

As I write this, city officials are conducting a sweep of [The Field of Dreams](#), a homeless encampment next to an I-90 overpass in SoDo. When I visited the camp on Sunday, residents were gathering to [draft](#) a last-ditch appeal to delay the sweep. Yesterday, four City Council members signed a letter asking the Mayor to delay the sweep. The sweep is happening anyway.

This encampment has been around for years, but grew massively in size as [The Jungle was swept](#). Numerous people that I spoke with at The Field told me that they had been directed there by the city. Regardless of how they ended up there, the fact that we allowed people to camp there for years while ignoring their pleas for the most basic services is a failure of our system. Our local governments should be serving ALL of Seattle's residents, not only those who can afford homes.

Residents have nowhere to go. Some plan to join a nearby encampment, close enough that they could carry some of their belongings. Others hope to make it across town, leaving behind what little they had. Belongings that they cannot carry will be disposed of. The eviction notices posted at the camp include a number to call for storage of belongings, but residents who called say the person answering the line [did not know](#) of such services.

A shelter designed to help those displaced by sweeps was supposed to open [last year](#), but is far behind schedule. Residents of camps should be supported, not punished, through the delay. So far, services for camp residents have been minimal: a dumpster at the outskirts of camp, and a few porta-potties. Whether at its current location or elsewhere, some stopgap measure is required. The reality is that we don't have the shelter beds or low-barrier sanctioned encampments for the people being displaced today.

It's too late now for the Field of Dreams. The tents are gone, and the community has scattered. But it is not too late to reverse our city's approach to homelessness. Ignoring unsanctioned encampments for years and then evicting residents for health and safety issues is an inhumane and expensive way to deal with problems. The City of Seattle must immediately end homeless sweeps and transform its top-down approach into one that listens to and respects communities.

There have been 41 fire department responses and [over 100 police responses](#) to The Field since September -- roughly one per day -- at enormous cost to taxpayers. In contrast, the preventative measures [laid out by residents](#) are modest in price and preventative in nature. They have requested LED lighting and fire extinguishers (the budget for each is just \$300). They've asked for gravel or mulch to address both the mud and the rat infestation (since rats make homes in pallets needed to elevate tents above the mud). They have requested garbage cans, and also want to offer their local knowledge to help identify and clean up abandoned tents. In the future, the city should proactively seek out and rapidly respond to such requests.

Working with residents from the beginning isn't just about efficiency. It isn't just about preventing displacement like today's sweep of The Field of Dreams. It's also about agency. When residents self-organize to improve health and safety and are rewarded for doing so, everyone wins.

In this video, I walk across The Field with resident Reavy Washington, who tells me about his efforts over the past six months to get fire extinguishers and other health and safety resources for the camp.