

To Whom It May Concern:

Hello,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I would like to bring the situation regarding Camp Rhonda in Deep Ellum to your attention.

The city is currently attempting to forcefully evict the occupants of Camp Rhonda, without offering any alternative solution for housing. Camp Rhonda is an encampment of over 25 houseless people in Deep Ellum. After one of their neighbors died of dehydration, malnutrition, and exposure, the residents came together to form a community in which they could protect and care for each other. They have been living on this property with the permission of the owner for over 6 months. The residents keep their things in order, clean their portion of the street and walkways, and do not cause any disturbances in the area. Camp Rhonda serves as a vital connection point for the local community to very efficiently funnel resources to dozens of people in desperate need for support. Many of them do their best to work with organizations in the area that offer solutions for homelessness.

In the past, Code Compliance has issued citations for minor infractions -such as leaves and litter- all of which are not on Camp Rhonda's property. As a result of these concerns and citations, numerous organizations volunteer to regularly assist the residents in keeping things tidy and sanitary. We are one of these organizations.

Currently, the specific code violation being brought against the camp is "Illegal Land Use", citing that the lot is zoned for industrial use. The people staying in this space are there with the owner's permission, the owner's sole intention being to give the members a stable, safe place to sleep, free from violence, instability, sweeps, and the consequences of 'loitering' without having anywhere else to go, and, in doing so, has created a functioning, clean solution for many of the more negative aspects of homelessness, which should be seen as positive for all potentially involved.

Per the current citation, residents have been given a mere ten days to vacate before the owner receives large fines, which is nowhere near an adequate amount of time to relocate. Housing and safety should be our city's priority, especially in the middle of one of the deadliest pandemics to date. We feel the city should consider it their duty to not only support us in helping Camp Rhonda to remain available to its members, but, likewise, the city should remove the financial consequences for the property owner, as the owner is generously providing a creative and helpful solution to a very real problem.

Potential solutions include:

- Housing for residents at no charge
- Removal of citations and further harassment
- Financial sponsorship of residents for basic necessities (i.e., food, clean water, cellular devices, identification, etc.)
- Leaving the camp as is and allowing the residents and organizations involved to work together to provide solutions for the effects of homelessness
- Zoning changes to allow the residents to stay on the property
- Committing to stopping the removal of unhoused citizens' property and sweeps

This eviction is immoral and unjust. It is also, as mentioned before, not even realistic or humane in terms of its timeframe. There is currently a moratorium in effect until March that protects the unhoused from violent sweeps and the confiscation of their property. This situation is no different, and there is no real reason this moratorium should not be honored in this case. As elected officials, you have both the power to support us in keeping our community safe and healthy, and the responsibility to make sure their needs are met. We are asking that you halt the eviction of these people and remove the violation. Otherwise, your responsibility as a government -and as an evictor- would be to provide equal OR more adequate housing. If these people are to be evicted, I ask you: Where do you expect them to go? The houseless shelters have reached capacity and this camp is the safest space for them. The people involved in this community truly care about Camp Rhonda and its surrounding neighborhood and will continue to work hard to ensure its success. We would be happy to discuss what this can mean for the immediate future, but we would also like to let it be known that we will not cease to continue to work toward/fight for a fair solution. We implore you to extend basic empathy to these people and fight for them along with us.

Thank you,

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