

Safety Committee Minutes

Honorable Council
City of Newark, Ohio
September 3, 2024

The Safety Committee met in Council Chambers on September 3, 2024 following the Service Committee meeting with these members present:

Mark Labutis, Chair
Bill Cost, Vice Chair
Beth Bline
Michael Houser
Jeff Rath

We wish to report:

1. Ordinance No. 24-36 AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 660 OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF NEWARK, OHIO WITH REGARD TO CAMPING ON PUBLIC PROPERTY

Mr. Houser – Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to go ahead and speak to this ordinance. I've got a few comments prepared for me to introduce it, and then I'll talk a little bit about some of the specifics of the ordinance. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in June of this year to uphold the constitutionality of camping bans on public property reflects a growing concern among communities across the country regarding the use of public spaces. The ruling has sparked a wave of local ordinances aimed at addressing the presence of homeless encampments in parks, walking paths, sidewalks, streets, and other communal areas. While these spaces are intended for the enjoyment and use of all residents, they are used by homeless individuals which has led to a significant reduction in accessibility and a growing sense of insecurity among the public. The bike path in east and south Newark serves as a prime example of this issue, and has since seen a marked decline in use as residents no longer feel safe navigating the area. Presence of encampments has not only made the path less accessible, but has also altered its intended purpose, ultimately depriving the community of a vital resource. Members of this body have consistently heard from business owners in the City, and the constant struggle they're having with individuals sleeping in front of their establishments and hindering their business.

Mr. Rath – Mr. Houser, could you increase the volume a little bit?

Mr. Houser – I'm so sorry. Yes. It is imperative that we maintain a city that is friendly to the local business owners. Addressing the issue of homelessness, particularly the segment of the population that remains entrenched in camping on public land, requires a change in approach. This may be because of substance abuse issues or mental health challenges, but

with this entrenchment there is a danger in creating an environment where assistance is available without any expectation of behavioral change, as this can inadvertently enable persistence of the problem without a clear path towards self-sufficiency or rehabilitation. The cycle of homelessness can continue unchecked and the burden on public spaces can grow. I want to make clear that in no way am I suggesting that every homeless individual is in this position through choice. Life can be difficult, and I believe it's important to make sure that as a community we are truly providing the right help, a hand up and not a hand out. In talking with the police chief, Newark Police Department and enforcement of this ordinance will make individuals aware of services available in the community as a first step. This will increase the awareness of needed services and this approach has been used in other communities across the country. In this community we do have an abundance of resources for those that are going through challenges of this kind. I hope that you'll consider this legislation, and I understand this is a difficult topic that there is a lot of disagreement for, but hopefully this will be considered and we can have some good discussion tonight. I'll touch on a couple of points within the legislation, I think assuming since most people are here they're aware of the content of the legislation. It is very similar to the legislation that was upheld by the Supreme Court, in fact it's almost identical. It focuses on sleeping in public places and camping in public areas. That's the focus with a minor misdemeanor offense on the first offense for violating that. That's an overview of the legislation and that's all that I had in case any of the public officials want to share.

Mr. Labutis - We will try to speak as clearly and precisely as we can, okay? We're trying to project out into the lobby as well, which I know becomes difficult beyond the doors. Before I open it for comment, are there any comments from the committee?

Mr. Cost - I think we'll all agree that there's a broad reason that people are homeless. It goes all the way from drugs, alcohol, incarceration, mental health, but that's not the end of it. There are also people who have just lost their home, can't make rent, have had a car breakdown, and they can't get to their job. The list goes on and on and on. So, we have this broad spectrum of why someone is homeless. But from my point of view, we're trying to solve this with a very narrow solution. I mean, I understand that the community does not want homeless camps on the yard of the courthouse. I get that. I also understand that community members do not want a camp in their front or backyard. I get that too. However, if you can't be on private property and you can't be on public property, then the only solution we're giving is jail. I've always found in life one size does not fit all. I don't care if it's a hat or a pair of pants or a community problem. I don't think we're going to solve this with one narrow swipe of having everyone go to jail. When you come out of jail, they're still going to be homeless. They're still not going to have a job. The only thing they'll have is a criminal record. For me, I'm only speaking for myself, I feel as if we're saying we give up. And I'm going to be fair and say this is not an easy thing to solve. If it was easy, it would have been solved years ago. We've always had poor people, we've always had homeless people, we're always going to have poor people and homeless people. But we have to be willing, as a council, as a community, to go that extra step. And I think until we're willing to put funds towards helping this situation out, it's never going to be solved. And I'm also realistic enough to know that a lot of money is being spent right now in what we're doing.

I mean, I get that. I've got a good friend whose daughter works out in Albuquerque, and her job is to find health care for homeless people. It's a tough job. But their motto is housing first. As I said, don't misunderstand me. I know there's a lot of problems. I know there are criminal elements inside of homelessness. I know that drugs are an issue. I know that there's problems with damage and breaking and entering. And I get it. I totally get it. If someone's committing a crime, they go to jail. I don't think being poor is a crime. I don't think being homeless is a crime. I think we have to find a solution. And it takes a lot longer than I wish it did. But we haven't found that solution yet. But I, for one, want to be a part of trying to find that solution. There's not one of us sitting up here that will leave here and ever question whether we're going to have a home to go home to or a meal or a job. Now, this is not a perfect world, and this isn't a perfect situation. I get that. But I think we need to do the extra work that it's going to take to try to help these folks. Some of them, you're never going to help. But there's still some of them who have, just like I said, just lost a house, just couldn't make rent, got health care issues. And I think there's some folks in there that we can truly help, and I want to be a part of helping them. Thank you.

