



## How City Departments and Divisions are addressing Transient Camps, Trash/Debris, and Illegal Dumping

This document contains a summary of the different approaches City Departments are taking to address the issues related to transient camps, trash, and illegal dumping throughout the City of Independence. Departments have highlighted areas of need and ongoing challenges associated with these topics for future discussion. It is important to note, not all trash and illegal dumping is related to homelessness within the City.

### Community Development Department:

- **Homelessness** – The Codes Enforcement (CE) Division has very little it can do in the way of homelessness. Staff try to handle issues by requesting that the property owners remove tents the homeless are using as well as the trash generated from their presence. If not removed by the property owner, staff will abate the tents and trash. Codes Enforcement Officers will often contact Officer Matt McLaughlin in PD to advise of the presence of homeless individuals or groups. In many cases, the issue moves to a property in close proximity, and a lot of them come right back to where we clean up.
- **Graffiti** – The Community Development Department has taken over graffiti complaints for PD. Staff face the challenge of not having time or resources to remove the graffiti fully, and generally just paint over it. In some cases, after it is painted, new graffiti shows up within a couple of weeks.
- **Trash** – Trash located on private property is handled by CE. Trash is a constant issue. Staff hold the tenant or property owner responsible, but if not cleaned up, ultimately staff have to abate it through a City contractor. While staff can write tickets to the responsible party, it seems to have little effect through the court system with numerous continuances, or bench warrants.

- **Dumping** – This is probably the Department’s biggest issue. Blighted areas such as Noland Fashion Square, the old K-Mart on Noland Rd., vacant, and/or Jackson County land trust properties are continuous areas of illegal dumping. Staff have little to no recourse to correct this issue other than an abatement as it is clear the property owners have no intention of monitoring their properties. Attempts have been made to try to make situations better. For example, at the former K-mart the idea of putting up barriers in the parking lot was unsuccessful as the Fire Department needs to have access should there be another fire on the property.

A staff representative is currently participating in an illegal dumping seminar through MARC, which includes municipalities, citizens and other types of organizations that understand the magnitude of this problem. While many ideas have been presented, execution requires time, money and resources; and overall it may have little effect without community understanding and support. Blight areas tend to gain more attention from the community and council, which makes abatement a priority. This leaves common illegal dumping spots on the back burner, frustrating citizens who have filed a complaint within their area seeing slow results. In turn, this generates a more negative view on the Codes Enforcement Division and the City as a whole. Staff are trying daily to make changes on the fly that get these issues resolved quicker. Additionally, staff have had cases where someone dumped on a property that an owner does maintain, but staff are only able to hold that property owner responsible for it. Ultimately, that property owner is responsible for the unwanted dumping through code enforcement and their only recourse is to contact PD.

- **Trespassing** – Staff receive trespassing complaints as a part of the original service requests they get, and it is usually an issue in around 70-80% of the cases of homeless complaints. Staff usually refer these to PD. Officer McLaughlin, the homeless resource officer, is a key resource for staff in this effort.
- **Additional Items:** Open storage and non-operable vehicles (NOVs) – CE is responsible to notify property owners that a non-operable vehicle or open storage is not allowed. However, staff cannot abate anything that can be considered of value, and the division does not have towing capabilities. To tow an NOV, staff must involve PD, which at this time are not able to actively work with CE for this purpose.

## **Parks | Recreation | Tourism Department**

- **Homeless** - Staff generally find the homeless camping in the parks or in the park restrooms. The main course of action is to call the police and have them removed. Once they are removed, staff must clean up the area where they were camping out. During the cleanup, staff come across a lot of needles and drug paraphernalia, which is mainly in the restrooms. Homeless in the restrooms is a daily issue especially at McCoy Park. Cleaning up homeless camps (large camps) is on average a weekly issue. There are two restroom locations that are heated and are open all year round at Waterfall Park and Santa Fe Park. The other restrooms (McCoy, Mill Creek, Glendale, Athletic Complex, Rotary, Hill Park, Dickinson, Van Hook and Fairmount) are not heated so they are only open April 1 through Halloween so the pipes don’t freeze. Staff must monitor the heated restrooms to make sure the homeless don’t camp out during the night when it is cold outside. The doors lock when the parks close but they try to get inside before they lock

or try to pry the doors open to get inside.

