



March 27, 2018

Gwen Lachelt, BOCC Chairperson
Julie Westendorff, Commissioner
Brad Blake, Commissioner
Sean Smith, Sheriff
La Plata County
1101 East 2nd Avenue
Durango, CO 81301

Mayor
Dick White

Mayor Pro Tem
Sweetie Marbury

Councilors
Melissa Youssef
Dean Brookie
Chris Bettin

City Manager
Ron LeBlanc

Dear Members of the Board of County Commissioners and Sheriff Smith:

The Durango City Council unanimously requests the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and Sheriff to close the homeless camp on County owned land west of the Durango City limits.

City Council thanks the Board of County Commissioners and the Sheriff for engaging with the City Council and staff in a public dialogue on the subject of homelessness. The many challenges of addressing homelessness reflect the enormity of the problem and the complexity of resolving it. The City Council remains committed to working with the BOCC, Sheriff and County staff to find reasonable and workable solutions to this community problem.

Addressing homelessness must start with taking the first of many steps. Closing the existing camp will address three immediate concerns of the City Council and community members:

1. Fire danger
2. Public safety, including public health and sanitation
3. Impacts on neighborhoods

The City Council is aware of the existing fire danger. We have had discussions with the Sheriff and BOCC regarding the need for a fire ban

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in the County. The City Council and many members of the community remember the devastation and property loss as a result of the Missionary Ridge Fire. The fact that existing forest fuels are at a similar level that existed prior to the Missionary Ridge Fire weighs heavily on us as elected officials and on our constituents, particularly those who live in proximity of City owned open space. Merchants also remember the economic devastation that occurred as a result to that fire with the lack of tourism. It took years for many merchants and businesses, including the D&SNGRR, to recover from those economic losses.

The City Council has been told by the Sheriff that fire mitigation efforts at the existing camp are underway. We commend the Sheriff for recognizing the severity of the situation and taking this initiative. However, those efforts may not be enough to make a meaningful difference.

It is not easy to be an elected official. There are no good answers to resolving this situation. The City Council will have a greater chance of success by partnering with the BOCC, Sheriff and other community groups. As such, to the degree that the Sheriff can articulate the conditions he is expecting the City to satisfy before he will enforce the no camping ordinance would be critical to preserving our partnership and demonstrating to the community that the City and County are putting differences aside in the spirit of serving the citizens. The City prefers to collaborate with the County.

City Council does not support the status quo. City staff have been directed to continue to enforce the no camping ordinance on city-owned lands within the city limits. County enforcement of no camping on county-owned lands is critical to reducing the threat of fire and the efficacy of the Lightner Creek Shelter.

The establishment of the Lightner Creek Shelter will provide a place to rest overnight. The site will include portable restrooms, dumpsters, and a safe place to store possessions. This is intended to be a temporary shelter. Council is expected to take action April 3 on an emergency ordinance to establish the shelter.

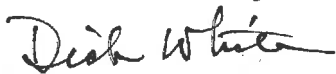
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The selection of this shelter site was the result of a comprehensive process that took months to evaluate. No site is perfect. Should this location prove to be unworkable, the City Council is prepared to pick a different site. However, the City Council must balance the immediate risks associated with fire and sanitation at the County campground with the need to act expeditiously in order to avoid fire risk and improve sanitation conditions.

The rules and procedures for operating the Lightner Creek Shelter are a work in progress. The concept is understood to be an overnight shelter. It would be opened in late afternoon and users would need to vacate the premises each morning. A place to safely store possessions is part of the plan, but those details have not been finalized. Sanitation facilities and a trash dumpster will be provided.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dick White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D".

Dick White, Mayor

cc: Durango City Council
Dirk Nelson, County Attorney
Ron LeBlanc, City Manager
Amber Blake, Assistant City Manager
Kevin Hall, Assistant City Manager
Kamran Afzal, Durango Police Chief
Joanne Spina, County Manager
Chuck Stevens, Assistant County Manager
Sheryl Rogers, County Attorney