Ms. Bline - Thank you. I'd like to thank everyone for coming out tonight. It means a lot. I was speaking with some as they were coming in. And, again, this is a reflection of a very engaged and caring community. Now, with that in mind, there's also an opportunity to bring clarity to something that is often very ambiguous and, as the gentleman said, very multifaceted. But with that in mind, government's role in this case is to bring safety, not just to house folks but those who are on the streets because they're in danger. I speak to many over the weekends, and they are in danger. And so, with that in mind, again, we want to get rid of some of the confusion as to what's being said and what's being spoken. And as this legislation is being considered, please, think about us as a community. We are a community, and one person's welfare does affect us all. And at the same time, one person's safety does affect us all. And so, we need to be wise in how we put this forth. And I thank you, again, for the opportunity to bring some clarity to this issue because before anything can move forward, we have to get rid of the confusion and chaos. So, thank you for this opportunity. And I'm glad to hear what people have to say. Thank you.

Mr. Labutis - Thank you. Anyone else from the committee?

Mr. Rath - Yeah, I'll throw my jabs out there somehow. Mr. Houser spoke of assistance without expectation of change and needing a change in approach. And we are spending money on this issue, on this problem, and I don't know that throwing more money at it is going to make a whole lot of difference. I don't know that we have a whole lot of money more to throw at it. Mr. Cost brought up...

(Interjections from the audience)

Mr. Labutis - Mr. Rath has the floor. Mr. Rath, go ahead.

Mr. Rath - Thank you. So, Mr. Cost brought up Albuquerque, New Mexico and their philosophy being housing first. I think that's awesome. I commend them for that. But you've got to compare apples to apples. We're a town of 50,000. Albuquerque is the largest city in the entire state of New Mexico. With a population of over a million. Why does that make a difference? Because when you have a million people paying into taxes, there's a lot more money to spend. We are not a big city. We are a small city. I think Mr. Cost mentioned that this was a very narrow solution. It's not a solution. It's not... This is not an end-all solution.

And that's not the goal of this legislation. The goal is not to take everybody that's homeless, round them up, and throw them in jail. That's not what we're about. That's not what we're talking about doing. That's not the purpose of this. But to say that the only thing that they're going to get out of this is a criminal record is just false. And misleading.

(Interjections from the audience)

Mr. Labutis - Mr. Rath has the floor. Mr. Rath has the floor.

Mr. Rath - Whether they are on city property or on private property... And by the way, if they're camping out on your private property, that's not a crime. Unless you report it. It's only a crime if you press charges. So, if you want them camping out in your backyard, have at it. There's no way they can be arrested for that unless you say they're trespassing. But getting these people into jail, for a lot of them, is their opportunity, their gateway into services. A lot of these people are on...

(Interjections from the audience)

Mr. Labutis - Mr. Rath has the floor. Mr. Rath has the floor. Mr. Rath.

Mr. Rath - It is an opportunity for them to get help. Whether they take advantage of it or not, it's not up to us, it's up to them. But it is an opportunity to get them help. This is another opportunity for us to lead people and steer them into a position of getting assistance. I absolutely am not... I am definitely against assistance without the expectation of change. I am definitely 100% for offering somebody a hand up. I am absolutely for giving them services that will allow them to benefit and change their position. I don't even care if they have a relapse and they go away from that and then come back. You want as many chances as they want. I'm okay with that. I really am.

(Interjections from the audience)

Mr. Labutis - Mr. Rath has the floor.

Mr. Rath - I am really okay with that. But I am definitely against getting a hand out. And there are a lot of our services here that really don't do any service to anybody other than their hand out. And that's just enabling. And I am definitely against that. There's also a lot of people... What are all the side comments going on? Who can't control themselves for just 30 seconds? Seriously. When it's time for you guys to speak, we will give you respect. And we will sit up here with our mouths shut and listen to you. Right now, it's my turn to speak. I'd appreciate it if you would give me the same respect. I forget what I was even saying. I don't know, I forget where I was. Okay, so there are a lot of services out here.

Unfortunately, there are also a lot of people that have burnt their bridges and don't qualify for those services anymore. That's not us. That's the people providing the service. They set the rules. You follow the rules. Everything is great, great, and glorious. You break those rules, you're not allowed to come back. That's for the safety and health, welfare, well-being of everybody else involved. There's nothing we can do about that. In point honestly, that's probably the biggest group of people that we have a problem with. Just to wrap it up, this is not a narrow solution. It's not a solution, but it is another way for us to be able to get services to people, another way for us to help people. It gives us the ability to lead them in the right direction. Pray to God that they follow. Thank you.

Mr. Labutis - Before I open it for public comment, I will say obviously this is a very passionate topic that everyone is engaged with. I appreciate that. From my own personal vantage point, I see both sides. I see the safety of our community and those that are

utilizing bike paths and public right-of-ways that we have. But it's also not lost on me the humanity side of people that are experiencing homelessness as well. I can see both sides. This is not an easy discussion nor an easy decision to make either. I think that all of us up here, even those of us that are not up here currently that are on Council, are approaching it from this manner. I understand that. So, as we go into and we have, just for clarification, we have had discussions previously as a community outside of Council. In 2019, there was a building that was purchased on East Main Street by the Evans Foundation that was originally meant to be a homeless shelter. We had a plan put forth in 2020. The building was sold in 2021 because there wasn't a consensus at that time as far as how to move forward. Most of us have a document from 2020 of a task force on homelessness that was there. That is a 105 page document filled with different and good, when I say good, ideas on how to work with the homeless community, how to help them, how to best serve them. With each of those great ideas comes a cost as well. I think a lot of the issues from our community, not from just a Council standpoint, from a community standpoint has been finding adequate funding to move forward on serving this population. So, I say that this is all as a precursor, okay? So, here's how I would like to move forward. I'm going to open it for public comment. As we do in Council meetings, I am going to limit the timeframe to three minutes per speaker, okay? I will watch the clock at 30 seconds. If you get to 2:30, I'll raise my hand. That's your 30-second wrap-up, okay? I know that many of you would like to speak. I understand that. I know we have people from probably all across the county that are here. Newark is dealing with this issue, but this is a county-wide issue. I understand that. So, for public comments, I would like to hear from Newark residents first, okay? I'd like to hear from Newark residents first. You have three minutes to speak. When I call you to the podium, I will point to you, call you out, you will come up, you will state your name and address for the record. Start by doing that. From that point, you will have three minutes to make your comment. Are we clear?

