



December 15, 2021

Mayor Nadine Woodward
Council President Breean Beggs
Council Members Michael Cathcart, Kate Burke, Lori Kinnear, Betsy Wilkerson, Karen Stratton,
Candace Mumm

The League of Women Voters of the Spokane Area (LWVSA) recommends the city take the following actions:

- 1) Substantially increase low-barrier 24/7 shelter bed capacity, including meals, for unsheltered individuals.
- 2) Provide additional day centers for unsheltered individuals to go where it is safe, warm, and dry.
- 3) Provide sanctioned public places (“safe ground” facilities) with trash disposal, restrooms, and handwashing facilities-where those experiencing homelessness can set-up tents and/or park vehicles.
- 4) Create and maintain a public-facing web-based dashboard which communicates real-time low-barrier shelter bed availability.

As of December 2021, there are only 449 low-barrier shelter beds available in Spokane County-almost 100 less than the number that was available last year. Women’s beds have decreased by 43 and Co-ed/Mixed shelter bed capacity has decreased by 102. Further, the 449 low-barrier beds are in stark contrast to the 1,559 individuals experiencing homelessness counted in the January 2020 Point in Time Count and the 5,400 unhoused individuals counted by the Department of Commerce over the same time period.

In recent month, the Spokane Police Department (SPD) has increased its efforts to seek out encampments of unsheltered individuals to impel them to relocate and engage with services, commonly known as “sweeping.” In addition, the City has substantially increased the number of citations it issues for misdemeanors, such as pedestrian interference.

This past summer the City approved \$500,000 for 10 seasonal employees for graffiti abatement, illegal encampment enforcement, and litter removal. The 2022 Proposed Budget includes \$1 Million to make these 10 positions permanent.

Individuals experiencing homelessness who are consistently forced to relocate, **without adequate alternative shelter options**, are repeatedly traumatized, creating an impossibility of existence where simply living and being is criminalized. Further, unsheltered individuals need **places to go during the day when many of the shelters are closed**.


The LWVSA appreciates that the 2022 budget includes \$4.3M for a new emergency shelter, although it most likely will not be operational until the winter months have passed. The LWVSA was disappointed that due to staffing shortages in the CHHS department this summer, the city was forced to skip the HOME request for proposals this year, which would have provided more than \$1 million in funding for low-income housing residents.

The LWVSA agrees with the Spokane Business & Commercial Property Council's (SBCPC) proposal that the City create a "safe ground" facility as a short-term strategy to immediately provide shelter for all men and women living on the streets. The SBCPC offers Modesto, California, as a model where they were able to immediately move 400 individuals off the streets, where they were being swept daily, to a sanctioned area with security, bathrooms and showers.

Finally, the City has been promising to provide a public-facing dashboard that contains real-time low-barrier shelter bed availability, but this has yet to materialize. In fact, Spokane Municipal Code 18.05.030, which was passed on July 26, 2021, requires that the city do just that. In recent days, outreach workers and CHHS employees can't agree on the number of low-barrier beds. This dashboard would ensure that everyone has access to the same data, which would help individuals experiencing homelessness access available beds.

Because Spokane does not have the ability to provide for the needs of the existing number of unsheltered individuals at the present time, LWVSA stands in support of the current protest at City Hall, to compel the city to create more low-barrier shelter beds, more daytime shelters, sanctioned public places for individuals experiencing homelessness, and a public-facing dashboard that contains real-time low-barrier shelter bed availability.

Thank you for your attention to this extremely critical issue for Spokane!
Ann

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ann M. Murphy". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Ann Murphy, President
LWVSA