

# **CHRONIC PUBLIC INEBRIATES AND RELATED ISSUES OF HOMELESSNESS**

## **THE MAYOR'S STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN**

Homelessness for both families and individuals and for those who are homeless as a result of chronic alcohol use is a familiar problem in the Municipality of Anchorage. With the recent economic downturn and with continued migration from rural communities to urban centers, there are indications that the problem may continue to grow.

The Municipality of Anchorage has contributed considerable resources to addressing these issues including the development of a 10-year plan to end homelessness. During my campaign, the transition process, and since I have become Mayor, I have heard considerable community concern regarding homelessness, in particular the concern surrounding the recent deaths and acts of violence against the chronically homeless alcoholic. From the earliest days of my administration, I have worked internally to develop the next steps in addressing this critical issue.

The issue of chronic public inebriates is not new. The city has been feeling the negative impact for decades and there have been many attempts to reduce the problem. In fact, we spend more than \$4 million a year trying to keep the chronic public inebriate population safe. What has been missing to date is a unified approach. I will bring all appropriate Municipal resources to bear toward solving this problem. In addition, my Administration will strengthen partnerships with the State of Alaska and the many community non-profits who also have a stake in making Anchorage safe.

There are many ways to look at this problem, but let me be blunt; I am addressing this first as an issue of public safety. People should be able to walk in their communities and their parks without fear. Tourists should be able to travel freely in the city, enjoying all Anchorage has to offer without being accosted on the street. More and more often, many of our citizens and visitors pause before taking advantage of these and other activities in the city because they don't know who or what they might encounter along the way. Maintaining the quality of life we have come to enjoy and expect in our community is a top priority of my administration and it starts with feeling safe in any neighborhood.

Let me also be blunt about this - chronic public inebriates are citizens, too. They are part of this community. They also deserve safety. They have the same rights

as every other citizen. The same oath I took as Mayor to protect the citizens of Anchorage applies just as equally to these individuals. Anyone who breaks the law and attacks these citizens will be treated with equal severity.

The truth is, unlike many of their fellow citizens, the chronic public inebriates have little chance of making acceptable choices without direct help. They are so addicted to alcohol that little matters to them other than their next drink. They are mentally ill and physically unable to quit on their own. This means that part of the overall solution must be to address their addiction, not just their crimes. Doing one without the other is a solution that will not have any lasting effect.

To that end, I am appointing a senior level executive position in the Department of Health and Human Services who will focus on ensuring we are deploying our municipal resources effectively. Our initial efforts will be in implementing strategies for those whose alcohol use has become a threat to public safety and a safety concern to our neighborhoods.

These efforts will include:

- Continuing our review of data on recent deaths and vigorously investigating violence against those who are homeless as a result of chronic alcohol use;
- Moving people from camps to safer environments with supportive services; and
- Engaging community stakeholders in a working group that will advise on strategies and assist with identifying and leveraging resources for implementation.

Outcomes:

- Reduced deaths amongst chronically homeless alcoholics.
- Reduced violence to and among the chronically homeless alcoholics.
- Reduced neighborhood impact from chronically homeless alcoholics.

Tactical:

- Identify a MOA working group with representatives from key departments to align resources and develop and implement strategies. Representatives will include but are not limited to assigned personnel from:
  - DHHS
  - Department of Law
  - AFD
  - APD
  - Community Planning and Development

- Immediate tasks for MOA working group would include:
  - Continuing work with Senator Ellis to make sure the detox beds at Clithroe are available and expanded and that we can effectively use Title 47 to do involuntary commitments.
  - Identify all of the current resources including various efforts within the MOA spent on dealing with the chronic public inebriate.
  - Finding ways to share information between departments with a need to know.
  - Ensure that Executive MOA Leadership is aware of and comfortable with current efforts in program and housing development.
  - Analyze what changes are needed in state law and municipal ordinances to help solve the problem.
  - Investigate the establishment of a 'City Court' with a local magistrate to deal specifically with this problem.
  
- Identify a Community Working Group that expands internal group and whose goal is to advise on strategies and assist with identifying and leveraging resources for implementation. Members of the working group should include representatives from appropriate social service agencies, Native groups, faith based organizations, the State of Alaska, community councils and others.
  
- Immediate tasks for Community Working Group include:
  - Identify all of the current resources including various efforts within the community spent on dealing with the chronic public inebriate.
  - Identify one area/camp to work within the model of community policing. Bring intensive resources from MOA and community partners to determine if we can intervene in closing down a camp and getting people supportive services.
  - Engage the workgroup in affirming the results we are looking for as a community. Then work backwards from the results to determine:
    - What steps do we take to achieve the results we are looking for?
    - What resources will it require?
    - Where will the resources come from? If we can't get all of the resources, can we still achieve some/all of the results?
    - How will we know when we achieve the results?
  - Use this community alignment to drive resource allocation and program activities.

In addition to our efforts to address the impact of homelessness amongst the chronic public inebriate, the city has an active and engaged partnership with local

providers to retool our services for families and individuals who are homeless or near homeless. The Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing funds allocated through HUD to the Municipality of Anchorage will be used to:

- Build on current partnerships to create a single point of entry into the system;
- Add case management and education to work with families and individuals to get services and promote permanent housing stability; and
- Leverage considerable community resources.

My administration looks forward to working with the various agencies and individuals who will help make this program a success.

Dan Sullivan  
Mayor