

**Coalition of Concerned
Commerce Circle Businesses**

March 2021

Councilmember Jeff Harris
Sacramento City Council
915 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Urgent Request for Assistance – RV Street Camping Out of Control

Dear Councilmember Harris:

We write to request your urgent assistance in addressing the unsafe, unhealthy, and highly unpredictable situation that is reaching a breaking point in the Commerce Circle area where our businesses are located. As you no doubt know, our area has become a destination for street camping by persons whose home is a car or an RV, in some cases an inoperable vehicle. At last count, at least 100 vehicles are occupying the area, without lawful access to water, garbage or sewer service. Some residents of these vehicles are engaging in threatening behavior, and many of us are experiencing incidents of trespass and theft on a regular basis, including theft of substantial assets in some instances. Despite numerous calls to local law enforcement, we have been told repeatedly there is nothing the police can or will do to protect or defend us, our employees, and our businesses. Only recently have we been able to obtain the assistance of code enforcement, which we appreciate, but the magnitude of the challenge calls for a substantial, coordinated response.

We know we are not alone in our experience, given the magnitude of the homeless problem in the city and elsewhere. But we are a relatively small business park and are on the verge of being completely overwhelmed. Here are just a few specific examples of what we are experiencing:

- Several RV campers have complained about normal business traffic using the city street and threatened to plant nails on the street as a makeshift tack strip to bring traffic to a halt.

- Even without the threat of nails in the street, the path for vehicle traffic is limited in a number of places because a number of RVs have pop-outs that extend their width in the first place; then inoperable cars, boats or other vehicles are parked next to them, side by side, blocking much of the street.
- Some RV campers are using our commercial waste bins as toilets, and recently a box full of human waste greeted one of our businesses at its entrance when it opened in the morning.
- Campers regularly hook into backflow detectors and sprinkler systems, located on our properties, for showers, carwashing and filling their water tanks, with their water use charged to us, directly or indirectly.
- One man living on the street breached the fenced yard of one business and entered the employee break room; when asked to leave he said the police would have to remove him; fortunately, an ambulance arrived promptly enough to safely remove the man before the incident escalated.
- At least two RVs have burned to the ground on site; fortunately, the residents evacuated in time and no one appears to have been hurt.
- If they are not burning fires inside their RVs, campers regularly cook their meals on barbecues set up on the edge of the levee on the south side of Commerce Circle, with attendant smoke and hot embers.
- Given the cover provided by the lawless circumstances, a stolen U-Haul trailer recently was left parked amidst the other vehicles.
- When a person died of an overdose in a vehicle on the street not long ago, the resulting street closure and law enforcement investigation was distressing and disrupted business.

A few photos showing how bad things have gotten are attached for your reference. To the extent residents of the RVs are closely approaching us and our employees, as well as our property, we also assume there is a risk posed by COVID-19. And as bad as the RV fires and the barbecue fires are at this time, we note they have been occurring during the winter wet season so far. Once the vegetation ringing Commerce Circle starts to dry, it will become more of a tinderbox than usual under our current circumstances.

To ensure things do not get any worse, and in order to bring our situation under control, we specifically request the following:

1. City funding beginning immediately for our businesses collectively to hire private security 24 hours a day 7 days a week, for at least the next 3 months. With patrols and the watchful eyes of security officers, thefts should be reduced or eliminated, and some semblance of order restored.

2. Development of a plan to relocate the RV residents to safe ground as soon as possible where they will have access to water, garbage, sewer and other amenities to improve their quality of life and eliminate the public health risks to them and to us based on their current circumstances.

3. A commitment to ensure the RV residents are relocated no later than the start of fire season as an essential fire prevention measure. This will ensure more RVs are not put at fire risk, and that we are not engulfed in more smoke and flames than otherwise expected given our drought conditions; it will also ensure the City's fire department is not occupied disproportionately in protecting our small business community.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We request the opportunity for a delegation representing our business district to meet with you to review our requests and discuss how you can help fulfill them promptly. To that end, one of us will call you in the next few days to arrange for a meeting.

Sincerely yours,

Signature

Signature

Printed Name and Title

Printed Name and Title

Business Name

Business Name