The Prince of Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church and SHARE/WHEEL were required to provide notice to property owners within 500 feet of the church and conduct a neighborhood public information meeting to answer questions. This meeting was held on June 19 at the church.

Q: What conditions will the City impose on the homeless encampment?

The church and SHARE/WHEEL will comply with Washington State and City codes concerning but not limited to drinking water connections, garbage, electrical systems, cooking and food handling and fire safety. SHARE/WHEEL requires its residents to comply with a Code of Conduct which has been incorporated into the Temporary Use Permit. This code includes a policy of no tolerance of drugs, alcohol or weapons, fighting of any kind, littering or disturbing neighbors. All residents must sign an agreement to abide by this Code of Conduct and failure to do so results in immediate expulsion.

Q: What presence will the police have at the site?

The City's number one goal regardless of the presence of Tent City is to ensure public safety for our entire community. We pledge City resources to properly monitor and respond to issues. Shoreline police officers will make regular, routine walk-throughs of the Tent City site so that they are familiar with the residents and the routines of the camp. If necessary, officers will conduct investigations and make arrests of those found to be in violation of criminal laws. Prior city hosts have found that Tent City has kept its commitment to self-police and self-manage its residents in accordance with its Code of Conduct. Prior to allowing individuals to stay at Tent City, encampment managers screen potential residents for outstanding warrants and sex offender status. No sex offenders are allowed to reside in Tent City. Residents form an Executive Committee that is responsible for site security, resident identification and donations management. One member of the Executive Committee is on duty, awake and available 24 hours per day.

Q: How does Tent City handle garbage and sanitation?

SHARE/WHEEL provides a dumpster for the handling of refuse and it is regularly collected. Regular patrols of Tent City residents monitor the streets and sidewalks to ensure they are kept clean. Many previous neighbors have commented on the cleanliness of their street during the tenure of a Tent City due to these regular patrols.

SHARE/WHEEL provides portable toilets sufficient to the needs of the residents which are regularly maintained. Hand washing stations are available adjacent to these toilets. King County Public Health performs site visits to inspect the maintenance and operations of the toilet facilities, garbage control, potable water, hand washing and safe food handling practices. City of Shoreline code requires that Tent City comply with all such regulations.

Q: Are open fires allowed? Is fire prevention equipment available on site?

No open fires are allowed at the camp. Fire extinguishers are on site and posted according to the directive of the Shoreline Fire Inspector. The Shoreline Fire Department will do an initial fire inspection and safety meeting at the camp and will be available assist with fire safety throughout their stay.

Q: How can I get more information?

For more information, please contact the Prince of Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church at (206) 363-8100.