



Information Related to the Unhoused in Monterey

Updated July 27, 2022

Background Summary

The City of Monterey has received numerous questions from the community related to concerns about the unhoused in Monterey, specifically related to illegally camping on the beaches, in forested areas, and other locations. Many concerns have arisen around the potential damage to the beach including erosion, creating public health issues, damaging areas with contaminating trash, human waste, drug paraphernalia, and potential fire danger in forested areas.

When the State of California enacted a [Stay at Home Order](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, it allowed the unhoused to live in various areas as there were no other options. Thus, we saw an increase in persons living along roadsides, in open spaces, on beaches, and other locations. Encampments grew along many miles of freeways and highways throughout California. As the pandemic eased, California lifted the Stay at Home order in June 2021. Months later, Caltrans, the state agency that manages the state road system, received funding to help displaced residents living along state properties. The State wanted to ensure safety for those living along roadways as it is unsafe and poses other risks to the community by increasing the potential for fires, and other environmental and health risks. Since late 2021, Caltrans has addressed many of the encampments and assisted individuals in finding other alternatives.

The [Monterey Police Department's Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team \(MDOT\)](#) plays an important role in this process locally. While there have been many successes, other individuals are more "service resistant," refusing services offered to them and choosing to live outdoors in public places, including on beaches, parks, and forested areas. When discussing homelessness, it must be recognized that people become unhoused for a variety of reasons, and the vast majority want to become housed. However, there are several groups of those who are homeless that are "service resistant" and will not avail themselves of services or, especially during the summer months, are "travelers" that move through Monterey and then move on. It must also be acknowledged that there is a lack of housing and shelter beds, which contributes to the problem.

The City of Monterey is currently seeing an increase in camping along Monterey State and Del Monte beaches – between Municipal Wharf 2 (the Commercial Wharf) and the Monterey Tides Hotel.

Q1: *Is it illegal to camp in public spaces, including beaches?*

A1: Yes, it is illegal to camp in certain public spaces, however, there are several legal requirements we must follow while enforcing this and similar laws. In a legal case titled *Martin v. Boise*, the federal 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that public agencies cannot criminalize homelessness if there are not enough shelters to house those who are illegally camping. If cities and counties have homeless shelter space, the enforcement of anti-camping laws is legal. While we work diligently to locate bedspace for those who want it, we sometimes have challenges finding bed space and therefore cannot enforce specific laws related to illegally camping. More about that case can be found here:

<https://www.cityofboise.org/news/mayor/2021/february/settlement-reached-in-groundbreaking-martin-v-boise-case/>

Q2: *Does the Monterey Peninsula have enough homeless shelter space?*

A2: No. There are challenges in finding bed space on a 24-hour a day basis for those who may decide they would like to avail themselves of being inside. In the City of Monterey, many non-governmental organizations and the MPD Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (MDOT) are working to house the homeless and these options include: 1) a shelter for youth to age 24 (Safeplace by Community Human Services, a non-profit organization); 2) a day center for women (Gathering for Women, a non-profit organization); 3) a daily housing service that picks up men and women to provide overnight shelter (I-HELP, a non-profit); and 4) an anticipated opening of a shelter in 2023 for women and children (The Shuman Hearthouse by Community Human Services). However, the temporary shelter offered by I-HELP is only available if people agree to be transported to various locations before 4:30 pm and be dropped off at 8:00 am the next morning. The MDOT team also utilizes the services of a men's overnight shelter in Salinas (Victory Mission, a non-profit organization). There are many challenges even when there is a potential for finding overnight shelter, as the shelters correctly have requirements to stay there. One such requirement includes being vaccinated. Sometimes individuals the City's MDOT Team are working with do not want to comply with the requirements the shelters have in place, such as the hours of operations, pet restrictions, and/or drug or alcohol policies.

Q3: *Why don't we secure more bed space for the homeless?*

A3: Many local non-profits and government entities are working on that, but it is challenging. Many residents do not want homeless shelters built in their neighborhoods. They fear these shelters will make their neighborhoods unsafe and reduce property values. If the shelters are built further away from neighborhoods, transportation and finding services nearby become difficult. Funding is also a significant challenge. City government funds are limited, focusing on services such as fire, police, library, parks and recreation, and public works. County funding is also limited, as are water supplies to support the development of shelter space. The City has

prioritized housing affordability and strives to improve access to housing, which in turn is intended to reduce homelessness.

Q4: What is the City of Monterey and the Monterey Police Department (MPD) Doing to address this issue?

A4: First, it must be acknowledged that being homeless is not a crime. Many unhoused suffer from mental health issues, addiction issues, loss of jobs, loss of homes, etc. Several years ago, the MPD created a team called the Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (MDOT). MDOT consists of our Community Action Team (CAT) police officers, as well as local service providers, such as: the YWCA (Domestic Violence), a Community Health Innovations social worker, a Monterey County Behavioral Health Mobile Crisis Response worker, Adult Protective Services, Gathering for Women, Interim and other providers. Some of these service providers have workstations at the Monterey Police Department and work closely with our officers. The City has had great success in coordinating services for people that has included enrollment in mental health and drug treatment programs, as well as long-term housing solutions. For individuals willing to go to a shelter or a program, the Police Department often drive them to the shelter or their appointment(s) where they can receive services. While we have had success with a few individuals, not everyone wants help or is willing to make changes to their current living conditions. There are also barriers to finding shelter for people.