Unknown Speaker - I have a clarification question on something you just said. The building on East Main Street, did you sell that building or does Newark still own that building?

Mr. Labutis - It is, I think the Evans Foundation still has it, but St. Vincent de Paul is operating it as a store. St. Vincent de Paul is operating it as a store. It is being utilized, and they serve the homeless, but yes. Three minutes. Newark residents first. I would like to control the side chatter so everyone can hear what each person is saying. Be respectful of each other. I know we'll probably have views on both sides. We're all passionate about this. I understand. We'll go... Council meeting will start at 7 p.m. We do break at that point. I'm giving you all just a heads up. First, I believe, ma'am, you have had your hand up. If you would, please come to the podium and state your name and address for the record.

Mary Jo Farrell, 93 Grant St - I am here to speak for the voiceless. My first question is why is City Council spending money on a new parking garage, which I've been told by several people, and I don't know if it's 1% of our city tax or property tax that is being used to purchase the old Advocate building and renovate it to be a parking garage? Gosh, why do we need a parking garage? We have homeless on the street and we're spending money on a parking garage? Okay. Especially when most businesses downtown close at 5 o'clock. Okay? Who's going to be there all night? Wouldn't the money be better spent on low-income, no-income housing for the homeless or a huge shelter for the homeless? Everyone

just seems to think that the bulldozing of their encampments will make the problem go away. It seems that our city just wants to sweep the problem under a big rug and out of sight, out of mind. We have one, I'm sorry, three shelters in this town. One is for men, one is for battered women, and one is at Salvation Army, and that's if you don't have any criminal record, or if you're not an addict, or if you're a couple but you're not married, okay? Until the city of Newark comes up with a plan to help these people, sorry, my thing's doing some funny things. Until the city of Newark comes up with a plan to help these unhoused group of men and women, no matter what you do to their camp, it will continue. If you want to try and eliminate the problem of unhoused population, you need to look at it from a proactive point of view. Try investing the money that you're spending to put another parking garage in, and use some of that on old buildings in this town, renovate them, and give these human beings a place to sleep, take a shower, get a hot meal, and wash their clothes. I'm sure you can pay someone to staff these places who will make sure things go smoothly, and if not, those persons will be removed from the premises. Also, you wait on people, i.e. churches, to do the things that our city should be doing for our unhoused population. My church helped for eight years to feed and clothe our unhoused population, but we're told they were no longer allowed to do that on public property in the city of Newark. Now you're trying to pass a law that would make it illegal for them to sleep in any public place. Arresting them and fining them from \$150.

Mr. Labutis – You hit your three minute limit. Thank you for sharing. I appreciate it.

Linda LaMontagne, 538 Manor Dr - At the very beginning of the Grants Pass decision, the Supreme Court, writing for the majority, cited the positive action that Grants Pass has taken to protect its homeless citizens, property, and has a community liaison to direct the homeless toward services. These actions show that Grants Pass is working toward what the Supreme Court calls for, a responsible societal solution to a complex issue in which the American people must shape public policy. This was one underlying reason why the court decided that Grants Pass was not outlawing the status of homelessness. The court has made previous clear rulings against outlawing a person's status. My concern is that the same can't be said for our fair city. We have, in the last few years, prohibited the building of shelters to meet the growing need. Instead, our council has hoped to incent the homeless to move elsewhere by destroying their personal property on public lands with a slash-and-burn mentality. In our Council there has been talk of busing our homeless elsewhere to become another city's problem. While all our charities continue to report that the homeless we serve are not some transient population new to our community looking to milk our generosity, but they are neighbors who grew up here. Our neighbors who have family here. Our neighbors who are experiencing temporary hard times. Our local charities are planning to host a public discussion on homelessness in first quarter 2025 and we hope that our city policymakers will take a significant role in shaping that discussion. As a community we need to take seriously the guidance of the Supreme Court ruling and devise public policy that in sense our neighbors experiencing homelessness for whatever reason not to jeopardize the safety of our public spaces or make our parks unsafe for use. We need strengths. The strengths and compassions of our community to help those impacted negatively by our communities growth. We can provide more shelter space and programs to meet the growing need. We can treat neighbors compassionately by creating a stepped approach to

getting them off the street, out of the parks, and into programs that can make them productive citizens again. Thank you.

Maria Alejandra Leon Garcia, 230 Woods Ave. - In the summer of 2008, I decided just to escape domestic abuse and I became homeless. I called the shelter for new beginnings and I live there with my children for five weeks. After years of struggles, I have now owned my house for 13 years. As someone serving the community for over five years, I know that as rents increase without corresponding increases in income, the number of unsheltered people and the number of evictions is constantly alarmingly escalating. The Salvation Army has a waitlist that is usually several weeks long. This City Council begins every session with the earnest prayer that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Isaiah 58 says share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear and do not refuse to help your own relatives. Matthew 25 says I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you gave me them to me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. Anything you did for one of the least important of these brothers and sisters of mine you did for me. I am outraged that my city, a devout Christian community, is now considering penalizing people who have no choice but to sleep outside. This is inhumane. The hypocrisy of asking the Lord's blessing while shunning the poor is using the Lord's name in vain, and I call on this Council to follow the Christian calling by exploring more humane, more effective, and cost-efficient ways to end homelessness. Thank you.

