

Homeless need housing, not arguments

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Seattle citizens are demanding a better response to homelessness than just allowing people to camp everywhere.

It's time for Seattle City Council members to put their differences aside, start working together and focus on getting homeless people off the streets and into permanent housing. These past few weeks of public arguments about homeless encampments in parks have not been constructive and have not brought anyone out of the cold.

The city has a plan called "Pathways Home" to quickly move people into permanent housing. Let's focus on that worthy goal and not on which City Council member or which neighborhood cares more about the needy.

City Council proposals to give people the right to camp on city park property are essentially moot at this point and should be tabled. Mayor Ed Murray signed an executive order that will set up a few temporary homeless camps with porta-potties, garbage collection and outreach services.

Citizens held up signs at a council meeting about a week ago that said it all: "Housing, not camping." Since then, more than 21,000 people have signed an online petition against the City Council's camping plan.

The council and city administrators should now focus their energy on implementing Pathways Home.

The city should get people inside this winter and work to keep families housed through city programs that do things like help people pay an overdue power bill. Rapid rehousing is cheaper and more humane than homeless camps or long-term shelters. Other programs such as supportive housing for people with chronic problems like alcoholism, drug addictions and mental illness are very expensive but still more cost-effective in the long-term, saving money on hospital visits, for example.

Working with other governments throughout King County, the city of Seattle really can make a dent in homelessness. But officials have to stick to the solutions that actually work and not bow to pressure from well-meaning, but mistaken council members and advocates who think the main thing homeless people need is a place to pitch their tents.

By the way, Councilmember Kshama Sawant was out of line when she wrote in a Facebook post that those citizens who disagreed with the camp-everywhere plan were "anti-homeless" and "anti-poor." Those who spoke out against the council plan were also advocating for other housing options. All viewpoints should be welcome at City Council meetings. Broadcasting the message that citizens will be called uncaring if they disagree with the council's actions is not going to encourage more citizen involvement in government.

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