While the MPD is very invested in coordinating access to services, MPD also enforces violations of the law. Recently during outreach, persons in an encampment were using and possessing methamphetamine and were arrested. However, arrests are not a long-term solution and with the recent decriminalization of drug crimes, simple possession of illicit drugs is a misdemeanor that results in the subject(s) being cited out of the jail and living back on the street.

The MPD publishes the work our Community Action Team and MDOT does via our Monthly Report. You can find the [Monthly Report](#) online under the Get Informed tab at montereypolice.org. As an example, in June 2022 the MPD abated 74 encampments, in May MPD abated 89 encampments, in April MPD abated 43 encampments and in March MPD abated 53 encampments. Please know the MPD is committed to the safety of the public and we are working within the confines of the law and ensuring those who are unhoused are offered services, to address this very complicated issue. Much of this work is done to ensure that the locations where these illegal encampments are being erected are not eroding the beach, creating public health problems, damaging the areas with contaminating trash, human waste, drug paraphernalia, preventing potential fire danger in forested areas, etc. The City addresses this issue with multiple Departments and in addition to the MPD utilizes staff and contractors from other City Departments to assist in the cleanup of the beaches and other City areas.

Q5: What can City administrators do?

A5: City officials know this topic is top of mind and very concerning for residents. City administrators continue to work with elected leaders at the local, regional, and state levels to find solutions. It is ongoing, and progress is being made. Caltrans continues to abate illegal encampments, set up wire fencing to stop encampments from reforming, and legislators are looking at new laws, and new services, including for those with mental health and/or drug addiction.

On July 14, 2022, many City of Monterey staff attended the "Lead Me Home Summit on Homelessness" which was presented by the Coalition of Homeless Service Providers. The City is committed to continue to work with all stakeholders in an effort to find solutions to the issues that are related to homelessness, and to find resolution so those who are illegally camping can be housed and these issues are resolved.

Q6: Why are we seeing so many unhoused in Monterey?

A6: Many of the unhoused in Monterey are from Monterey originally, and this is their home. Others come to Monterey and find a mild climate, little crime, and tourists. Those who are visiting Monterey often feel for those who do not have as much as they do and provide cash and other things to those who are homeless. This provides the ability for the "service resistant" unhoused to find a means that allow them to remain unhoused, but gain income. For many years, the City has discouraged the public from donating money or goods directly to those who are unhoused, and instead donate to nonprofit organizations that support individuals experiencing homelessness. While some may feel that donating cash to panhandlers is an altruistic act, direct monetary donations to individuals experiencing homelessness perpetuates the homelessness challenge our communities are facing, because it encourages individuals to panhandle rather than seek assistance from service providers.

It is important to point out that the programs being utilized in the City of Monterey are working in getting people housed. The 2022 [Monterey Homeless Count and Survey Comprehensive Report](#) shows a 50% decrease in unhoused persons in the City of Monterey comparing 2019 to 2022 (the two most recent counts, page 12).

JURISDICTIONAL BREAKDOWN

Of the jurisdictions in the County, the City of Monterey saw the largest decrease of 50% from 2019 to 2022.

Figure 6: HOMELESS POPULATION BY JURISDICTION

JURISDICTION	UNSHelterED			ShelterED			TOTAL			'19-'22 % change
	2017	2019	2022	2017	2019	2022	2017	2019	2022	
Total Incorporated	1,692	1,492	1,089	724	560	652	2,416	2,052	1,741	-15%
Monterey	292	167	74	46	37	27	338	204	101	-50%
Salinas	1,097	976	777	264	206	288	1,361	1,182	1,065	-10%
Marina	51	98	81	356	261	275	407	396	356	-10%
Seaside	40	126	90	58	56	62	98	182	152	-16%
Sand City	31	8	3	0	0	0	31	8	3	*
Gonzales	0	21	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	*
Pacific Grove	35	14	29	0	0	0	35	14	29	*
King City	0	27	18	0	0	0	0	27	18	*
Greenfield	6	14	2	0	0	0	6	14	2	*
Del Rey Oaks	111	0	2	0	0	0	111	0	2	*
Cornel	16	6	1	0	0	0	16	6	1	*
Soledad	13	35	12	0	0	0	13	35	12	*
Total Unincorporated	421	358	268	0	52	58	419	370	306	-17%
Total	2,113	1,830	1,357	724	592	690	2,837	2,422	2,047	-15%

*Note: % change was not calculated when jurisdiction was below 25 individuals.

Q7: What can you do to help the situation?

A7: Here are five things you can do to help:

- 1) Contact your [state representatives](#) and ask them for help. Tell them how you feel about the current situation on the local beaches and other open spaces. Explain to them your concerns.
- 2) Try to understand that each individual situation is unique and being empathetic to people's needs can help.
- 3) Do not provide handouts or cash to those who may be asking, instead find a reputable non-profit and donate to that group. Non-profits provide a more structured way of providing services.

4) Keep the communication channels with your community leaders open. Dialogue and continuing to work together as a community will make us stronger and we will see positive results.

5) If you see something, say something. While most homeless persons are not a threat, it is always good to be aware and if you see something that doesn't seem right, please let us know. This goes for any individual, not just a homeless person. If you see a crime being committed call 9-1-1. If you see an incident, but not the crime taking place, call the non-emergency Police number at (831) 646-3914. If you want your city official to know about a situation, contact them by email at suggest@monterey.org, or call (831) 646-3799 – both go directly to the City Manager's Office.