Donald Bennett, 112 S. 5th St. - I also go out every Wednesday on my own with my girlfriend and a group of people, one that actually works here at the courthouse, and we serve our homeless. We actually go out there. We give them food. We give them clothing. We also know that people like our second ward is cutting down wood so that our homeless can't stay out of sight, out of your guys' way. They go out here, they live deep in the woods, out of everybody's way so that they don't bother nobody. And here's Toby Wells and his son wanting to go cut up their tent, steal their stuff. Why ain't they in jail for destruction of private property? Why ain't they in jail for theft? And then you wanna know why our homeless are out here sleeping on your sidewalk, sleeping on the square. They're out here stealing because their stuff's been stolen by the City. Their homes and the woods have been taken from them, forcing them out into the open. If you guys really wanna know what these homeless are about besides just seeing them, come down on Wednesday night, 6 o'clock at the thrift store on East Main Street, and you'll see us where we feed them, we clothe them, and you can hear their stories. They're down there begging to be helped, begging to be saved by the Lord. We have another group that goes out on Thursday nights. We have another group that goes out on Tuesday nights. We're trying to get a group every night to serve and feed them. If you guys would give us a building, you have enough volunteers, you ain't gotta pay nobody to come in and house them, staff them, feed them, or even clothe them. The only thing we need paid is the electric and the water so they can get showers, so they can get their phones charged, so they can continue with people. And I, Donald Bennett, 112 S. Fifth Street, you get ahold of me and I give you my word I can get you enough people to continue housing. I do it every Wednesday. I don't care if it's raining,

snowing, sleeting. Me and a group of people are out there helping them, not going against them. Quit taking them out of the woods. I'm done, you can keep your hat on.

Mr. Labutis - Mr. Bennett, can you please come forward? Mr. Rath has a question for you.

Mr. Rath - I just wanted to clarify something. You said give you a building. You're talking about a building to use for people to sleep in.

Mr. Bennett - We will get it, whatever. Yes, we just need a building that we can, if they need a nap for an hour or two.

Mr. Rath - What's the specific use of the building that you're wanting?

Mr. Bennett - The specific use is we need water, we need electric. We need to feed these people, we need to shower them, we need to where we can get them suits. So, I personally work for the JC's, so I know how to do paperwork to get these people jobs, resumes, help them. That's why we need a building, so that we can get them in there. I know that we have one down on 3rd Street that they can go to, Salvation Army, well that's here or there, wherever they can get in. I know they can go clear down on East Main, not that they have transportation, but we can get them in there to where we can help them. The ones that are on alcohol and drugs, I'll tell you, I have so many people that have come to me like, hey man, down on 3rd Street, the place down there. Helped them get clean, but now they can't get into a house because their social security check's only \$800 and rent for one bedroom's \$1,200. But they're clean, they're ready to do something, but they can't, so.

David Ruderman, 15 Cottage St. - First of all, I'd like to thank you for proposing this measure because look at these beautiful people. I mean, this makes me very happy. There's so much love here. This is the community and for, I know you didn't mean it to be like this, but you've created a groundswell, right? And so, these people, we're not going to go anywhere. We're not going anywhere. We need a low barrier shelter in this town, and we need one for a long time. And you created the conditions now for that to happen, so thank you. Thank you, but this, I mean, I'm also a person in recovery. I've been in recovery for 34 years, so, yeah, well, thank you. And I work with a lot of people, both through the day reporting program, the adult court services, teaching a poetry class with them, and I teach at OSU Newark. So, I'm an English professor. Sorry, I got nervous. So, my point is that this criminalizes homelessness, addiction, and mental health. And I'll tell you the ways in which it does. You say it's a misdemeanor. After the second misdemeanor offense, because they have nowhere else to go and they're picked up, they would then not even be eligible to get housing vouchers. You know, it's going backwards. It makes no sense. And I'm going to leave enough time for other people here. So, thank you for opening this up, and thanks everybody for coming out.

Daniel Crawford, 163 S. 2nd St. - Before I speak for myself, a friend of mine who had to be at work today wanted me to read off what she had wrote. She says, my name is Helena. I live on Kibler Ave in Newark, Ohio. Last week I worked 124 hours. There are only 168 hours in a week. This week I will work 91 hours. I earned \$27 an hour, and on October 1st will be homeless. The only mistake I made in my adult life was moving home to Newark. After earning my two degrees out of state, I have made my children in high school and middle school, both with straight A's, agree to move away after graduation. I have paid \$40,950 in rent since January of 2022. The ridiculousness of rents averaging \$700 to \$800 going up to \$1,700 in Newark is the reason why most of the good people who truly care about this

community and have been here for generations will move away. But those unchecked rent prices are also greatly contributing to the homelessness crisis you are here to criminalize. Evil men take aim to slay the poor, but their swords will be plunged into their own hearts, and all of their weapons will be broken. It is better to have little and be godly than to own another man's wealth, for the strength of evil men shall be broken. But the Lord takes care of those he has forgiven. Criminalizing citizens that you represent for an issue that is a direct failure of each of your offices makes you poor morally. I am just poor financially. So, with that having been said, I need to start with the position that you guys all know that I believe housing is a human right, and the best cure for homelessness is a home. Now, I know that sounds counterintuitive because of the whole notion that people, you know, we have it in this society that everyone needs to earn their way into whatever, but the thing is there have been studies done in other parts of the country where if you, like for instance the tiny homes that are down in Florida, you put people in these tiny homes and they will build their way out of homelessness. Does it work for everyone? No. But for the most part, if you give people a chance, they will progress. They will thrive. And I look out at this legislation. The last time I came before you guys, I've had to take some time off to clear my head because of the anniversary of my stepbrother's death. And he was homeless. He battled with addiction. And my stepfather, his father is here today. He's the one who's had some trouble controlling himself because he's animated about this. And it's like what we do here, the legislation that you guys do here, you guys are representative of us to the rest of the world. Is this what we want the rest of the world to see Newark, Ohio for? I hope not. Thank you.

