



**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY GROUP**  
**of the Ventana Chapter**  
P.O. Box 604, Santa Cruz, CA 95061

EMAIL: [sierraclubsanacruz@gmail.com](mailto:sierraclubsanacruz@gmail.com)  
WEB: [www.sierraclub.org/ventana/santa-cruz](http://www.sierraclub.org/ventana/santa-cruz)

March 4, 2021

Dear Santa Cruz City Council members,

**The Sierra Club is writing to express our opposition to the Temporary Outdoor Living Ordinance as currently written due to its potential impact on Santa Cruz's greenbelt properties.** Because the ordinance would effectively ban camping in almost every other part of the city, including city parks, the areas of our greenbelts that are 75 feet from trails become, de facto, the primary place where camping is allowed. It challenges common sense that areas with sensitive riparian habitat, waterways that flow into Monterey Bay, and both state and federally listed species should end up as the primary legal spaces for homeless people to sleep. The problems of untreated human waste, trash, habitat disturbance, and fire danger are the most obvious environmental issues that are not adequately addressed in the ordinance.

There is widespread recognition that the current situation in our city is untenable. Voters elected the current city council because, as candidates, each pledged to address the entrenched and growing issue of homelessness in Santa Cruz. Treating our protected natural spaces as relocation sites is not a solution for a population that is in dire need of managed living situations with access to sanitation, food, health care, and social and mental health services. Furthermore, with the approach of spring and summer in this drought year, the specter of last summer's fires loom large. To proceed as if unsupervised outdoor camping does not pose a grave fire danger is unfathomable.

**Questions raised by the ordinance, and which need to be answered by your Counsel prior to the adoption on this ordinance and the CEQA determination, include:**

- Has the appropriate level of environmental review been performed addressing potential impacts on water quality, habitat disturbance, and fire danger?
- How will the city enforce the ordinance (and laws already in place) when each of these locations includes many obscured and difficult-to-access areas?
- Has the Coastal Commission been consulted about changes that would occur in the areas that would allow camping?
- How will existing laws against littering, open fires, and pollution of waterways with human waste and trash be enforced?

The Sierra Club does recognize the ethical and constitutional right of people without homes to have legal places to sleep. We view managed encampments and the development of affordable housing work as effective steps toward decreasing homelessness. We appreciate Council-members Brunner and Kalamati-Johnson for recognizing that managed camping areas are key to improving local conditions. Pushing people into remote out-of-sight areas does not solve the problem of homelessness and it ignores the very real threat to these sensitive habitats. **We urge the council to set up managed campsites and safe sleeping zones for our homeless population in places with good access to services. In so doing, the City can protect the safety and well-being of our open spaces and the human residents of our city, those with housing and those without.**

Yours Sincerely,

Micah Posner, Executive Committee Chair