

## Citizens' Oversight Projects (COPs)

771 Jamacha Rd #148  
El Cajon, CA 92019  
CitizensOversight.org  
619-820-5321

January 22, 2018



**CITIZENS' OVERSIGHT PROJECTS**  
CitizensOversight.org

El Cajon Mayor Bill Wells  
El Cajon City Council  
Steve Goble  
Ben Kalasho  
Gary Kendrick  
Bob McClellan

El Cajon City Manager Doug Williford  
200 Civic Center Way  
El Cajon, CA 92020

CC: Barry Jantz, Grossmont Healthcare District

Greetings:

I am writing today about the failed policy to cite or arrest people who are sharing food at parks, and the related Hepatitis A outbreak.

El Cajon is getting a national reputation, and it isn't a good one. I noticed a recent Facebook video on the subject – <https://www.facebook.com/NowThisNews/videos/1778159485607501/> – received more than three million views. We can't afford to get this type of publicity!

The general policy that El Cajon has pursued for years regarding interaction with homeless persons is immoral and backwards. Instead of trying to help these people out of a rut, your policies make it worse.

The banning of food sharing in parks is supposed to be a good idea to limit the transmission of hepatitis A. Unfortunately, this is probably the least of our worries, and any risk of food sharing can be minimized through the use of portable handwashing stations, providing gloves to workers, and education for those who are in direct contact with food.

Worse than this is the lack of public restrooms in city parks and public spaces. Most glaringly, the city spent literally millions of dollars on the Promenade Park and did not plan to have any restroom facilities.

The dimensions of Promenade park is 170 x 383 ft, or 65,100 sqft, or about 1.5 acres. (That does not include the park areas around the ECPAC theater and City Hall.) If this were a preschool, it could accommodate 868 students (75 sqft each) and they would require 57 restrooms. Here, you have zero restrooms despite the fact that this area – outfitted with an amphitheater – is used for events with very high capacity, such as concerts on the green. I can guarantee that if this project were in private hands, the El Cajon building and development department would have required at least one restroom, particularly since it has an amphitheater area. Plus, there are other amphitheaters which are available for public use,

picnic tables, etc. all the way up to City Hall and yet there are no public restrooms anywhere.

The logic behind this is backward and broken. The only reason I can imagine that you can spend something like \$4 million fixing up a park and not including even one restroom is because it is thought that any restroom would be a magnet for the homeless. With this broken policy, there is also nowhere to correctly wash your hands should you want to serve food in the park.

Hepatitis is spread through fecal matter and to the mouth. Key to stopping the spread of the virus is to wash hands with soap and water. That isn't rocket science, but is apparently a lesson that is lost at City Hall. To build facilities without adequate restroom facilities and hand washing facilities is emblematic of the problem. The hepatitis-A outbreak is at least partially due to these broken policies.

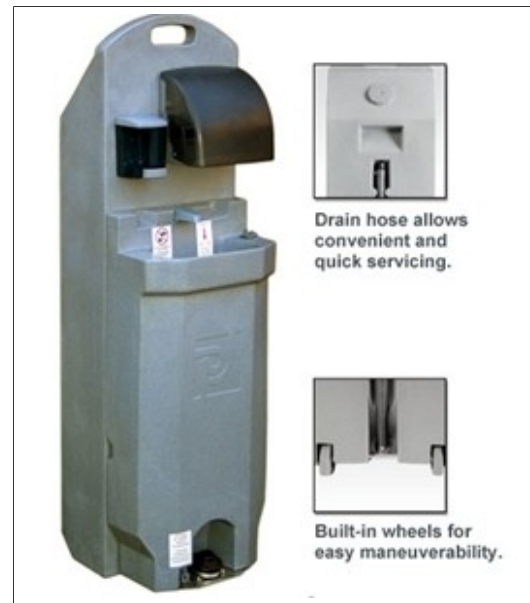
→ Question: What are the policies regarding restrooms required in parks?

Now let's turn to this food sharing law. Let's start with the obvious. You can't stop people from sharing food in public parks. And you can't make it illegal to share food to one class of people while allowing others. This law must be undone immediately. It is clearly unconstitutional. But worse, the whole affair is another black eye for El Cajon just as it was on the road to restoring a better reputation.

There is a big "In God We Trust" sign in the City Council Chambers, but just think how many times Jesus shared food with homeless persons. In fact, I think even Jesus was homeless. This is an example where it becomes clear that the sign in City Council Chambers is just posturing rather than reality.

There are many other things you can do to deal with the Hepatitis A outbreak, and outbreak that has been exacerbated by your own decisions. Here are some ideas that are obvious.

