

The District • Downtown Community Improvement District  
11 S. Tenth Street • Columbia, Missouri 65201 • (573) 442-6816  
[discoverthedistrict.com](http://discoverthedistrict.com)

May 27, 2026

Mayor and City Council  
City of Columbia  
701 East Broadway  
P.O. Box 6015  
Columbia, Mo 65205

Honorable Mayor Buffaloe and City Council Members,

On behalf of The District, we respectfully request that the City of Columbia begin developing a clear, publicly accessible, and enforceable Urban Camping Ordinance for our community.

This request is not about criminalizing homelessness. It is about creating clarity, consistency, safety, and compassion for both those experiencing homelessness and the broader community navigating growing concerns related to public camping, obstruction of sidewalks, encampments, and sanitation issues.

Currently, existing ordinances appear fragmented, broad, and difficult to locate or interpret. This creates confusion for residents, businesses, law enforcement, outreach providers, and individuals seeking services.

Communities across Missouri and the nation are reevaluating how they address unsheltered homelessness in public spaces. Local agencies and regional homelessness counts continue to show rising needs and strained shelter capacity in mid-Missouri.

A well-crafted ordinance would help Columbia:

- Clearly define prohibited camping and sleeping activities on public property
- Establish transparent standards for enforcement and outreach
- Protect sidewalks, parks, businesses, and shared public spaces
- Improve sanitation and public health conditions
- Create clearer pathways toward shelter, treatment, and support services
- Ensure consistency for city staff, outreach workers, businesses, and residents

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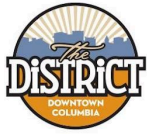
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Importantly, we strongly encourage the City to pair any ordinance with compassionate diversion and outreach measures, including warnings, shelter referrals when available, mental health and substance-use outreach, and coordination with service providers. Many communities have adopted tiered enforcement models that prioritize education and voluntary compliance before citations or penalties.

We respectfully request that the City Council direct staff to review existing ordinances, identify gaps and enforcement challenges, research best practices from peer cities, and work with stakeholders to draft a clear Urban Camping Ordinance for public discussion and consideration.

Additionally, as the City of Columbia, the University of Missouri, and The District begin implementation of the new Block by Block Safety Ambassador program, it is increasingly important that ordinances related to public spaces, camping, sleeping, obstruction, and quality-of-life concerns are clearly written and easy to understand. The Safety Ambassadors are intended to help de-escalate situations, connect individuals to services, and support public safety efforts before situations escalate to emergency response. Clear ordinances will help ensure transparency, consistency, and the long-term success of this partnership.

Downtown Columbia is one of the economic and cultural hearts of our community. Ensuring public spaces remain safe, welcoming, accessible, and compassionate benefits everyone — including those currently experiencing housing instability.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nickie Davis', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Nickie Davis  
Executive Director  
Downtown Community Improvement District

This letter is supported by more than 70 Downtown Columbia businesses and organizations. A complete list of supporters is attached.