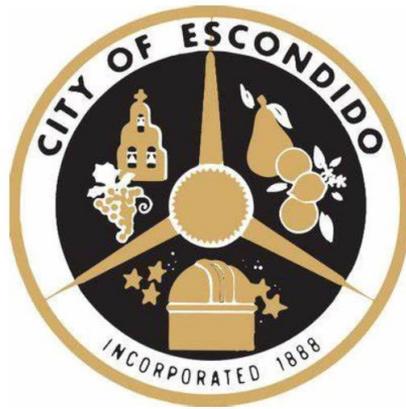


POLICY STATEMENT



ON HOMELESSNESS

FEBRUARY 28, 2024

The City of Escondido recognizes homelessness is a complex issue without a single solution to meet the dynamic needs of our unhoused population. We understand there are a number of underlying causes including: housing affordability, mental health concerns and [Substance Abuse Disorder](#).

The City of Escondido is committed to a compassionate, needs-driven approach for families and individuals experiencing homelessness in Escondido that are willing to receive help. We have led the response to homelessness in North County by partnering with residents, business owners, and non-profits that provide wraparound services to the homeless population.

The City of Escondido has listened to the public and studied their concerns with one fact being clear; a pervasive and consistent level of criminal activity exists within the unhoused population. This is largely perpetuated by those with untreated Substance Abuse Disorder. To ignore this reality by primarily attributing homelessness to housing availability and affordability is naïve. We support a Public Safety First approach towards homelessness that ensures the safety of our community and economic viability of our future.

The City of Escondido believes everyone should be treated with dignity and respect, irrespective of their current situation or economic status. We are committed to supporting efforts that help individuals achieve sobriety and regain their mental health with the goal of financial independence and stable housing. We believe any policy that enables personally destructive behavior is neither compassionate nor effective.

The City of Escondido will not support any program that enables continued drug use or allows individuals to continue living on the street, regardless of how well-intentioned the programs may be or who may endorse them. We will not participate in the distribution of free resources such as tents, tarps, syringes, drug pipes, or anything else that enables substance abuse or homelessness.

The City of Escondido recognizes the one-size-fits-all approach of [Housing First](#) has proven ineffective and unsustainable with the exception of seniors who may have been priced out of the housing market due to their limited and/or fixed income. We believe independence can be achieved and encouraged by addressing the underlying causes of homelessness, before long-term housing is provided. Being unhoused will not be accepted as an excuse for continued drug abuse and/or criminality in Escondido.

The City of Escondido understands that simply being unhoused is not the problem, but a symptom of the problem. Data shows that the vast majority of unhoused are either addicted to drugs, experiencing a mental health crisis, or both. We recognize that drug addiction and untreated mental health concerns are the root cause of the state of affairs on the streets of Escondido. Sadly homelessness is the predictable consequence of the financial, relational, and legal problems that regularly accompany Substance Abuse Disorder.

The City of Escondido recognizes not everyone experiencing homelessness is a criminal transient. We stand ready and willing to lend IMMEDIATE support to those willing to accept help. If an individual on the streets in Escondido, regardless of circumstance, has a family member who is willing to take them in, we will seek to reunite them. We believe in accountability for those willing or unwilling to accept assistance. Choosing sobriety is the only acceptable option. A criminal transient is a specific type of unsheltered person who creates an unreasonable burden on emergency services, the criminal justice system, and affects the safety of our entire community.

The City of Escondido understands that criminal transients adversely impact local businesses and suppress economic development. We value every business that contributes to the economic success of our community. Small and large companies have sacrificed significant sums of money to make their storefronts more inviting to customers and less attractive to criminal transients. We believe private citizens should not be forced to subordinate their property rights to the interests of criminal transients. Business owners should not have to tolerate an unsheltered criminal trespassing on their property, creating a disturbance or otherwise being harmful.

The City of Escondido recognizes the detrimental impacts criminal transients have on our parks, creeks, waterways, plazas and other public buildings. Crimes such as vandalism, arson and the dumping of biological waste are among the most egregious acts that must cease. We understand our duty to maintain a clean and safe environment for the benefit of the community as a whole and for the good of the Earth. We will prioritize the following areas: Grape Day Park; Grand Avenue (with focus on Centre City Parkway to Ivy Street); Valley Parkway (with focus on Ash Street to Midway Drive and the Home Depot located at 1550 West Valley Parkway) and direct staff to explore a moratorium on homeless services and shelters in the [Downtown Specific Plan Area](#), including a buffer zone of the surrounding six blocks.

The City of Escondido understands that changes in State Law have removed any viable mechanism to force an individual experiencing homelessness to accept help. This must be reprioritized by the State Assembly, State Senate and Governor of California. We recognize our responsibility to advocate for criminal justice reform that does not seek to punish individuals for being a victim of Substance Abuse Disorder. We support sound policies that provide accountability and relief.

The City of Escondido believes that local control is critical to developing effective solutions to the impacts of homelessness on City residents and businesses, as well reducing the expenditure of scarce City resources, money and services on these issues. To that end, it supports clarity from the United States Supreme Court, in cases such as *City of Grant's Pass v. Johnson*, in declaring the right of cities to enforce generally applicable state and local laws to regulating impacts of homelessness on both public and private property.

The City of Escondido recognizes that the role Law Enforcement plays with respect to homelessness is limited and specific. The Escondido Police Department is committed to protecting our community through exceptional police services. Escondido residents have an expectation that their officers will police crime and disorder rather than function as social workers or homeless advocates.

The City of Escondido advocates for programs that reduce the prevalence of drug addiction in our community and provide mental health support to achieve independence. We seek programs that provide education and intervention efforts especially for our youth.

The City of Escondido supports an *Escondido First* approach that prioritizes unsheltered individuals in our community with direct ties to Escondido. We maintain a standard that local service providers not become magnets for criminal behavior which place undue burdens on municipal services.

The City of Escondido expects all local service providers to prioritize helping unhoused Escondido residents before aiding individuals from other cities. We recognize homelessness is a problem throughout the region, but until Escondido residents, or those currently unhoused in Escondido, have been served, local providers cannot become a regional resource. Leaving individuals unhoused in Escondido while accepting residents from other cities is unacceptable.

Passed, adopted and approved by the City Council of the City of Escondido at a regular meeting thereof the 28th day of February, 2024

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Attest:

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Zack Beck
City Clerk