

Max Overland

Subject: Valley Water Board Meeting- October 11, 2024

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Sent: Monday, September 30, 2024 3:30 PM

To: Clerk of the Board <clerkoftheboard@valleywater.org>

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Dear Clerk of the Board,

Below are Questions and comments I like to enter as part of the Public Record in the meeting Scheduled for October 11, 2024, Agenda Item 2.1. I also think it will be beneficial and informative if the panel can respond to the questions time permitting.. ...Thank you

UNHOUSED PEOPLE AND ENVIRONMENT SUMMIT

Friday, October 11, 2024

Valley Water Board

Agenda Item 2.1

Questions:

- 1- What specific evidence is there that encampments near waterways are being sufficiently monitored for environmental damage, and are current policies stringent enough to prevent further harm to these sensitive ecosystems?
- 2- Given the ongoing environmental impacts of encampments, is there a timeline for when these areas will be cleared of unsheltered individuals to prevent further degradation?
- 3- How are we addressing the contamination of waterways caused by human waste, trash, and other pollutants from encampments? Are there measurable impacts on water quality, and what health risks does this pose to the broader community?
- 4- What immediate steps are being taken to prevent these encampments from contributing to public health risks, including waterborne diseases or contamination affecting downstream users?

- 5- Encampments along waterways can attract criminal activity and create public safety concerns for nearby communities. How is Valley Water working with law enforcement to ensure that these areas remain safe, and what strategies are in place to prevent encampments from reappearing in cleared areas?
- 6- Are there plans to increase law enforcement or security presence in these areas to protect both the environment and public safety, and what will be done to deter individuals from returning to these areas?
- 7- What alternative locations are being proposed for unsheltered individuals that keep them away from environmentally sensitive areas such as waterways? Shouldn't there be clear no-camping zones near vital environmental areas?
- 8- How will Valley Water and City ensure that the unsheltered population does not simply migrate to another vulnerable area along the waterway once cleared, creating a repeating cycle of environmental harm?
- 9- Can the panel provide evidence that current outreach and service programs are effectively moving individuals away from waterways and into more appropriate shelters or housing? If not, how do we plan to enforce stricter regulations?
- 10- Why have current strategies not been more effective in permanently addressing the presence of encampments along waterways, and what more stringent measures can be taken?
- 11- What long-term damage has already been done to the waterway ecosystems due to unsheltered encampments, and is there a realistic plan to restore these areas to their natural state once they are cleared of inhabitants?
- 12- How will continued allowances for temporary encampments affect the long-term health of the environment, including wildlife that depends on clean, undisturbed waterways?
- 13-What resources are being dedicated to ensure the enforcement of bans on encampments near waterways, and how can local communities hold agencies accountable if these areas continue to suffer environmental harm?
- 14- Is there a threshold for when local authorities will be forced to prioritize the environmental crisis over temporary humanitarian allowances in these areas?
- 15- Are there legal or policy frameworks that could be enacted or strengthened to prohibit camping or habitation in environmentally sensitive areas like waterways, while still addressing the humanitarian needs of the unsheltered population?
- 16- Given the environmental and public safety concerns, is it time to adopt more assertive legal measures to prevent encampments from forming near waterways?

Comments:

1. The environmental damage being caused by encampments along our waterways is a critical issue that needs immediate attention. While we need to address homelessness, the continued harm to our natural ecosystems cannot be ignored or delayed any longer.

2. Waterways are not just natural resources—they are vital to the health and safety of the entire community. Allowing encampments to remain in these areas threatens water quality and risks severe public health consequences for everyone.
3. I'm deeply concerned about the public safety issues arising from these encampments. There are documented cases of crime and hazardous conditions near these areas, and it's important to prioritize the safety of the broader community.
4. Temporary solutions that allow encampments near waterways will only perpetuate the problem. We need a firm commitment to clearing these areas permanently and finding more suitable locations for unsheltered individuals.
5. While it's important to have compassion for those experiencing homelessness, we must also enforce strict regulations to protect our environment. The long-term impact on our ecosystems, water quality, and public safety is too great to allow these encampments to continue unchecked.
6. Has there been any discussion on restoring areas already damaged by encampments? It's critical that we not only prevent further harm but also begin repairing the environmental degradation that's occurred due to encampments along waterways.
7. Encampments near waterways should be considered a non-negotiable issue. There must be clear policies that prohibit habitation in these areas to ensure the protection of our environment and public health.
8. We cannot afford to continue the cycle of allowing encampments to form, displacing individuals, only for them to return later. A long-term, enforceable strategy is needed to prevent the environmental crisis from worsening.

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