- Provide hand washing stations to any food sharing event that asks for them, and if you hear of such an event, then provide them. Portable hand-washing stations can be rented. But I suggest you purchase a few and maybe even have two or three more hand washing stations at EVERY PARK.
- Grossmont Hospital probably has GRANT FUNDING to pay for these stations to help with the Hep A outbreak.
- Encourage EVERYONE to wash hands at every event where food is served with signs over the handwashing stations.
- Provide free gloves to workers who are serving food.
- Provide training and instructional guidelines to anyone who wants to serve food.
- Provide free Hep-A vaccination events and invite the homeless to attend, and hand out food sponsored by the city, and Grossmont Hospital.



**THIS MUST BE TURNED AROUND IMMEDIATELY! No more videos like the one shown PLEASE!!**

This brings up the general way you are addressing the homeless problem. You can either make the problem worse, or you can make it better. You have a choice. Make it harder for homeless to get out of the

rut they don't want to be in, or help them out of the rut. Your current laws promote keeping them in the rut. No restrooms. No handwashing. No foodsharing. No loitering, etc. etc. etc.

There is another way to approach the problem, and it is to help the homeless out of the rut. Here are some ideas.

- **Transitional Storage Center**

Provide a place to store belongings during the day. This was started in San Diego by the group originally called "Girls Think Tank" and now called "Think Dignity," and they provide lockers and those rolling storage bins so homeless can store their stuff during the day so they can look for employment, attend classes, or meet with service providers. San Diego sees it as a good thing and is expanding the program, as the "Transitional Storage Center," where they will also provide restrooms. My suggestion is to also provide showers.



See this article:

<https://www.sandiego.gov/homeless-services/programs/transitional-storage-check-center>

The center "provides clean bins to over 300 homeless individuals to temporarily store their belongings. The Check-In Center offers a place for homeless families and individuals to safely store their personal belongings as they search for employment, attend classes, or meet with a service and medical providers while freeing the streets of almost 30,000 pounds of personal belongings."

If it were not for the heavy-handed way the ECTLC promotes a specific religion, I would suggest that perhaps they sponsor such a check-in center. See Union Tribune article on Check-in Center expansion: <http://sandiegouniontribune.ca.newsmemory.com/publink.php?shareid=3a6cf0043>

THIS IS A GOOD MODEL TO FOLLOW!

- **Sleeping Areas:** Parking lot for people to park in their cars to sleep at night, perhaps on one of the empty lots near the airport. This, if colocated with the storage facility can give those homeless a way to compassionately sleep at night without trying to find places behind bushes in the central area of town.
- **Tiny Homes:** One of the popular trends is the use of tiny homes, very small buildings that can serve quite well as an alternative to sleeping behind a bush. With real estate prices sky high in Southern California and in El Cajon. This link provides info on 10 villages of tiny homes to give these people a start

<https://www.curbed.com/maps/tiny-houses-for-the-homeless-villages>

there are undoubtedly many more such villages that did not make it to their list.

- **Basic Skills Training:** I am amazed when I visit towns in Mexico like Puerto Vallarta, where we saw no homeless nor anyone begging for money. We asked them about it when we were there on a cruise and we learned that they have skills training for those individuals who do not have jobs. They learn handiworks, such as basket weaving and other crafts that can then be sold for an income. Same was true when I was located in Japan on business.

The point here is that if you don't have a place to store your belongings and some security about where to sleep at night, it is very difficult to make headway on any skills training to get a flow of money started and get out of the trap they find themselves.

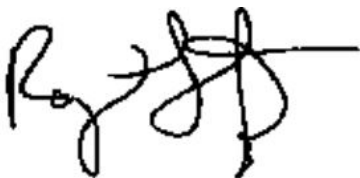
- **Cell Phones:** One of the most important things that can help the homeless is to provide cell phones. How can you find work if you don't have a phone to receive calls, or to check on services, etc.? Answer-- it is very hard. Providing free phones to in a program to help the homeless can go a long way to getting them out of the rut. The trouble with many of the existing programs is they are based on land-lines and are oriented to people who have an address, such as <https://www.californialifeline.com>
- There are certainly other opportunities El Cajon is not taking advantage of.

The bottom line is that El Cajon has to do a lot of things to help with the homelessness problem and the related Hepatitis-A outbreak. But passing a law that only some people cannot share food is not one of them.

I recommend at this juncture that you immediately stand-down on the enforcement of the food sharing ordinance, and instead, immediately embrace food sharing and help those that are doing it with handwashing stations and probably porta potties if those parks have no restrooms. The amount you will spend on cooperating and providing sanitation is far less than the work you are adding to the criminal justice system to process these citations or arrests.

I hope you will work with the Grossmont Hospital District to address the Hepatitis-A outbreak in a sensible manner.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Lutz', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ray Lutz  
Citizens Oversight