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## Sunbreak Ranch Could Be San Diego's Homeless Solution



Camey Christenson talks with a homeless individual in downtown San Diego during the annual homeless count last month.  
(Howard Lipin / San Diego Union-Tribune)

By GEORGE MULLEN & BRIAN CASTER

The time has come for us to seek out a realistic way to manage our worsening problem of people living on the streets of our city and to do so in a manner that best serves our city's entire population of 1.35 million. With this in mind, we propose the establishment of "Camp Hope San Diego" (aka Sunbreak Ranch) on city-owned land adjacent to Brown Field.

The purpose of this camp is to safely and respectfully house all of the men, women and children living on our streets, as well as provide ample space for the amazing, generous organizations that serve them.

Our homeless brothers and sisters deserve our respect, support, prayers, and help. They do not, however, have the right to reside on public lands of their choosing — especially when it negatively impacts San Diego's progress and potential and presents health hazards to themselves and to the rest of the population. Our city must decide which lands to designate for them. Unfortunately, our leaders have abdicated this responsibility and allowed our homeless population of 8,692 to camp wherever they choose.

Have you walked downtown's East Village lately? 17th Street encampment? Commercial Street underpass? Courthouse area at night? MTS trolley stops? How are the adjacent homeowners and businesses being impacted? Have you hiked Balboa Park's trails recently? San Diego River in Mission Valley? Tecolote Canyon? Do you feel safe doing so?

Think about downtown as our city's front doorstep and window unto the world, and yet, it looks disheveled and dreadful. With homeless trash everywhere imparting terrible first impressions, numerous aggressive panhandlers scaring off tourists and residents alike, and growing encampments creating no-go areas, downtown's ability to grow and prosper is being severely hampered.

Furthermore, allowing the homeless to sleep wherever they choose is not beneficial to them either — they are living in inhumane conditions surrounded by speeding cars, street thugs, gang members, drug dealers, thieves, dogs, rats, trash, disease, cold, wind, rain, and, most dangerously of all, the recent string of assaults and murders perpetrated upon homeless people.

This situation is beyond outrageous, but our homeless population is not to blame — the culprit is failed city leadership.

Must our city continue into the abyss? We say No. There is a better way — one that is fair and beneficial to all concerned.

Camp Hope San Diego — the vision forward:

- No homeless camping or loitering would be allowed anywhere in the city of San Diego, except within the jurisdiction of Camp Hope — a spectacular open space setting with breathtaking views and fresh air, just 13 miles southeast of downtown.
- San Diego County, plus the other 17 cities within, are invited to partner in this effort. Doing so will prevent their jurisdictions from becoming homeless migration points.
- Camp residents can come and go as they please; there will be no fences or residency fees.
- Housing will be large military-style tenting with portable bathrooms and showers (think Stand Down), enabling the camp to quickly expand or contract based on need/weather. If preferred, individuals can pitch their own tents.
- Large tents will be provided for homeless service providers — Father Joe's, Rescue Mission, Food Bank, Path, Catholic Charities, Veteran's Village, God's Extended Hand, Salvation Army, Solutions For Change, etc. — for dining, gatherings, services, etc.
- The "Entry to System" facility will initially be downtown, working in conjunction with these homeless service providers.
- Upon arrival at Camp Hope, a state-of-the-art intake tent will greet and direct new residents.

- Special tents will be devoted to job training and rehabilitation, with 12-step meetings daily.
- First-aid tents and private jitney services (for hospital runs) will be available 24/7.
- MTS bus/trolley service is available nearby for residents needing transportation to jobs, medical appointments, etc. Highways 905 and 125 intersect adjacently.
- A permanent police outpost will keep the peace, and private security will patrol 24/7.

Our homeless brothers and sisters will ultimately be better served at Camp Hope's centralized location, as well as better protected from street predators and surrounding negative influences. Likewise, San Diego will be cleaner, safer, more hospitable, and better able to realize its full potential. Everyone wins.

Are we ready to begin the conversation, San Diego?

*Mullen is principal of StudioRevolution.com. Caster is CEO of A-1 Self Storage and a local philanthropist. Both are native San Diegans.*