- **Graffiti** - Graffiti incidents that are reported in Cityworks are immediately cleaned up in the parks and on park facilities by either power washing or painting over the area. Staff keep these as a high priority work order and try to get them cleaned the same day. On average a staff member is dealing with graffiti at least 4 days a week.
- **Trash** – During the winter, crews empty all trash cans and pick up trash at the parks on Mondays and Fridays. From April 15<sup>th</sup> through November 15<sup>th</sup> (during mowing season), two employees work seven days a week to clean restrooms and walk the parks picking up any trash on the ground and emptying any full trash cans. This is to ensure that the parks and restrooms are clean for the rental events that are scheduled at our pavilions and shelters. Staff typically find trash all over the ground which must be picked up before they can mow the parks, otherwise the trash is shredded into tiny pieces. Trash on the ground during spring, summer and fall is a daily issue.
- **Trespassing** - If staff get complaints for afterhours trespassing, they inform PD. On average staff deal with this issue five days a week, especially at McCoy Park and Hill Park. Staff have the same issue at most of the parks on the west and south side of the City, but not as frequently as at McCoy and Hill Park.
- **Dumping** - When staff see a dump site, or a complaint is taken on dumping at a City park they immediately put a crew together and pick up the dump area. These are for large dump sites which includes couches, TV's etc. Staff typically use a loader to pick up the debris that has been dumped due to the size of the items and the volume of the trash. This is a significant issue at Davis Park, Phil Roberts Park, Fairmount Park and Van Hook Park (parks on the west and south side of town). On average staff are cleaning up a dump site at least once a week.

## **Police Department:**

- **Outreach**
  - Initial contact includes outreach
  - When needed personal support items may be handed out
  - Resource pamphlets and business cards are handed out
- **MOUs** - The Department maintains 169 total Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the following entities:
  - MODOT
  - Jackson County Land Trust
  - Independence School Dist.
  - Private Businesses
  - Property owners
- **Community Partners:**
  - Community Services League
  - Comprehensive Mental Health

- Restart (KC Shelter)
- Veterans Administration
- Churches
- **Monitoring** - Spot check known homeless camps and problem areas once or twice per week
- **Complaints** -
  - Cityworks complaints handled as received by priority level.
  - Respond to immediate needs dispatched by police communication center.
- **Enforcement** -
  - Immediate threats and concerns are handled by arrest
  - Homeless individual illegally camping are normally given 24-48 hours to vacate
  - Based on property location, site clean-up request are sent to City Depts, MODOT, property owners
  - Ticketing onsite is preferred but arrest and bookings are used as needed
  - Enforcement of Ordinance 19163 as it pertains to Panhandling in the median.

### **Municipal Services Department:**

Municipal Services assists with homeless camp cleanups as requested (support role). The Department's typical role is trash and debris removal. The Department occasionally provide trucks and other equipment (dumps) as necessary. The Department's biggest challenge is staff availability. Since the Department does not have dedicated staff for trash pickup, performing these tasks pulls Street Maintenance Workers out of the field/road work to which they are assigned. The Department receives weekly complaints from citizens about the need to clean up debris in the right of way which is difficult to complete with staff availability.

## **Looking Forward**

### **Health and Animal Services Department:**

Currently, the Health Department does very little in response to homeless and trash issues. The intent though is for the Department to play a role in the coordination efforts, especially if mental health is playing a role in the issue.

### **Fire Department:**

The Health Department is working with the Fire Department, CMS and Police Department to create a Co-responder team that includes members for all departments to provide mental health and health outreach to not only the homeless, but also those high-users of the Public Safety resources. This program is being modeled after successful programs that are currently being used across the country.

### **Multi-Department Collaboration:**

The City is working on a multi-department intervention strategy to address mental health crises in Independence. Currently, IPD works with two Comprehensive Mental Health Services (CMHS) social workers to respond to some police calls with a predominantly mental health/social work component and to conduct follow up on these calls. The City's Fire, Police, and Health & Animal Services

Departments are working with City leaders and CMHS to identify multiple teams that can coordinate to address these issues with citizens and collaborate on the building of a crisis intervention center, built and ran by CMHS.

Initial goals of this group are to identify calls to 911 that would be best addressed by trained crisis intervention teams, utilizing crisis intervention best practices from Eugene, Oregon, and Denver, Colorado, and historical data from dispatch. Additionally, first responders would be trained to identify individuals that may be better suited to be assisted by crisis intervention team members. Those that may need police would be flagged to be addressed by an officer and a CMHS member, ones that may have minor medical issues for evaluation would be flagged for a firefighter/EMT and a CMHS member, and ones that may need follow up for navigating social services would receive assistance by two CMHS members or a health department staff member and CMHS. Within two years, CMHS hopes to have built a crisis intervention center where these teams can collaborate and bring individuals for immediate, crisis care, which will relieve the burden from our hospital emergency rooms. With time and a chance for individuals to receive the treatment they need, it is hoped that this program will lessen the number of calls to 911, decrease suicide rates, and improve the overall quality of life for Independence residents.