

Lake Forest Listens: Homelessness

Frequently Asked Questions

Why can't Sheriff's Department arrest people for living in The Arbors?

Homelessness is not a crime. A federal appellate court ruling, *Martin v. Boise*, prohibits local governments from enforcing anti-camping ordinances on public property unless sufficient local shelter beds are available. On private property, individuals can be asked to leave or cited for trespassing. Lake Forest has joined with seven South OC cities in support of Boise's request for the US Supreme Court to overturn *Martin V. Boise*.

Can homeless individuals be forced to accept treatment or other services?

Individuals do not lose their fundamental constitutional rights because they have become homeless. Therefore, they cannot be forced to accept services unless they have been found to be "gravely disabled" due to mental illness.

Why don't Sheriff's Deputies arrest homeless individuals for other crimes?

Propositions approved by California voters have decriminalized or minimized narcotics and other offenses. In many cases, actions that would have sent a person to jail in the past now result in just a citation or no violation at all. Sheriff's Deputies do issue citations and make arrests when appropriate: In the third quarter of 2019, the Sheriff's Southeast Homeless Outreach Team issued 44 citations and made 51 arrests.

Why don't we have lights, cameras or music at The Arbors to discourage campers?

The City turned off utilities at The Arbors after discovering people had tapped into the electricity to recharge telephones or power other devices. That created a dangerous situation and encouraged others to live there.

What is the City doing to protect public health at The Arbors?

The Arbors are power-washed twice a week and steam cleaned twice a month to protect the public health.

Why can't the City discard the abandoned property around The Arbors?

Several laws govern treatment of property belonging to homeless individuals. On public property, the City is prohibited from disposing of property that someone says belongs to them. The City does remove items that nobody claims. On private property, abandoned property can be removed.

Has the City considered selling or leasing The Arbors?

Yes. The City is exploring all options to return The Arbors to their intended purpose – providing a welcoming environment to the El Toro Road corridor.

Why can't the City provide a campsite or shelter for the homeless individuals?

Unlike some other cities, Lake Forest does not own property outside of City facilities and parks. Opening a shelter in an existing industrial park would be challenging because of CC&Rs. While no options have been eliminated, a shelter – even a campsite – is a major investment. The City of Tustin spends more than \$1.5 million annually on its shelter, while San Clemente will spend more than \$400,000 annually on its campsite. The City, like many experts, believes Permanent Supportive Housing is the best long-term solution to homelessness

What is the City doing to address homelessness in the community?

The City has a multi-faceted approach to balance the safety and comfort of residents with the rights and dignity of homeless individuals that includes:

- Contracts with two non-profit entities, Mercy House and City Net, that provide outreach workers in the City seven days a week and evenings: in the third quarter of 2019, Mercy House and City Net helped eight people get off the streets
- A full time OC Sheriff's Deputy assigned as the Homeless Liaison Officer
- Participation in the South OC Sheriff's Homeless Outreach Team.
- More than \$37,000 in federal grants allocated annually to programs and organizations that prevent homelessness, such as South County Outreach, Families Forward and Family Assistance Ministries.
- Working with National Community Renaissance to include Permanent Supportive Housing units in a proposed affordable-housing project.

Who do I call if I am concerned about homelessness at The Arbors or elsewhere?

Always call 9-1-1 if you see a crime, dangerous situation or if you feel threatened. If you need a deputy but it's not an emergency, call the OC Sheriff's Department at 770-6011. If it's not a law enforcement issue, please call the Lake Forest Homeless Engagement and Resources Team (LFHEART) at 282-5219.

How can I help?

Remember to Give Positive Change, Not Spare Change. The City wants to encourage residents to help those experiencing homeless but to do so through a local charity that supports the homeless. Giving directly to the homeless keeps them from connecting with available resources, may support a drug or alcohol addiction, and can encourage more panhandling.

See www.lakeforestca.gov/homelessness for local charities working to solve homelessness in Lake Forest.