Amanda Young, 301 Quail Creek Dr. - I'm 37 years old. I first off wanted to just say that I am recently an actual resident of Newark. I stayed, I was welcomed at the Salvation Army with my two children and my fiancé for nine months. I don't know if any of you have been on that side of town, but it gets a little rough. My kids have seen everything. But even though they have seen the worst side of things, it's making them people and it's going to make them appreciate the things that other people would have otherwise been handed in life. They will appreciate that and want to be more gratuitous with that in life. Furthermore, I also wanted to bring to the attention that it is easier to get a felony expunged, than it is to get an eviction removed in this state. I have personally submitted several requests to have my eviction, other people's evictions, to be sealed or however the process is. And no one with legal aid really has the time to deal with that because they have actual cases, cases. These are more like wants I think is how the court said. It's not a necessity, it's a want, you know because it was something that basically brought upon ourselves which essentially doesn't really make any sense because isn't that what a crime is. You know be it as it may, I was blessed with housing and you know I do appreciate that and I see my friends and I see people who have made mistakes. I mean, my husband, my fiancée makes \$27 an hour. He was laid off for six months. We were homeless. We were sleeping in the storage units with our kids and if someone would have found us we've been in jail and our kids have been in CPS. Do you know how hard it is to get your kids back at that point? The state doesn't it seems like they almost don't want to and that just creates another list of problems. Not just for regular people who don't have kids but for people, you know, who now have a criminal charge you don't now have kids. It's a repetitive process of issues that you have to

overcome in order to be able to just try to get started all over again and I just wanted to bring that. Plus, I believe the Licking County Commissioner does own the Juvenile jail, which has been vacant. I don't believe it's even a 9-1-1 dispatch center anymore. But that would be, if you removed all the steel bars and scrapped that money, it could be used towards more accommodable housing and you guys are already paying the utilities for that place. So, while it's empty, you know, I figured it might be, you know, a good place to put some people, you know. Just a thought. Thank you.

Mr. Labutis – The last speaker mentioned the county jail. There is a difference between County owned and City owned. There is a difference between the ownership.

Caitlin Curtis - I'm homeless. I'm one of the homeless ones out here. My husband, Adam, died three years ago, which made me homeless and I'm technically blind now for two years and I have epileptic seizures. That's how I got paralyzed. Last year I had a seizure and got ran over by a car and I lost my sight to glaucoma. I've been out on the streets three years since Adam died due to financial situations. He was my pay on my SSI. I lost my checks when he died. Like the gentleman said earlier, I can't afford to go to jail because look at me. I can't and I can't work I've got no other place to go and I do sleep behind churches. I have slept on benches, but I have no way of getting anything to eat. Most people have food stamps. I mean, I only get 934 widow's benefits. All I ask is that you do give us homeless some consideration. Help us out. I've tried to get housing and they told me I was a liability risk due to my health issues and they said the homeowner's insurance would go up. I went to Salvation Army and they can't help me either, so I just wanted to let you guys know that I don't need to be in jail. I don't need to be, you know, having a job because I can't. I just want a home. I just want to get off the streets. I just want to be able to get my SSI back. I want to be able to live on somewhat normal life. I want to be able to give to my kids and grandkids. That's all, thank you.

Chris Gargis, 103 Swainford Dr. in Heath - Most of my work with the Champions Network is in Newark, and one thing I know about all the people that we work with most of them are extremely low income. Most of them are on SSI which is about \$920 a month. Not enough to pay rent. Barely enough to pay any kind of bills. Most of them are on Metro housing, but Metro housing is full now, too There's no one that wants to rent to Metro people. So, they're already in a bind, okay, and we're working with these people daily. This is not just once a week, once a month. This is what this is every day. I get calls every day working with people that need help, sincere help. So, we help them. We help them move. We put nine people in housing between us and Summer Bloom in the last nine months. We put ten people in treatment just in the last two or three months. So, there are people that are getting treatment, but you got to give these service programs time to work. You got to let them work the process. Look, we went from 58 overdoses deaths to 31 in one year because of these services. It's working, but you got to give it time. I'm just asking respectfully of this Body, before you jump too fast on writing laws, consider maybe letting the services work a little bit more with you. And we're, I'm Champions Network, you guys knew who I am, been here several times before. I'd be glad to help and help you guys get resolved this without having to force the issue. Because now the camps are coming to Heath. I live in Heath. There are camps in Heath now. And I'm like, okay, so let's go deal with those guys. I'm not afraid of that. I'm not afraid of these people. I want to love these people because they need

it. That's all I'm saying. We're based at 261 East Main St, right across from the Salvation Army. That's all I have to say. Thank you.

JT Sowers, 50 Swainford Dr. in Heath – I'm the pastor of Crossroads Baptist Church. Also have a local business in Newark. So, we own Subzilla. It's a supplement company. We have a gym in Newark as well. And my ministry is at the FOP. I'm also the Fraternal Order of Police Chaplain. And we have a ministry and a lot of the people right over here are the people that do that with me. Donnie, he mentioned us a minute ago. But here's the thing. So, we go out and I've been doing this for years and years and years. I can't tell you how many years that we've been going out and we are trying to help the homeless. We don't just go over and give them a hand out. We're trying to give them a hand up. The city does not recognize that. The city has never come to me and talked to me about that. I went to the city and I said, I want to talk to everybody. Can I turn around a little bit and talk to everybody? So, I went to the city and I said, hey, I said we would like to use the basketball courts across from the jail so that we can pass out food, so we can give clothing, so we can preach the gospel. And that is what we did. And so, we did those things. And next thing you know, there was a woman that came out. What was her name? Does anybody remember? I can't remember her name, but I know she works with Parks and Rec. You guys know who she is. She's under Dave Rhodes. And so that's a whole other story. But here's the deal. So, we literally are passing out food, doing these things. We're seeing people give their life to Jesus. We're seeing people get off drugs. We've sent some to the Champions Network and things like that. But listen to this. So, while we're doing this, the woman comes out and says, you can no longer use the city parks for any of this. OK. And so, we thought, OK, we'll go down to the auto spa. We went down to the auto spa. It's a private property. Apparently, somebody in the city, don't know who, these are the words that I got, went to that group of people. Well, guess what? The auto spa is not there anymore. I don't know what happened to those people, but we couldn't do it there. So, we went back to the basketball court. There was nothing in writing, right? And so, nothing in writing that said that we couldn't do it. So, the next thing you know, I get a letter. Now listen, I'm an FOP chaplain, right? I get a letter from the law office threatening to prosecute me and our church. I've got the letter. I'm not going to show that right now. I've got that as a spade for later. But the interesting thing about it is, and I've been holding this for a while, I've got this piece of paper right here. Can I say this piece of paper real quick? OK, this piece of paper right here is a reservation form. It says that it's good on Thursday evenings at 4 p.m. until dark, all right? 2022 through 2024. I can't really read the woman's name. She just scribbled something on there. That was 10-20-22 Main Street basketball court. They kicked us off. Listen, so we had to, I got threatened by the law office. It was the City that put them out there. Thank you.

