

## A Concerned Community Member Replies to City Cruelty

From an e-mail;sent by Peter Gelblum to City Manager Martin Bernal. Gelblum is Director of the Santa Cruz chapter of the *American Civil Liberties Union* but this flyer does not necessarily represent the *ACLU* position.

All - I have read the December 17 Memorandum and Order ("Order") from Messrs. Elliot and Bernal to the City Council and the Parks and Recreation Commission regarding the "temporary" closure of San Lorenzo Park, and the consequent eviction of the approximately 200 unhoused people living there. I urge you in the strongest possible terms not to do this, for several reasons.

1. Even if all the reasons provided in the Order were true, which they are not, there is no shelter available for these 200 Santa Cruz residents. The only immediately available shelter is at the Armory, and there are generally **0-5 spots** available there each night. Getting long-term shelter requires being on a waiting list that generally takes **at least three months** to provide a shelter spot. **Where do you expect these people to go?** The Order cites the cost of cleaning Pogonip. The cost is going to be incurred wherever these residents relocate.

2. The Order is especially cruel and ironic, because in recent weeks, SCPD officers and others have swept many other large and small camps and told the people who were forced to move to go to San Lorenzo Park. Officers have even taken unhoused people to the Park.

3. Sweeping this large camp **directly violates numerous aspects of the CDC guidelines** regarding homeless people during the pandemic ( <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html> ), including this: "If individual housing options are not available, allow people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are. **Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread.**"

4. Contrary to the speculative claim in the Order, the Park is not & never has been a COVID hot-spot. I am not aware of a single COVID case being reported there, likely because the residents live outside.

5. Contrary to the statement in the Order, the encampment at San Lorenzo Park is extremely clean. We have video evidence to prove this. To the extent that there is trash buildup, that is because the City has failed to pick up the collected and bagged trash frequently enough.

6. The City has closed all or almost all public restrooms and provided only two portable toilets for the entire campground. There are insufficient options for toilet use.

7. Many of the stated justifications in the Order are so vague and general as to be meaningless, including "City staff is aware of theft of City tools and supplies" [from where, what tools and supplies?]; "the site has been host to fires and fire safety issues" [what issues?]; "encampments are attached to trees, likely damaging those trees" [likely? doubtful]; "branches from the City's trees have been incorporated into encampment structures" [so what?].

Please use both common sense and decency and stop this grave mistake before it starts. At an absolute minimum, delay the closure until there are sufficient shelter beds for everyone who wants them.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this serious situation.