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Date: 03/04/2016 11:42 PM
Subject: Re: Warrant Article 24-Camping on Public Property

Hi everyone,

I just wanted to follow-up on Christine Carney's message about Warrant Article 24 - Camping on Public Property. I have read through [the supporting materials](#) Town Counsel submitted for the Feb. 10 Board of Selectmen meeting and watched the archived footage of the meeting. Clearly, everyone involved has the best intentions for providing a safe and pleasant experience for everyone in our Town.

I am concerned that the conversation at the BOS meeting about public camping was short and incomplete. I know that the Police and Health & Human Services worked with Town Counsel on this recommendation, but since that process wasn't detailed at the meeting and no one from the Police or HHS spoke that evening, it's unclear what that whole process looked like. That makes it difficult to decide whether to support the recommendation.

Arresting people and/or pushing them out of our Town because they are living unhoused is a worrying proposition. So I feel it's AHRC's duty to examine the process leading to the BOS vote in favor of the proposed bylaw change. I would like to know about the kinds of information gathered from other towns about how they have successfully addressed similar issues around safety and homelessness. And I want to make sure that adequate input has been sought from well-established innovative programs serving homeless populations and from LGBTQIA, mental-health, and intimate-partner abuse survivor advocates regarding this issue.

At the Feb. 10 meeting, Mr. Heim and Ms. Mahon mentioned allegations of rape and other violence at the homeless encampment by Alewife. I'm glad that those concerns are taken seriously. But it's also important to weigh problems in an encampment against similar issues in shelters, especially if referrals to shelters are the only assistance we're offering. (Perhaps we're offering more? But I have no information about that here, which is why I think additional discussion is necessary.)

For example, some people avoid shelters because of past experiences of sexual assault and other violence. And although discrimination and harassment against the trans and gender non-conforming population is now illegal in Massachusetts, that law is still fairly new. Area shelters have ongoing work to adequately train employees regarding the issue, and we can't minimize people's trauma regarding past problems. I am very concerned that we ensure that the "alternatives" we are pushing people toward are actually safer and more welcoming than where they are currently.

I am not an expert on these issues, and I am very much in support of a standard set of procedures regarding helping the unsheltered population. I just want to make sure that we're approaching the very serious issue of housing insecurity with kindness, stacks and stacks of information, and a variety of techniques and options.

Before the BOS makes a final decision about approving specific wording for this proposed bylaw change, can we have a longer discussion? Perhaps police clinician Rebecca Wolfe and someone from HHS can speak at the BOS meeting before the final vote?

Many of the specific concerns mentioned here are my own. AHRC as a whole, however, feels that criminalizing homelessness goes against Arlington's core values. We urge all parties involved to find a compassionate and responsible way to address the concerns behind this warrant article. Because the safety OF the homeless population is a much more common problem than safety FROM them.

I look forward to further discussion of this important matter.

Thanks,
Mel

Mel Goldsipe
(she/her)
[Human Rights Commissioner](#), Arlington, Massachusetts

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-----Original Message-----

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Date: Fri, 04 Mar 2016 11:02:45 -0500
Subject: Warrant Article 24-Camping on Public Property

Dear Board of Selectmen,

The Arlington Human Rights Commission has some serious concerns regarding Warrant Article 24-Camping on Public Property. We strongly feel that this bylaw amendment does not address the issue of homelessness we feel precipitated this warrant article. If passed it will essentially punish people for being homeless, and will not do anything to address and solve the issue.

As you will be discussing this article at the upcoming Board of Selectmen meeting. We would like an opportunity to voice our concerns at the meeting.

Thank you,

Christine Carney

Attachments:

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File: [ATT00003.html](#) (Shown Inline) Size: 12k Content Type: text/html