



August 8, 2024

Chico City Council Shuts the Door on Negotiations

On Tuesday the Chico City Council refused an offer from Legal Services of Northern California (LSNC) and their unhoused clients in *Warren v Chico*. The offer would allow the City to enforce all anti-camping ordinances with no more than a three-day notice, while maintaining the practice of ensuring adequate shelter is available, including a site at a location of the City's choosing for individuals who do not qualify for any indoor shelter.

While the City did not make any information publicly available on Tuesday, the letter from LSNC outlining their offer and the response from the City Council majority are public records and I am attaching them with this statement.

The decision to refuse negotiation on any of the requests of LSNC reveals that this is not about the ability to clean parks; it is about the ability to deny services.

If we criminalize sleep for people who have no shelter to go to, either the public pays to house them in jail or they go to sleep some place else. If you criminalize camping everywhere you in effect allow camping anywhere. When the best hope for peace is in hiding, the safest places become the deepest ravines with the densest vegetation. This is a formula for fire and trash in our green spaces.

In Tuesday's closed session meeting, I made a plea for us to retain the reasonable practices brought about by the *Warren* Settlement Agreement: outreach and engagement with social work professionals, assessment and offer of adequate shelter, and a guarantee that the Pallet Shelter stays open, maintained, and available to the majority of unhoused people in the Chico community.

Throughout the shadowy process of managing public policy on homelessness, I have found some of my colleagues on the Council motivated by a genuine resentment of the poor and those who defend them, and others by a belief that uncompromising repression is simply what the majority of Chico

voters want. Even so, my repeated attempts to hold a public discussion on the questions facing our community are refused. It is a gross disservice to the public nature of our jobs as elected officials.

In this direction to refuse negotiations the City is committing to an uncertain legal battle which will exhaust city resources and those of the only legal defense organization in Chico that freely serves seniors and low-income tenants facing unlawful abuse by landlords.

In this direction the City offers no practical solution to homelessness in the near or long term. It is a pander to the reflex of selfishness and the lazy conviction that Chico cannot have our parks be for everybody and our dignity too.

This is a period of Chico's history that will survive in infamy, just as we look back with shame on the persecution and expulsion of the Chico Chinese.

The cause of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing. It has been aggravated by the disappearance of mental health services, the opioid epidemic, and wildfires destroying a significant portion of the affordable housing stock in Butte County. The only long term solution to homelessness is a broad-based public enterprise to reverse the housing shortage and develop a social service system fit for the needs in our community.

There is no just or democratic way forward without moving these discussions into the public realm and my priority continues to be that the City Council consider and review these decisions with public participation in open session.

Addison Winslow
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