John LaBelle, 100 Jeffrey Lane, right outside of Heath - I'm president of St. Vincent of Paul Society at St. Leonard's Church in Heath. We spend around \$55,000 a year on helping the poor, the homeless, the people that are in need in the city of Heath, just in that one zip code. My question to you, how much money is allocated through the City to handle situations with the homelessness? How much money? Zero. May I suggest that you look at homelessness as a problem with infrastructure. If it was a bridge that needed repair, you would find the money to repair the bridge. If we would have a storm and a subdivision would have a flood problem with some of their sewer systems or whatever, you would find

the money somehow, some way, to fix that problem. Homelessness is part of the City, of all cities, not just this city. You can go right over to Columbus, which is a lot larger than Newark, but scale it down, they seem to find the funds to help the problem. And again, you answered the question. You have not provided any funds to help the problem. And there's funds out there. There are grants. You have people come in and build buildings and big manufacturing plants in the county and some in the city, and they get a tax abatement. Why can't you provide the laws or some means to give tax abatements to real estate people or to builders to come in and build housing? Why can't you offer some type of a program to buy down the rents of some of the renters, some of the people that rent, and buy it down a little bit to where the people can still stay in their homes through a voucher situation, through vouchers? It's done in other cities. They've been able to make it work because they care. When I see a homeless person, I see Christ, and you need to do the same. You can't just continue not to see it that way. Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

Callie Rucker, 130 Delmar Ave. - First of all, I would like to say good afternoon, good evening, whatever you want to call it. My name is Callie Rucker, and I reside at 130 Delmar Avenue, Newark, Ohio 43055. And I would like to commend everyone that came out tonight because homeless is a problem in the city of Newark. Matter of fact, I am ashamed of some of the things that I see in the way they treat the homeless peoples and the drug addicts. I am very ashamed. Newark is a small town. We should be setting an example for the other towns around, cities of what you want to call it. And I would like to say that regardless of whether you're homeless or whether you are a drug addict, a recovery, you all are human beings also. And for the ones that say that the military people are suckers and losers, I apologize to the one who told y'all that. I also would like to apologize to one that called the police officer pigs. They're human beings too. I always tell them if they can do the job better, get out there and do it. Because we all have faults. We have to be a community that work together and stop pointing fingers at everybody else because we all have shortcomings. And I don't know why that we don't come together. I'm a big advocate for the younger generation, for the schools and for education. They always want to put everything on the younger generation and I tell them like this, we have to talk to them and not at them. And we also remember power do not last forever. And one day what you got what the people are doing to their families, taking our health care and the health and denying them a good education. That's going to turn one of these days because they're going to be in charge of us regardless of whether we like it or not. Whether we like it or not, they're going to be in charge. They're taking health care away from them. They don't want to get my health care and the things that they're doing. Let me repeat myself. Power do not last forever. And just like when you have children, and when those children leave home, you have lost that power. And when you're home, you want to put the kids in this little computer hole. Let them have a choice of themselves, for themselves. If you're not going to do things their way, it's their way or the highway. You got to understand, they have needs. Not matter what they want, the needs. And if they want to control this mass shooting in the school, a lot of kids, I interact with a lot of the school kids. They're afraid to go to school. I know my time is up, but I could go on and on and on. Some of the things that people do in the City, they should be ashamed of themselves. And that's all I got to say.

Mr. Labutis - It is about 6:52 currently. City Council meeting starts at 7 p.m. So, what we're going to do now is take a recess from Safety Committee so we can take a break before we go into Council 7. We will reconvene Safety Committee after Council is finished. Whatever time that is, we'll reconvene Safety and call for a vote at that point. So that will conclude Safety for now. We're taking a recess until after Council meeting this evening. Council starts in eight minutes at 7 p.m.

(Safety Committee resumed at 8:20 p.m. on 9.3.24)

Mr. Labutis - I'd like to reconvene the Safety Committee meeting from earlier. Again, present are myself, Mr. Houser, Ms. Blin, Mr. Rath, and Mr. Cost. Now we want to hear from a few other folks that were wanting to speak earlier. Just a point of clarification. So, this evening, what we're doing with the committee is, if we were to vote on this, what we're voting on is to take this to a full vote for City Council. Okay? Outside of our committee. This doesn't enact any laws this evening. It's just taking it for a vote to City Council. If it were to go to City Council, the ordinance would be read twice. First time, it would be read, we move on. The second reading is when we would actually take a vote on to the, to actually vote on the legislation. So, if this were, if we were to pass this on this evening, the first reading would be September 16th. The vote would actually be on Monday, October 7th. We would have a break week in between there. No meeting on a fifth Monday. So, the vote, if we're thinking about this evening, this is not to enact the law. It is to pass it on to a full vote for the entire Council. Everyone you saw sitting up here earlier. Does everyone understand that piece of the process? Okay. I want to make sure that we don't think we're passing a law, passing legislation into law this evening. Okay? All right. Again, I do appreciate everyone's comments. I do appreciate everyone's civility. If we can continue that spirit, I would appreciate it. Just by a quick show of hands, how many do I have that still want to speak? One, two, three, four, five, okay. All right. Let me start. We might not get to everyone, but let me take at least a few. Show me the hands again. Who wants to speak? All right. So, if you have spoken before, hand down. Okay. All right. So, if you spoke in the first half.

Unknown Speaker - Did you say to put your hand up if you spoke before?

Mr. Labutis - If you spoke before, keep your hand down. If you didn't speak before. Yes. All right. Name and address for the record.

Bobby Hayes, 86 Donington Circle - I just have a question. My church is one that reaches out at least once a month to do homeless outreach. And again, we were told we couldn't do that on public property. My question is who decided that and why?

Mr. Labutis - I do not know the answer to the question.

