



To: The Honorable Michael B. Hancock
From: Undersigned Denver City Councilmembers and State Legislators
Subject: Temporary Safe Outdoor Space for those remaining outdoors during the COVID-19 Outbreak
Date: 24 April 2020

Dear Mayor Hancock,

Thank you for your bold leadership to protect our community during the COVID-19 crisis. While tough, we know that the stay-at-home and social distancing orders have helped prevent the spread and saved lives among many of our residents. Similarly, we appreciate your administration's leadership and support for measures that have protected those experiencing homelessness through auxiliary shelter that allows social spacing throughout the shelter system, and through hotel and other rooms for those who are sick or most at risk.

We write to ask the Administration to now move toward reducing risk of spread of the virus among those who remain outdoors for a variety of reasons, including couples, who are still unable to access even our improved 24/7 shelters. These individuals may not be able to maintain appropriate social distancing and have limited access to restrooms and handwashing. Our community also lacks any system for health screening individuals sleeping on the street, or for referring them for the life-saving hotels and/or health care services being delivered to others experiencing homelessness. These gaps heighten the public health risk for these individuals and for our broader community with whom they interact and share spaces.

We support the proposed collaboration with community partners to open a Temporary Safe Outdoor Space where those who have not been using shelter can be better protected in a safe, healthy, secure environment that provides access to the resources required to slow the spread of the virus. We as a City have never failed to try to improve conditions for as many individuals as possible, even when we aren't yet able to reach everyone. The Temporary Safe Outdoor Space could serve 50 to 100 individuals at one time, with a likely greater reach as individuals are screened and referred to other medical care, hotels, or even housing solutions making space for new occupants. That is 50, 100 or more lives that can be protected directly. Reduced transmission will matter not only to them, but to the 4+ individuals anyone with the virus could infect.

We support a Temporary Safe Outdoor Space based on our city's long standing values, including values receiving more emphasis in this crisis:

- 1) **Evidence-based health practices** where advice comes first and foremost from medical experts, not political positions, including utilization of harm reduction and risk mitigation where 100% protection from transmission (or other health risks) cannot be guaranteed,

- 2) **Equity for those who have historically been disadvantaged** or unable to access the same opportunities as others, including the many individuals of color, gender non-confirming or LGBTQ folks, or those with mental disabilities that are over-represented among our unsheltered neighbors, and
- 3) **Expanding access to housing stability**, which in the case of street homelessness begins with developing relationships of trust and sustained contact with individuals over time to help them get assessed under the OneHome system and considered for solutions that may range from.

The proposal from Colorado Village Collaborative, Interfaith Alliance, and their service provider partners advances all three of these values. We ask you to evaluate the community partnership proposal from new perspectives, in light of the risk of inaction during this crisis, and with the advice and expertise of the health experts upon which we are all required to rely during this crisis. When this crisis hit, we didn't stop in our tracks because we didn't have the mass testing or PPE that we needed and should have had. Instead, you governed to the best of your ability to reduce risk with the best, limited tools you had, such as social distancing and stay at home orders. We can all agree that we should be housing all who need homes or that we wish those without homes would be sheltered inside. But in the exact same way, **we cannot fail to act to prevent foreseeable and predictable harm of the spread of this virus among those who are unsheltered because our preferred path of being inside is not the reality for every individual experiencing homelessness.**

The City has proven over the past 6 weeks how nimble and effective we can be in a crisis. In addition to your support refining and supporting the proposal for Temporary Safe Outdoor Space, we ask you to work with the partners to leverage existing city assets and contracts wherever possible to complement the private fundraising that is already underway to support this effort. With asks the City to help with land, permitting/waivers as needed, relocating handwashing stations, leveraging other facility contracts for restrooms and/or showers, city security contracts or other support.

The SOS proposed to you by the Interfaith Alliance, as well as CVC, was explicitly designed to protect the health and wellbeing of both the individuals who will be served as well as the broader Denver community during the current global pandemic. **If for any reason you review this plan through Denver's values, in consultation with medical expertise, and you believe another plan can better protect individuals and public health, then it is incumbent upon the City to advance such a plan.** We must all agree that inaction and maintaining the status quo in light of the risk is not acceptable. The truth of our deep interdependence has never been more obvious than it is right now. Thank you for your consideration. Please support a Temporary Safe Outdoor Space in Denver for the duration of our present Public Health emergency.

Respectfully,

Councilmember Robin Kniech
Councilmember Candi CdeBaca
Councilmember Amanda Sandoval
Councilmember Jamie Torres

Councilmember Paul Kashmann
Councilmember Stacie Gilmore
Councilmember Debbie Ortega
Councilmember Chris Hinds
Senator Julie Gonzales
Representative Steven Woodrow
Representative Emily Sirota
Representative Serena Gonzales-Gutierrez
Representative Susan Lontine

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