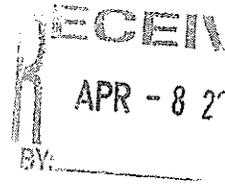


DATE: February 26, 2019
TO: Greenbelt City Council
CC: Nicole Ard, City Manager
Acting Capt. Seung Lee, Greenbelt Police Department Liaison
Mary Johnson, City Liaison
FROM: Public Safety Advisory Committee
Dr. Laura Kressler, Chair
SUBJECT: Vagrancy and Loitering Issues Within the City



Vagrancy issues have progressively become a frequent topic of conversation, as well as an increasing management issue for the City, the Police Department and for businesses within the City in the last year or so. The Public Safety Advisory Committee has been following the various developments with interest and concern. The committee decided to take a look at the issue and determine if there were any recommendations they could make towards resolving or at least ameliorating some of the issues.

As the Council is more than aware, addressing vagrancy and its associated issues of homelessness and mental health disorders is both a complex and delicate matter with no easy solutions. It appears during the last year or so that the main complaints deal with persons sleeping in public areas overnight or even during the day and persons camping out with all their belongings in certain areas at all times of day. This happens currently at Roosevelt Center and has previously been an issue near the Municipal Building and the Community Center. The PSAC received specific complaints from the Roosevelt Merchants Association at their meeting on November 13, 2018.

The committee met with representatives from the Roosevelt Center Merchants Association including Caitlin McGrath, Sharon Natoli, and Lauren Cummings on behalf of Gretchen Schock, and discussed their experiences in dealing with vagrancy and loitering within Roosevelt. Ms. McGrath from the Old Greenbelt Theatre reported a number of problems, including one man who was sleeping on a bench in front of the Greenbelt Theatre and who eventually progressed to occupying two benches. At the time of our meeting, she reported that this man had been sleeping in Roosevelt Center for about a month. Ms. McGrath also reported that approximately 3-6 people

cc Nick, Chanel, Todd, EM

loiter in Roosevelt Center every day. Some of these people apparently sleep in the woods, but some "roll up in a carpet" and sleep under the overhang at the Maker Space periodically. Ms. McGrath also reported that the Maker Space appears to have made an extension cord available in front of their business to allow people to charge their cell phones. Additionally, they have placed carpets or other materials out in front of the business for people to use to protect them from the cold ground. Ms. McGrath feels that these actions only serve to encourage more people to loiter in Roosevelt Center and to even sleep there at night.

Lauren Cummings presented the PSAC with a letter on behalf of Gretchen Schock from Bee Yoga Fusion (see Addendum). Ms. Schock reported that her clients have questioned why someone is allowed to erect "a camp" and sleep outside in the town center. Ms. Schock stated that her clients should feel safe attending classes at her business and that having individuals hidden under tarps outside the business door does not elicit that feeling. She also stated this is having a negative impact on tax-paying businesses and that Roosevelt Center businesses are being treated differently than businesses in privately owned developments such as Greenway Center and Beltway Plaza where she felt this behavior would not be tolerated.

The Public Safety Advisory Committee has been asked by the businesses to address this issue. After extensive discussion, the PSAC met with Theresa Smithson from Greenbelt CARES to learn more about vagrancy, loitering and homelessness issues during our October 2, 2018 meeting. She reinforced the facts that had been shared with the committee by PSAC members Matthew Inzeo, a Prince George's County Police Officer and Stan Zirkin, a retired lawyer. Individuals who are chronically loitering for the purpose of sleeping on public property or are simply hanging around all day cannot be removed simply because they are loitering or even because they happen to have a mental illness unless they are a danger to themselves or others or they have broken the law in some way such as being disorderly or openly using drugs or alcohol. Currently, the Maryland State laws do not make it easy to regulate loitering or vagrancy. Without a change to the State laws or at least City ordinances, there is no current "easy fix" for this issue and even with changes to laws and ordinances will remain a delicate and complicated issue.

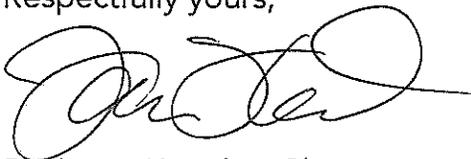
This information brought us back to the problem at hand in the City. How do we address these issues? The PSAC currently feels that one important step would be to create uniform rules or ordinances for the use of public spaces such as Roosevelt Center, Buddy Attick Lake Park, Schrom Hills Park and other facilities within the City to the extent that this is possible given the respective uses of each facility.

Posting clear rules at each location is a good solid start to discouraging unwanted behaviors since it gives all users of the space a clearly defined list of prohibited behavior. As such, rules such as "No Sleeping", "No Camping", etc. could be added to the posted rules for each site such as Roosevelt Center. Roosevelt Center currently has only a few posted rules such as "No Skateboarding" or "No Smoking" in the Center. While these are important rules for safety or health concerns, prohibiting sleeping and camping would seem to be equally, if not more important, rules. Currently, there are far more rules posted at the City Dog Park than any of the people-oriented public facilities.

Additionally, using methods to discourage people from sleeping on benches within the City parks or public rights-of-way could also continue to be used as has been done to benches in and around the public library and Municipal building. Additionally, depending on where private property stops and City property begins in Roosevelt Center, the City could pass an ordinance prohibiting businesses from providing concessions that would make it easier for people to sleep in the Center. This may be easier to accomplish if City property begins right outside each businesses' door.

The Public Safety Advisory Committee recognizes that this is an issue that will be ongoing and that no magic bullets are available to solve this issue outright. It will take creativity, flexibility and patience on the part of the City, the City Police Department, business owners and City residents in solving or at least minimizing the impact these issues have in the future.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Kressler', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Laura Kressler, Chair
Public Safety Advisory Committee