

Fresno City Council Member Hates Homeless People

By Dylan Donnelly

Fresno City Councilman **Clint Olivier** wrote a shocking op-ed published in the [FresnoBee](#) earlier this week demonizing the homeless and calling for City Hall to ramp up it's war on homeless people.

Nearly everyone in Fresno knows our city's neighborhoods are under siege.

We are facing the greatest crisis since the specter of bankruptcy loomed over City Hall five years ago. The damage done to our city by the homeless is out of control. They have overrun nearly every park, along with hundreds of street corners and shopping centers. The trash and vandalism they leave in their wake are costing residents and business owners hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars in cleanup fees and repairs each year. Complaint calls are lighting up city switchboards, but thus far, City Hall has refused to respond in any meaningful way.

The federal government claims there are 1,183 homeless people in Fresno, down a jaw-dropping 53 percent from the 2,537 who reportedly roamed our streets two years ago. So what happened to them? The truth is they didn't go anywhere. The homeless are still here and thriving, thousands of them, rifling through our trash cans to steal ratepayer-owned recyclables, panhandling on medians, breaking into our homes and garages, burning down vacant buildings and defecating on our children's playgrounds.

But let's back up. It's important to clarify who these blight-makers are. Allow me to suggest the use of a new word: vagrant. There is a marked difference between a person who is homeless and a vagrant. Homeless people are on the streets temporarily. For vagrants, homelessness is a permanent condition. Homeless people take advantage of programs like Mayor Ashley Swearingin's First Steps Home, while vagrants carry power drills in their shopping carts to break into vacant houses. Homeless people go to the Poverello House or the Fresno Rescue Mission for assistance. Vagrants panhandle for money for cigarettes, alcohol and drugs. Homeless people have fallen on hard times. Vagrants cause hard times for others.

Olivier unwittingly admits, in spite of [what Mayor Ashley Swearingin touts](#), that displacing homeless people from encampments year after year has not decreased homelessness. In fact, it creates another issue: "Vagrants", as Olivier would say. Definition: *A person without a settled home or regular work who wanders from place to place.*

Although Clint makes a distinction between the homeless and "vagrants" (after an opening statement that does not ("The damage done to our city by **the homeless** is out of control"), he doesn't propose any way for the city to make that distinction in his plan. So let's get one thing clear about Clint's call-to-action to criminalize vagrancy: he's not just targeting the people out to poop on your lawn. He's targeting all homeless people.

What's his big plan to end the *siege* of homeless people destroying the city? Make life more difficult for homeless people.

I am proposing six common-sense measures that will immediately begin to remove the chokehold that vagrants have on our city:

- *Increase the Fresno Police Department's Homeless Task Force from five to 12 officers.*
- *Implement and staff a citywide park ranger program to patrol our parks and park restrooms, which have become dens of drug use and filth.*
- *Begin a public information campaign to discourage residents from giving cash to panhandlers and instead donate to community organizations that fund homeless services.*
- *Begin an outreach campaign to neighborhood recycling centers asking them to immediately cease accepting recyclables from vagrants.*
- *Conduct an immediate sweep to reclaim stolen shopping carts from vagrants.*
- *Convene a committee consisting of the mayor, city manager, city staff, council members and community leaders, similar to the Blight Task Force, to work toward comprehensively addressing vagrancy.*

As a community, we have tackled some important topics over the past five years. All pale in comparison to what is taking place largely unabated in our city. Fresno's biggest problem is not that we don't have enough parks; it's that vagrants are destroying the ones we already have.

It's not that we have too many boarded-up houses, it's that they become home to vagrants who do meth and oftentimes burn them to the ground.

The greatest issue we face isn't that City Hall is not business friendly, it's that City Hall is entirely too friendly – to vagrants.

We must act.

Clint Olivier represents District 7 on the Fresno City Council.

If Clint is your representative and you'd like to suggest some-common sense alternatives to expelling all homeless people from Fresno, please contact his office.

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Summary

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Description

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