Ms. Hayes - How do we find out? Because very many of us are in the same situation, and we don't know why we're being told that. We're not hurting anybody. And we don't know who decided that all of a sudden you can't do this on public property.

Mr. Cost - Mr. Chairman, may I ask a question? Ma'am, what church are you with?

Ms. Hayes - Newark Naz.

Mr. Cost - Okay.

Ms. Hayes - And the director of the We Love Wednesdays is Cheryl Simpson. Been doing it for probably 10 years.

Mr. Cost - And you were told that you could no longer do this?

Ms. Hayes - Correct.

Mr. Cost - And you were doing it where?

Ms. Hayes - Just around the square. We might be on the east side of the square one night, one month, and then the other. We set up tables with food, clothes, and they just show up.

Mr. Cost - When this meeting is over, I'd like to be able to speak to you.

Ms. Hayes - Okay.

Mr. Cost - Thank you.

Mr. Labutis - Mr. Marmie, go ahead, please. If you can come forward and speak. Thank you.

Doug Marmie, Councilman - Sure. A lot of issues with providing those types of services on public property is because of consistency. We have to be consistent. And what has happened in the past is that some organizations were giving out supplies, clothing, and folks were just grabbing a couple of items and then littering everywhere. And then it's our responsibility to come in and have to clean up. Taxpayer dollars having to do that. So, we had to make a consistent decision to not allow it because a few bad apples created the problem. And I'm not saying all, I'm just saying a few bad apples and we have to be consistent in the manner in which we handle things. So that is one of the reasons why it became an issue is because there were a few bad apples. Okay, I'm not saying that anybody who spoke here tonight is one of those bad apples at all, but I do know that did happen.

Cliff Wartenbee 5703 Licking Valley Rd - I go to First Church up here and I run a shower ministry for the homeless on Friday. We shower for two hours, hot meal and shower for two hours. We give them a meal to take. We supply clothes. We have several organizations, nonprofits that have donated to us. I would put the invitation out to anybody that wants to come down and see what we do. We would be happy to have you. We have not had a single problem as far as anything. These people come in, they're grateful for a shower. They clean the shower when they leave. Several of them have said if it wasn't for our ministry, they would be in jail. I cannot understand how we cannot keep doing that. Thank you.

Stanley Frankart, 230 37th St. - This is Canton, Ohio. However, I do serve and work here in the Licking County area as well as 10 other counties here in the state of Ohio. I just wanted to first take a moment to affirm each and every one of you for all of your service, your diligence, your hard work. I could tell with heavy heart that you are here having these conversations. I do not make light of that. I understand it takes a lot of time, a lot of effort, a lot of energy, a lot of thought into these kinds of conversations. And so, thank you for all of that in your service to our community. I do want to give a little bit of context to the numbers that I'm going to share because I think that was a big conversation for this evening is talking about what are some viable solutions. One of the comments that was spoken about was it's hard to do certain things in Albuquerque and compare that to here in Licking County with a population of 50,000. So, I'm going to share a little bit of numbers of communities here in the state of Ohio that are doing supportive housing programs with a population in the ballpark of 50,000 to 70,000. And they're doing that successfully. There are 10 different counties in which I serve in. Those are Richland County, Muskingum County, Knox County, Coshocton County, Guernsey County, Wayne County, Holmes County,

Ashland County, Licking County and Muskingum County. So, um, Knox County is 63,000. As of the Census Bureau, Coshocton County itself is 36,000. Ashland County is 52,000. Muskingum County is 86,000. Guernsey County is 38,000. And the city of Zanesville specifically is 24,000. City of Mansfield specifically 47,000. Lancaster specifically 41,000. Canton 69,000. That's where I live. Figured I'd include that number. Newark is 50,000. So, the cost of what it costs per month to house somebody in Ohio, just in Ohio, is \$1,877. For instance, the survival budget alone in 2022 was \$30,000. That's just to survive in Ohio. What we're talking about is criminalizing individuals because they make neither one of those. And I understand that we're not saying criminalizing homelessness. But when we're talking about having minor misdemeanor offenses for camping in public places, I was an individual who was involved at an early age. I myself went through all of the systems, all of the processes, I came home at 26 from an incarceration at 16 years old. I came home at 26, my mother died while I was in prison, that was the only support system that I had. I came home and I was homeless, and because of that, I've had to go through the program that I now supervise. I have two children, three and two years old, and a wife as well, and I'm a homeowner. But my wife has had to experience the same hardships that many people that we're talking about tonight have had to experience with no criminal history at all. Because of my personal criminal history. And so, I just want to share with you that it's not only impacting the individuals that quote unquote have tense mental health instances, substance use disorders, but it's also their families, their children, their loved ones, who haven't had any of those struggles in their lives as well. Thank you.

Mr. Labutis - Can you tell us what you do, you said you work in (inaudible) County, what is it that you actually do?

Mr. Frankart - I actually do supportive housing, so that's what I do statewide. It's through the Licking County Coalition for Housing. I work specifically with folks that are justice involved. It's only through the Community Transitions Program and the Returning Home Ohio Program. We are not, unfortunately, we're not an emergency shelter kind of situation or a crisis hotline. We provide long term housing solutions. And so, we got to operate within our parameters of our programs that we have. But we do lean into those programs and try to do the most we can with what we have. Stanley Frankart. Thank you.

