



April 11, 2019

Northlake and Othello Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Members-

Thank you for your April 8 letter regarding the transition of daily operations at Northlake and Othello Tiny House Villages from Nickelsville to the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI). As you know, the City's Human Service Department (HSD) is responsible for designing and implementing this critical shelter resource and HSD believes tiny house villages continue to play a role in meeting the needs of people living unsheltered. Although we have conveyed this before, we want to make sure you know that the City has a direct contract with LIHI to operate this program and Nickelsville has no contractual relationship with the City or LIHI for operating this program.

Our first and foremost concern is the welfare of the residents, particularly those with children at the villages. We share the sentiments the CAC highlighted in your letter—in particular, the concern regarding the lack of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between LIHI and its contractor, Nickelsville. The MOU would address two key areas: increasing visibility HSD and community have into the day-to-day operations of the villages and the need to provide case management resources to residents.

We have spoken extensively to LIHI and Nickelsville and had hoped that they could reach an agreement between the two organizations. However, HSD has waited over a year for a MOU to be agreed upon. Every day that passes without these necessary improvements results in more instability and precious time lost for residents searching for permanent housing options. Considering this lack of progress in regard to the MOU, we support LIHI's current efforts to comply with the terms of the City's contract.

HSD recognizes that Nickelsville has a long history of organizing and operating self-managed encampments for individuals experiencing homelessness. We have communicated on multiple occasions that we wish to continue to support the self-managed model at these sites into the future. HSD has met with residents and observed their day-to-day management of sites—we believe residents have the power, autonomy, and community to continue internal leadership of villages in a democratic manner with LIHI. HSD is confident that LIHI can continue such self-managed practices successfully, as seen at Interbay Village and Camp Second Chance.

HSD takes allegations of any misconduct in villages seriously and encourages residents, staff, and CAC members to contact us to report incidents. Such allegations further highlight the need for professional case management and transparency within villages operations. HSD has deployed specially-trained staff to village sites on a near daily basis to meet with residents and to create direct dialogue between residents and the City, helping HSD learn more about their experiences and understand how we can greater support their diverse and multicultural needs.

During these visits, HSD staff heard directly from residents who are concerned with Nickelsville's ongoing presence, insufficient access to case managers, and threats of punitive measures for speaking with City or LIHI staff. HSD staff have witnessed Nickelsville staff misrepresenting the City's position,

including the falsehood that residents will be removed upon LIHI assuming daily operations of the villages. Media accounts of padlocks on gates have been widespread and have included threats by Nickelsville staff to go “on strike” to prevent supplies and services from reaching these sites. These accounts and tactics are deeply concerning given the implications for such a vulnerable population, further exposing residents to unnecessary instability. We support LIHI’s efforts to maintain programmatic control of these villages and to provide a safe, supportive environment that allows people to have the resources they need to find their path to housing.

We are happy to engage in constructive dialogue with the CACs and their members, Nickelsville, and LIHI during this transition of daily operations of these villages to LIHI. HSD appreciates your time and energy to help village residents succeed in the neighborhoods hosting these programs. We look forward to LIHI continuing to convene community members, as they have done in other villages, in the months ahead.



**Jason Johnson**  
Interim Director  
City of Seattle Human Services Department