



September 20, 2022

Mr. Johnnie Perkins  
City Administrator, City of Spokane  
808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd  
Spokane, WA 99201

Dear City Administrator Perkins:

This letter serves as an official response from the Washington State Departments of Transportation, Commerce and Washington State Patrol to a letter from the City of Spokane dated Sept. 8.

We would like to use our response as an opportunity to outline a high-level plan of action. While the city's letter outlines purported state agency roles and responsibilities as they relate to working with people experiencing homelessness, it fails to acknowledge the city's responsibility for much of the hard work necessary to find long-term, meaningful solutions for the residents and businesses living and operating near Camp Hope, the first responders that operate within the area and for the people living within the encampment.

There are four actions that allow encampments like Camp Hope to be removed from state right of way:

1. The offering of shelter and services to people living there (*local jurisdiction & service/outreach providers; funding offered by Commerce*)
2. Secure storage of their belongings (*local jurisdiction & service/outreach providers*)
3. Safety and security for people on site and work crews (*local law enforcement & WSP*)
4. Restoration and cleanup of the property (*WSDOT*)

This is not the first time this has been explained to the city, yet the city remains resolute that homelessness and those experiencing it is a state problem and not a local one. It is both.

The state Right of Way Safety Initiative provides significant financial resources using grant opportunities funded and managed by the Department of Commerce. This capital infusion represents an unprecedented funding opportunity for local jurisdictions like the city to augment city resources to provide shelter and housing options – and is part of the state's response to its role in this matter. It is also important to note that WSDOT started discussions (prior to the existence of Camp Hope) with the city in October 2021 to help cover city costs like law enforcement and litter disposal related to other encampments in state right of way, but the city would not sign the contract.

While the city is focused on the reimbursement of \$350,000 in expenses if abatement of Camp Hope does not occur by the city's irrational deadline, it has clearly lost sight of the \$24 million

Mr. Johnnie Perkins

September 20, 2022

Page 2

investment the state has already made to immediately address homelessness in Spokane. With all of this in mind, the state will not entertain reimbursement discussions.

WSDOT, WSP and Commerce are pleased to see more housing options become available like the Trent Resource and Assistance Center. The soft launch of the center appears to be going okay and some residents of Camp Hope have already relocated there. Commerce has offered to pay the operating costs of the shelter associated with people from Camp Hope staying in the shelter, are in the process of negotiating contract terms with the city and expect to have a final contract in the near term. While this is encouraging and represents a good start, TRAC does not represent an immediate solution for all the residents at Camp Hope as there are capacity limitations.

As to the deadlines set by the city to include removing the encampment by Sept. 23 with a completion date of Oct. 14, these deadlines are arbitrary and misleading. Not only are these deadlines completely unrealistic given the scope of this issue and current lack of housing capacity, but without time to provide adequate outreach, it sets up those living within the camp for failure. This would be in direct contradiction with the legal requirements for state agencies for this work. The Legislature's proviso for the state Right of Way Safety Initiative requires WSDOT and Commerce to work with local governments and service providers as part of the work to "transition persons residing on state-owned rights-of-way to safer housing opportunities, with an emphasis on permanent housing solutions," and that the housing offered is a "meaningful improvement over the individual's current living situation" and "well-matched to an individual's assessed needs." The city's deadlines imply clearing the encampment, which will simply force the most vulnerable to relocate to other city, county, state and private property within the area. Acting on the city's ill-considered demand solves nothing for anyone. So, this is not just about doing what makes sense, or what is right and needed for those experiencing homelessness, it is what WSDOT and Commerce are legally required to do by the Legislature.

As a historical reminder, Camp Hope began in December 2021 at Spokane City Hall as a protest of the city administration's inaction to provide beds/housing and social and health services for people experiencing homelessness in Spokane. To address the protest, the city threatened to remove people living in tents around City Hall without providing any options for housing, emergency shelters or social and health services. The protest group – already totaling more than 80 people – moved en masse onto empty WSDOT property. WSDOT reached out to city officials immediately to let you know what was happening and the challenges associated with it in the hopes of partnering with the city to proactively and productively address the encampment and, more importantly, the challenges its residents faced. Now, you threaten fines and legal action on multiple fronts for a problem created by both your actions and your continued inaction.

Our agencies are focused on proactive, productive solutions for Camp Hope to include the Catalyst project led by Catholic Community Services and a substantive contract with Empire Health all funded by the Department of Commerce to provide much needed outreach and service provision to those living within the encampment.

Mr. Johnnie Perkins

September 20, 2022

Page 3

Initial tasks would include fencing, RV removal, badging and a curfew to help address safety and security challenges felt within and outside of the camp. This work starts the process for strategically decreasing the size and footprint of Camp Hope, while transitioning people to shelter/housing alternatives.

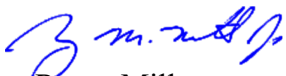
The combined outreach and site security work will improve security at the site and start to visibly transform the encampment as residents are matched with the services and housing options they need to leave the encampment and be on a path to permanent housing. It is important to set expectations up front that further work to resolve the encampment in its entirety after these initial actions will take time and it will not happen over a matter of days, but rather weeks and months.

WSDOT, Commerce and WSP sincerely want to partner with the city to work together to resolve the challenges associated with Camp Hope. We know from successful approaches elsewhere in the state that working together with responsible local jurisdictions is an essential ingredient to the work to provide safe, secure housing and service solutions for those living homeless.

Sadly, to date the city seems more preoccupied with blaming the state for the problem it ultimately played a hand in creating and not acknowledging its own roles and responsibilities regarding residents of its own city. We sincerely hope that your energy will be redirected and applied to meaningful solutions for all of your residents to include the most vulnerable.

Continuing to blame the state does not actually make that narrative true no matter how many times you repeat it to the press and elsewhere. The city - starting with the Mayor - is more preoccupied by optics than action. Regardless of past behavior by the city, we would like to get to a place of continuous, collaborative productive dialogue that recognizes we each bear a unique role and associated responsibilities with successfully resolving Camp Hope. We look forward to meeting with the city to chart a path forward later this week.

Sincerely,



Roger Millar

Secretary, Washington State Department of Transportation



Lisa Brown

Secretary, Washington State Department of Commerce



John Batiste

Chief, Washington State Patrol