Gwynyth Camara-Huff, 445 North Pearl St., Granville - I do live in Granville, 445 North Pearl Street, but I work in Newark, so a lot of my taxes come to Newark. And I also do work within the County in the home visiting program. I'm a home educator for Early Head Start and Head Start. I work all over the County. And in fact, just, I was not aware that this meeting was happening, but just last Thursday, I'm going to share and pass this along to you. I went to a training housed by Groundwork Ohio on homelessness in children in the state of Ohio. Which you may have one perception in your mind, somebody's homeless because they've had a mental health issue, or they've had a drug issue, they've had a legal issue. Many children, I'm going to just, you can look at this and do what you want, but many people experiencing homelessness are employed. Many of them are employed full time. I'm just going to pass this on after I quote a couple things to you currently in 2024. The Ohio Housing says that there are 444,768 individuals or 28% of renter households with extremely low incomes. So, in order to be able to rent a house averagely in the state of Ohio to provide renting, the minimum to afford a two bedroom home is \$20.81 an hour. We all

know that even two parents working do not always make \$20.82 an hour. So, when you put that together, you find that it just becomes very, very difficult for people to put together. And one of the things that you have mentioned is there are some shelters, but there are no shelters for married couples with children. There are no shelters in Newark that will take them. If a woman has been abused by her spouse, she and her children might be able to get into New Beginnings. But there is nothing currently here that will help those hardworking families who are married, who are trying their very best to stay together, to be able to be housed together. So that is a big concern of mine. Two bedroom rents have risen on average from \$800 in January of 18 to \$1,200 now. That's a huge increase. The wages have not increased in that similar period of time. Ohio evictions are also raising and homelessness in Ohio has increased in 2023 by 6.9% with rent prices increasing from 2020 until 23 by 24%. 40 out of 51 babies who are served in early care programs will go on to be full term birth weight, but those who are not often end up in the NICU. Their maternal health problems, their ongoing health problems. I know for a fact that my agency serves homeless families here in Newark. I am very concerned that if we make it illegal they get a misdemeanor. They'll never get into public housing. They'll never qualify for those programs that might help them.

Mr. Labutis - We've had a lot of discussion this evening, a lot of eye-opening discussion. Does anyone have anything that's different to share than what we've heard previously? I have. You spoke before. I got you.

Melissa Anderson, 196 Fairfield Ave - I did not come prepared to speak this evening, so forgive me for not having my thoughts organized. The first thing I want to say is the Salvation Army does offer housing for married couples with families. Although there are limited rooms, however, I work for an agency that provides bridge services. I work for an agency that provides bridge services that allow the families to be in hotels while they're waiting for those beds at Salvation Army. Now, Mr. Marmie mentioned that there are CDBG funds that have been distributed to the community to help with homelessness. And I'm here to tell you that our CDBG funding was canceled this year. So, we no longer have those funds available to provide those hotel stays.

Mr. Labutis - Could you identify your organization?

Ms. Anderson - Licking County Coalition of Care. Now, that being said, we were fortunate enough that we have another funder in our circle that stepped up and helped us to recover those funds. So, we are able to continue those services. But I also know that CDBG funding was cut to other agencies that are providing those same gap services for people that are awaiting shelter space or awaiting transitional housing with the Licking County Coalition of Housing. And so, saying that those funds from CDBG are helping the homeless, they are a little bit. But a lot of those funds are being reallocated for other things. So, I wanted to share that. The other thing that I appreciated that you said was communication. I think communication is a huge problem between our city officials, City Council, and our nonprofits that are working to be an answer to the problem. Our agency specializes in homelessness prevention. We help with rent and utilities. That is our primary goal. But that's becoming harder and harder for us to meet those needs in the community because rents are being raised and we can't even get close to helping people from getting evicted.

And so, we're struggling there. I know that I have reached out to Ms. Bline, invited her to my office last year in 2023, was told multiple times that she was too busy, that she would get back with me. I would still like to invite you to come and see what we do at the Coalition of Care. As a citizen of Newark, I understand the City's desire to beautify our streets and to make things safe. But as we are pushing people out of downtown, they're in my neighborhood. They're in my backyard. They're in my neighbor's backyard. My neighbor had somebody in their woodshed sleeping. So, if we're keeping people safe, we have to come up with a solution that doesn't just push people out further in the radius of Newark, but gives them a place to be. And so, I know myself. I work in conjunction with almost every other nonprofit here in Licking County, Dub Dingus, with United Way. We try to partner with other agencies. I would love to see us come together with City Council and city officials to come up with a better solution for this problem as opposed to just pushing them out. Because they're not leaving. And that is creating a safety issue. My children are not afraid of the homeless. I am not afraid of the homeless. But I don't want to encounter one in my backyard. Because they don't have someplace else to go. Thank you for your time.

Walter Zang, 467 Tuscarora St - Here in Newark, First Ward. So, a lot has been said. I would encourage you all to do a little more research before taking this to full Council. I'm a social worker by trade. And one thing I learned is that other communities that enact policies similar to what you are proposing end up spending a lot in tax dollars that could go to other things. I encourage you to seek other solutions because they may be more cost effective. Personally, I live across the street from where a local school is knocked down. It's a vacant lot. Personally, I would love to see miniature homes in our community. It works in other parts of the world. If we can look at, as the gentleman from the Coalition for Housing said, other communities similar to ours and what is working in those communities, you will see that legislation like this is not the answer. And so, I would just encourage you, I know Councilman Marmie mentioned earlier in years past they've reached out or tried to reach out to the non-profit sector. Please, the players and the game have changed. We have seen a changing of the guard with a lot of leadership in our local non-profits. Please return to that conversation. A lot of us would like to be a part of it. Thank you.

Mr. Labutis - So I know we've heard a lot of discussion from earlier. We heard a lot of discussion this evening. I wanted to hear everyone's opinions. The information you've shared, we've got a page full of notes plus on different things that were shared. What I would like to do is I would like to make a motion to table this legislation to our next Council, it would be another Committee meeting on September 16th. So, we would be tabling to a definite date of September 16th in a little less than two weeks from this evening. Do I have a second? Second from Mr. Rath. So, all those in favor of tabling this legislation for two weeks to the 16th to reconvene, can I have a vote of yes? Yes. Any nays? That passes 5-0. We will continue to reconsider this legislation on Monday, September 16th. That will be during the Committee time frame starting at 5:45 p.m. and then Council will convene again at 7 p.m. So again, thank you for all of your conversation, input, and insights, and have a good night. Thank you.

Motion to table Ordinance No. 24-36 until September 16, 2024 by Mr. Labutis, Second by Mr. Rath, passed 5-0.

Safety Committee stands adjourned

Mark Labutis, Chair