



Mayor Coffey and Members of Yakima City Council
Cynthia Martinez, Acting City Manager
Police Chief Matt Murray

Dear Mayor Coffey/City Council, Cynthia and Chief Murray,

The annual Point-in-Time count of homelessness shows that for almost a decade now, Yakima's streets and greenspaces have been "home" to a large homeless population. As we know, this evokes compassion for their struggles, as well as frustration with actions and behaviors, commonly present with homelessness.

While Yakima's homelessness rate is 171% of the national rate, it is average among Washington's ten largest counties. Steps can be taken to ensure our community does not accept that a portion of our population is likely to become homeless, simply due to this being "normal" in other large WA counties. Out of compassion for everyone in our valley, we must strategize and take action.

Our Chamber membership, which is made up of many of the businesses in our valley, experience the effects of the homeless men/women/families almost daily. Some of their comments to us include:

- *We have homeless people who will camp in front of our business, often overnight. When they move in the morning (by themselves or with our prodding), they leave a mess which ranges from cigarettes and left over food to needles and human waste.*
- *Customers are often wary of the homeless "camps" and or overflowing shopping carts and will often just stay away from coming in.*
- *Our trashcans and dumpsters are ransacked leaving trash strewn about.*
- *It is very hard to entice businesses to locate in downtown area when they see the problems caused by homelessness and nothing seems to be done about it.*
- *Open drug use, left behind drug paraphernalia, using our alley or side of building as their toilets, vandalism to property, harassing our customers, causing our customers and staff to feel unsafe, putting out fires in dumpsters or on the sidewalks – all these are almost daily occurrences – what are our taxes and assessments being used for?*

We urge our elected officials and policy makers to pursue a holistic approach to homelessness that integrates adequate amounts of professional-quality services (for issues like mental illness



and addiction), with consistent and professional enforcement of civility and property crimes. Such an approach has the highest likelihood of preserving and enhancing the quality of our community. Safety and respect for property and each other is the foundation of a sustainable society, as well as a basic precondition for thriving families and businesses. The public safety/consideration and property crimes resulting from homelessness, erode these foundations.

Consistent and professional application of duly established standards for civility and property also benefits those struggling on the streets, with well-integrated and effective systems of rehabilitation and support (e.g. treatment and care for issues like addiction and mental illness). This approach communicates to the homeless population that our valley has not accepted the idea that this is "as good as it gets" for them, and provides the action needed to make a real and positive impact for all.

Call to action: The Chamber is not an expert in this area so we are calling on the City Council to lead and develop an actionable plan to resolve this issue, within the next six months. The plan must include dates and timelines for implementation and taking steps as defined by the plan, as well.

We thank you for taking the time to listen to our position. If you would like to discuss this in more detail, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Verlynn Best
CEO, Yakima Chamber of Commerce

Bob Gerst
Chamber Board Chairman