

# River Street Campground—the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Speech to Santa Cruz Community and City Council by Robert Norse 4-24-18

I haven't been able to get past the gated barbed wire fence surrounding the River St. campground [RSC], previously called the "Boneyard" campground by none other than Susan O'Hara, the camp's ubermanager herself. But the ugly barbed wire, which O'Hara assured us they were "working on" fixing has been spruced up with some frilly colorful pennant flags recently. So that's nice.

There are good things about RSC. It provides a private tent for those few able to get into the campground. Privacy is an important component of dignity. It provides shuttle service for the few disabled in the campground, though its rules require everyone to use that shuttle service. The bad: walking in and out is reportedly banned. More bad: using the bus stop across the street is a no no. Bad strike three: visitors are not allowed at RSC. And, Susan's comments at City Council some weeks ago notwithstanding, there is no mechanism for communicating with RSC residents if you don't have a phone link-up or arrange an off-site meet.

The very good: you are allowed to be there all day. And are not thrown out in the early morning as is traditionally the case with Winter Shelter and the Association of Faith Communities rotating shelter. Unlike the Winter Shelter, there's no entry search.

Even more good: there is a place to store your possessions—for the few (60 or so) who are in the RSC. It would have been nice if the City kept its winter storage deal with activist Brent Adams. He arranged for winter storage for a much larger number of people, but that was abruptly stopped a few days before it was scheduled to open in early November.

The obvious bad: it only serves a fraction of those outside. It is not emergency shelter. It has a low turnover. Meanwhile, Chief Mills new District Policing system authorizes his Lieutenants to drive away the "loitering" poor outside during the day at the whim of morally challenged businesses and residents. Instead of the Sleeping Ban, cops and rangers use trespass, closed hours, and other convenient pretexts to harass.

In the unending housing crisis, HUFF has always favored campgrounds as emergency shelter. If homeless-run, it ends up being safer, more inclusive, and self-policing as the San Lorenzo campground was. Those currently outside without alternatives need to be left in peace by police. If the City had sense, they would supply trash containers, portapotties, and sharps containers. If not, it's up to the rest of us to meet the need.