



COMO MOBILE AID COLLECTIVE

COMAC STATEMENT ON CAMP CLEARINGS
MARCH 16, 2023

CoMo Mobile Aid Collective echoes the sentiment of many concerned citizens in regards to the living conditions of our neighbors staying in camps around the city. We, along with others, have asked the city for assistance in managing this situation, but so far there has been no forward momentum over the years except to move “the problem” along to other properties.

As stated on the official city website, the city’s vision is for Columbia to be “the best place for everyone to live, work, learn and play.” Their mission is “to serve the public equitably through democratic, transparent and efficient government.” The city’s Public Health & Human Services Division’s webpage states that their vision is “optimal health, safety, and well-being for all” and their mission is to “promote and protect the health, safety, and well-being of the community through leadership, partnership, and service.”

The solutions to assist those experiencing homelessness must be as varied as the humans that are involved—every person has a different story, experience, and path. CoMo Mobile Aid Collective asks that the city, media, and private citizens approach this issue with empathy and an open mind.

The current reality in Columbia is that there are not enough options or resources for the people who need them, no matter what some people seem to be insisting. The list for getting housing through the voucher system is incredibly long and complicated. There are very few local landlords that will accept vouchers and even fewer that will allow renters with pets. And many folks experiencing homelessness are not prepared to make a 12-month lease commitment and take on the responsibilities required of managing a home, bills, etc. The only no-barrier shelter, Room at the Inn, has done an incredible job helping people survive the winter, but will close for the season on April 1. The Opportunity Campus is still years away, so that can’t be part of today’s conversation.

We recognize that the trash and sanitation issues are valid concerns. We encourage city leaders and the public to seek solutions that are humane, immediate, practical, and inflict as little trauma as possible onto those involved. The reality is that being forced out of your “home,” no matter what that “home” looks like, is traumatic and anxiety-inducing. What does one do when there is nowhere to go?

Some simple solutions involve providing dumpsters/trash services, water, and hygiene stations to the wooded areas where folks are living until more options are available. Other steps would be to provide land with managed services on which neighbors could camp. Many cities are providing or working with private entities on micro-villages where people can access more sturdy shelters provided by small pop-up living spaces or trailers. Columbia has many people living in their vehicles; a parking area with trash, water, and hygiene services for those in that position would be helpful. The financial implications of these solutions would likely be minimal in comparison to the expenses accrued in hiring contractors to evict and clean up camps, and the impact living without basic needs has on our healthcare system.

The topic of homelessness is complex and cannot be fixed immediately or without considering various options. CoMo Mobile Aid Collective believes in the power of community and hopes we can work together to create solutions that can be positive for everyone involved. Let’s move this conversation forward and live up to our vision of being the best place for folks to live and be well.

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