

Santa Cruz RV-Dwellers Question Police Attention

Selections from a 1-18 Sentinel Story by Jessica York

SANTA CRUZ — In the four months since Alicia Kuhl, her partner and three children, ages 1, 3 and 5, moved into a 23-foot recreational vehicle, she has seen her life flip over.

“With an RV, they notice the second you roll in,” Kuhl said Friday, seated on a bench outside her vehicle and home. “I would think it would be a more nonchalant thing in this town, instead of automatically associated with homelessness.”

A month ago, Kuhl, who parks away from other RVs but not directly in front of homes, found a note left on her windshield citing city municipal code prohibiting overnight camping or sleeping in vehicles & telling her she was not welcome in the Westside neighborhood... During about an hour-long meeting Jan. 10 billed as a press conference in front of the police department, Mills heard & responded to speakers’ concerns.

72 hours

Kuhl and several of the activists gathered questioned Mills on honoring the city’s 72-hour parking policy that allows vehicles to remain in an otherwise unrestricted parking space legally.

...“If you see sewage, if you see heroin, if you’re witnessing domestic violence, absolutely call the police,” said Kuhl, 40. “If you see somebody just parking there, minding their own business, they might be making dinner for their kids — there’s no reason to call the police.”

Targeted?

“I have a really strong feeling that I’ve been talked to far more than have been complained about me, which would show a homeless targeted harassment,” Kuhl said to Mills about her interactions with his officers.

The day before, the department posted an [announcement on social media](#) about its December officer of the month award, presented to vehicle abatement officer Joe Haebe, for his work in 2018 tagging more than 2,000 vehicles for abatement and having 291 of them towed...

Mills told the group of about 20 people this month that he sympathized with their plights, saying that his job involves social order and finding a middle ground between the needs of people who are less fortunate and, for example, a group of 100 residents “screaming mad” about RVs that have dumped raw sewage and needles onto their residential streets. He suggested alternatives to parking on residential streets, such as working out one-on-one deals with private property owners and businesses to rent a space, or rent parking at the Kampgrounds of America in Watsonville.

Problematic parking

...Mills said his department tries to strike a balance between “towing people’s homes,” putting another person on the street and a “responsibility to my community” sending him hundreds of emails and complaints and calls. He said city and county leaders are seeking solutions for those struggling without housing, and that an effort to establish a local [safe-parking program](#) was “submarined.”

On Friday, Kuhl, who will seek appointment from the Santa Cruz City Council to a seat on the city of Santa Cruz’s Parks & Recreation Commission on Tuesday, said she believes what the city really needs is a new standing homeless commission. The body, comprised of non-property owners such as renters and homeless people, could make city policy recommendations on spending recommendations, long-term programs, safe parking options & more, she said.

The Vandwellers Meet the Police Chief: Relearning Sad Facts

Selections from an on-line story by Robert Norse 1-16-19

Alice Kuhl, a mother of 3 who lives in her RV in Santa Cruz, asked SCPD Chief of police Andy Mills some hard questions last week. Kuhl challenged what she termed harassment by hostile homeowners and SCPD's vehicle abatement enforcer Joe Haebe. She noted lack of support from Mills SCPD complaints line and sought assurance from Mills. She got none.

WHY THE PRESS CONFERENCE—BACKGROUND: Particularly at issue for Kuhl & other houseless folks was harassment actions by enforcement officers like Joe Haebe ignoring their right to park on public streets for 72 hours unmolested. She asked Mills to instruct his officers to respect that 72-hour window, which, she and other vandwellers said, they took care to not overstay. Mills insisted he had a responsibility to investigate all complaints and praised Haebe's work in "tagging and towing". " Over the past year, Joe has fielded hundreds of calls, tagged more than 2,000 vehicles for abatement, and towed 291 vehicles."

MILLS UNRESPONSIVE; WHAT'S NEEDED?: Mills did not respond to requests that he instruct officers not to "take the side" of the homeowner, & view repeated "get this vehicle out of my neighborhood" style calls, skeptically...Mills needs to require officers to limit themselves to determining if a vehicle has overstayed 72-hours (which he said police can do through an undisclosed system). And to hold those complaining about the vehicles accountable for false police reports (a misdemeanor). Kuhl claimed earlier that she was obstructed in her attempt to determine the identity of those complaining about her vehicle and the specifics of their complaints.

OTHER QUESTIONS; THE FINAL RESULT: Vandweller Veronica Crow noted the appearance all over town of "permit parking only" signs that ban parking at night without a permit--a specifically anti-homeless provision since they can't get such permits. Is Mills explicitly advising callers complaining that vehicles have a right to remain for 72 hours? Are his cops notifying them that filing a false police report is a misdemeanor? Is he looking into the claims that his "go to" guy Haebe is engaging in "hunting expeditions"? No answers.

Mills sympathized that those in vehicles are only going to face street homelessness if his cops vigorously persecute vehicles at the instigation of neighbors. However he explicitly refused to offer a change in any policies, some of which are discretionary. He may agree that police have higher priorities than removing them because of the aesthetic preferences or unfounded fears of residents. ...If he refuses to rein in those abuses, the buck stops with him.

INACTION AND HYPOCRISY: Other issues raised were the crying need for a carpark. Mills sympathized but declined to offer any public advocacy. He also suggested folks leave town and go to campgrounds (costly) and ask churches and businesses for parking space (largely unsuccessful in the past).

His general response was "our job is to enforce the law" and "take your concerns to the City Council." ... Last Sunday Mills wrote an editorial for the Sentinel, apologizing for other abusive police departments, but ignoring concerns about his own. He also announced joint sponsorship of a Martin Luther King day march with the NAACP on Monday the 21st.

Full article can be found at <https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2019/01/16/18820421.php>

Flier by HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom) 423-4833 www.huffsantacruz.org 309 Cedar PMB #14B S.C 1-21-19