

San Juan Homeless Encampment Clean-up

Over the past few months, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) received numerous complaints regarding excessive noise, campfires, crime, loitering, and litter at a large homeless encampment in the area of San Juan and Blythe Avenues. The encampment was located in an area with considerable overgrown foliage, making it difficult to see from the public street. It was bordered by residential duplexes, apartments, Santa Clara Water District property, and a PG&E easement. Approximately 40 people lived in the encampment.

DPS took a multi-faceted approach to ensure that the encampment was ultimately removed in a fair and humane manner, while taking into consideration the safety and security of the public. The first step included bringing together homeless advocates and stakeholders, such as Sunnyvale Community Services and the Downtown Streets Team, to provide outreach, resources, and support to the people living in the encampment. Anyone who wanted help was provided with the appropriate resources and referrals.

The second step was to determine the lawful owner of the property where the homeless encampment was located. Since there were many conflicting reports about who had legal ownership of the property, Neighborhood Preservation (NP) staff conducted an investigation. After working with the Water District, PG&E, duplex owners, Office of the Assessor, and Public Works Engineering, NP determined that the property was owned by four different duplex owners, who were all unaware.

NP and DPS Patrol coordinated a meeting with all of the property owners to educate them on their responsibilities in accordance with applicable municipal codes. All four property owners were very cooperative and worked with staff to develop a plan to remove the encampment (after the inhabitants had vacated), trim the vegetation, and secure the properties to prevent reoccurrence.

The third step was for Patrol to talk to the individuals who were camping on private property, at the direction of the property owners, and provide them with notice to remove their belongings and vacate the property. After a few days, most of the campers had vacated the property; however, the few who remained were issued warnings and then ultimately cited for trespassing. Shortly after the property was vacated, the property owners brought in contractors to remove the remaining debris, thin out the vegetation, and install a fence to secure the property. As a result of a partnership among homeless advocates, DPS, and the property owners, the area is now clean, safe, and secure. While there is no easy solution to the homeless problem, it is heartening to know that there are a wide variety of resources available for those who seek assistance. For more information, contact Christy Gunvalsen, Neighborhood Preservation Manager, at 408-730-7255 or cgunvalsen@sunnyvale.ca.gov.