

## **LWVSA Statement on Spokane City Camping Ordinances**

Over the last two years the League of Women Voters of the Spokane Area (LWVSA) has made recommendations to the Spokane City Council, concerning the unsheltered residents of our city. We have made three specific recommendations.

- 1) Secure sufficient low-barrier 24/7 shelter beds, including meals, for unsheltered individuals.
- 2) Provide places for unsheltered individuals to go during the day that are warm and dry.
- 3) Provide sanctioned public places with trash disposal, toilets, and hand washing facilities, where those experiencing homelessness can set up tents and/or park their vehicles.

Currently we are most concerned about the third recommendation. The two proposals that have been submitted, for revisions to the camping ordinance, present varying rules that outline not only where the unsheltered cannot rest, but also deem these places illegal. Both proposals will restrict camping from:

- 1) Within 100 feet of railroad viaducts
- 2) Within 35 feet of the Spokane River or Latah Creek
- 3) All city parks and city-owned property
- 4) Within 3 blocks of any congregate shelter

The mayor's proposal goes further and expands these restrictions "to include the boundaries of the Business Improvement District and the downtown police precinct."

The focus of both proposals is on where residents CANNOT GO. We prefer the focus be put on where the unsheltered CAN safely and

legally live while they engage with service providers to gain access to housing, employment, and other support. Charles Durrett, a noted expert on affordable, socially responsible, and sustainable design, during a recent visit to the Spokane community, pointed out that the city and county own over 20 properties that could be immediately put to use for the needs of the unsheltered. We strongly urge both City Council and Mayor Woodward to present options including but not limited to the 20 identified by Charles Durrett where the unsheltered can legally exist.

We agree that ideally people experiencing homelessness should not “camp” in front of downtown businesses, rights of way, or in public parks. However, our elected officials need to FIRST inform these individuals where they CAN live while they engage with service providers, obtain the necessary ID’s, and wait for housing to become available instead of updating ordinances to tell them where they CAN NOT live while in transition.

The unsheltered in our community need places where they can rest, exist, and survive without fear of legal consequences or harassment. We recommend that identified places where the unhoused can legally exist should include trash disposal, restrooms, and hand washing facilities. Ideally, these locations would also provide these unhoused individuals with showers, laundry, storage and parking for vehicles and RVs.