

Minutes from the December 15, 2010 meeting

Members present: Ray Detter, Susan Pollay, Peter Ludt, Brian Durrance, Maggie Ladd, Charles Coleman, Maura Thomson, Sabra Briere, Daniel Chae (Office of Community Development)

Members absent: Mary Campbell, Paul Sher, Doug Martelle (representing the AAPolice)

Guests present: Leslie Stambaugh, Don Austin (Shelter Association), Lily Au (Community Volunteer), Robin Melton (panhandler), Allon Melton (panhandler), Geoffrey Scott (panhandler), Tate Williams (Camp Take Notice)

Members of the committee and guests briefly introduced themselves.

The minutes of the previous meeting were not discussed or approved.

The committee heard from three residents who identified themselves as panhandlers

Why do you panhandle?

Geoffrey Scott became homeless in New York on 9/11/01, but that situation had nothing to do with the World Trade Center. He learned there how to live on the street. He lost his job due to alcoholism; he survives on panhandling. He was able to learn how to survive because he likes to talk with people. He lives in a parking structure but could live with his sister. He believes he'd wear out his welcome there.

Robin and Allon Melton are currently homeless. Robin spends much of her time unable to work, even as a panhandler. They learned to panhandle from Tommy Cotton (a panhandler who works the downtown area, often around 4th Avenue and Ann). They are from Ypsilanti. Panhandlers may have substance abuse or mental health problems. Sometimes they are filling the gap between housing vouchers and the rest of their expenses by panhandling.

How much do you make? Can you support yourself?

Tate Williams from **Camp Take Notice** knows of three men who share an apartment. The apartment is only in one person's name. They make about \$100 each per day.

Geoffrey Scott said that a panhandler working a freeway exit can make \$300 per day. He supports his habit panhandling. He asks for a specific small amount (a quarter) and gives a purpose (help with bus fare, help buy coffee, etc.).

Are panhandlers homeless?

Lily Au said that some are homeless, some are not, just as some are aggressive and some friendly. There are youth who are living on South University on a roof top and others who are living under a bridge by the hospital. Ms Au described other panhandlers who make a living in this fashion, and talked about their individual temperaments.

Others mentioned that these transient youth are sometimes quite aggressive, and while their presence may have been connected with Punk week, others have come to the area because they romanticize the lifestyle. This group of youth also seems to be much more involved in drug addiction (vis. Heroin) rather

than alcohol addiction. In addition to hanging out around South University, a group (they may be the same ones) have been present in the Liberty Street area near State Street.

Why panhandle in Ann Arbor?

Geoffrey Scott said that panhandling is 4-5 times better in Ann Arbor than in Ypsilanti. It can also be very territorial. The resources are in Ann Arbor, the residents are very friendly. There is a younger group of people who are just passing through (the students) who give freely. At the same time, Ann Arbor is liberal and tolerant.

Charles Coleman offered help to both Geoffrey Scott and the Meltons, but no one accepted this help immediately. Shelter, medical care and an opportunity to withdraw from alcohol were all on the table. The Meltons spoke of a need for a home they could rent with a shared kitchen and bath. Members of the service organizations will continue to work with these and other panhandlers.

Discussion

Charles Coleman pointed out that he had come to this meeting with some misgiving, as he was surprised to see the change in the agenda. However, he'd learned by listening, and was pleased with the outcome. **Sabra Briere** explained that the opportunity to have the panhandlers come to the meeting and talk about their reasons for panhandling had come together at the very last minute. She said that **Brian Durrance** offered to make the arrangements at the last meeting, but there were no guarantees that anyone would actually agree until the morning of the meeting.

Susan Pollay and other committee members discussed how what was offered by the guest speakers reinforced what the police, the merchants, and the service organizations had already told the committee.

Next Meeting

Agenda:

Action phase

Outreach: how to reach the permanent resident; how to reach the merchant; how to reach the student / University staff member; how to reach the panhandler – develop the firm strategies

Education: finalize the message(s)

Budget: determine the first year; design mechanism for continuing

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30 pm, Wednesday, January 5, 3rd Floor Conference Room. Beware of construction!