



October 11, 2017

Council File 17-1092

Honorable City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Los Angeles City Hall
200 North Spring Street, Room 395
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable Members,

The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council (“DLANC”) hereby submits this action letter as a Community Impact Statement to be added to Council File 17-1092 with general comments concerning the public health crisis facing stakeholders in Skid Row/Central City East due to a lack of public restrooms and hygiene facilities in the area. While DLANC appreciates the fact that the City Council has decided to formally devote attention to this ongoing problem, the proposals contained in Council File 17-1092 are not sufficient. Stakeholders in Skid Row do not need additional reports to prove what everyone already knows: The lack of public sanitation options in Skid Row has created a public health emergency,

As noted in the Motion accompanying Council File 17-1092, “[a] June report by a group of homeless service providers, advocates and residents found that the conditions do not even meet the standards the United Nations set for refugee camps,” and that “there are only nine public restrooms available at night for the individuals living in Skid Row.” Somehow, these facts drastically understate the problem, both presently and historically.

According to the United Nations’ standard for operating long-term refugee camps, there should be one toilet for every 20 people. The cited report, *No Place to Go: An Audit of Public Toilets in Skid Row*¹, found there are only nine public restrooms at night for 1,777 unsheltered homeless individuals in Skid Row. In other words, there is one restroom for every 197 people. At night, Skid Row is roughly 80 toilets short of satisfying the minimum standards of a long-term refugee camp. During the day, the situation is roughly the same, generally there are more public restrooms available, but there are far more unsheltered people who depend on those restrooms. The public toilets that are available often lack stalls or doors that lock, as well as sinks, soap, toilet paper, seat covers, and feminine hygiene products. They are infrequently maintained, which causes a health

¹ Los Angeles Central Providers Collaborative, Skid Row Community Residents and Partners, *No Place to Go: An Audit of the Public Toilet Crisis in Skid Row*, June 2017 (<http://www.innercitylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/No-Place-To-Go-final.pdf>).

hazard to everyone, but especially unsheltered people in wheelchairs, who must wheel through the muck with their hands. Because of the lack of toilets, unsheltered people are forced to suffer innumerable personal indignities, thereby compromising their physical and mental well-being. And given the size of Skid Row and the number of people living there, the propensity of public health consequences are enormous.

In fact, evidence about the public health emergency created by the lack of sanitation options in Skid Row has been prevalent since 2012. That year, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Surveyed Skid Row, reporting fecal matter on sidewalks, storm drains, and other public areas, and a lack of public restroom options.² The Department determined, given the crowded and unsheltered living conditions in Skid Row, the area faced a substantially increased risk of communicable disease transmission. The Department specifically cited increased risk of “meningitis, respiratory infections, enteric pathogens such as Hepatitis A and Salmonella, Staphylococcus Aureus (Staph) skin infections, Tinea infections (fungal), Pediculosis infections (lice), diarrheal disease, Tuberculosis, HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and Typhus.” The Department’s findings spurred further investigation by the community members and advocates, who conducted further audit and analysis of the sanitation crisis in Skid Row.³ The community report concluded the City has failed “when it comes to providing accessible and clean public restrooms”.

In response to the June 2017 report—which immediately garnered international attention⁴—the City promised some action. The Mayor’s office indicated that \$1.3 million in the 2017–18 City budget was “earmarked . . . for mobile showers and bathrooms.”⁵ This appears to include \$500,000 for “mobile toilet kiosks,” as well as “investing in permanent bathrooms in [San Julian and Gladys Parks], though they will be closed at night.”⁶ City officials also “promised in July to put up 10 more toilets by mid-September.”⁷ But when asked whether those toilets came to fruition, the roughly two dozen Skid Row stakeholders at our September 20 Committee meeting emphatically answered in unison: “No!” Instead, the City seemingly intends to invest its present resources in a hygiene center “in the midst of Skid Row on a city-owned parking lot, offering toilets, hand-washing stations, showers, and half a dozen stacked washers and dryers for laundry.”⁸ But it is unclear when that hygiene station will become a reality; for instance, Council File 17-1092 makes no mention of the hygiene center. And despite initial reports the City intended to hire community members and advocates to operate the hygiene center—who devoted untold hours and energy to this cause—it is our understanding that is no longer the case.

² County of Low Angeles Public Health Department, *Report of Findings – Request from City of Los Angeles to Address Public Health Issues in the Skid Row Area of Downtown Los Angeles*, May 21, 2012.

³ Los Angeles Community Action Network, *The Dirty Divide in Downtown Los Angeles: A Call for Public Health Equity*, Mar. 2013 (<http://sites.uci.edu/humanrights/files/2013/03/The-Dirty-Divide-in-DTLA.pdf>).

⁴ Alastair Gee, *The Guardian*, “At night on Skid Row, nearly 2,000 homeless people share just nine toilets,” June 30, 2017 (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jun/30/la-skid-row-homeless-toilet-access-report>).

⁵ Gale Holland, *Los Angeles Times*, “Bathroom access on Skid Row is worse than in a Syrian refugee camp, report says,” June 30, 2017 (<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-skid-row-bathrooms-20170630-story.html>).

⁶ Gee, *supra*, at fn. 4.

⁷ Editorial Board, *Los Angeles Times*, “Refusing to build public toilets doesn’t make homeless people go away. It creates a public health crisis,” Sept. 16, 2017 (<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-homeless-toilets-20170916-story.html>).

⁸ *Ibid.*

Given this history, the Skid Row community is wary of meaningful action being condition on completion of yet another report; as if the extensive work of community members and advocates is irrelevant to policy concerning the community itself. If the City needs additional reports to fulfill its procedural obligations, so be it. We kindly request those reports be completed with urgency, and rely on the significant work already conducted by community advocates. Of course, the City must carefully consider where to place new restrooms and hygiene centers; but new facilities should be sited and opened as soon as space becomes available. Community members and advocates have given substantial thought to this question already, and should be consulted. Moreover, the City should exempt those mobile hygiene centers and related facilities that are currently operating in Skid Row from traffic citations. On around August 31, 2017, a Lava Mae shower provider was given a traffic citation while operating in Skid Row according to community members. The stakeholders at our September 20 Committee meeting were almost-universally aware of this incident. The issuance of traffic citations to bathroom or hygiene center providers is detrimental to the City's relationship with the community. Skid Row community members are disillusioned when so much attention is devoted to surrounding areas—from trash cans to dog waste disposal—and their own overwhelming problems still exists

The community believes the City needs to treat the public health crisis in Skid Row like an emergency. Skid Row community members and advocates have been diligently documenting this problem for years, with persuasive data and personal stories. This is not a question of “centralizing” services, but our fellow citizens and stakeholders at the very least, the City should bring the sanitation conditions in Skid Row to that of a long-term refugee camp.

This Community Impact Statement is based on the recommendation of the Central City East Ad Hoc Committee on September 20, 2017, and action taken at the Board of Directors meeting on October 11, 2017, when the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council adopted the following motion and directed that a Community Impact Statement be filed reflecting its position.

Committee Motion: “The Central City East Ad Hoc Committee (“Committee”) recommends that the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council (“DLANC”) should submit an action letter calling on the City to immediately build more toilets and hygiene centers to address the public health crisis in Central City East/Skid Row, incorporating to the greatest extent possible the recommendations contained in the report *No Place to Go: An Audit of the Public Toilet Crisis in Skid Row*. Additionally, the City should respond to this crisis by empowering the Central City East/Skid Row community to the greatest extent possible.

Sincerely,

Patricia Berman
DLANC President

Sincerely,

Nate Johnson
DLANC CCEAHC Co-Chair