From: Samantha Booth <sbooth@ashevillenc.gov>
Sent: 12/15/2021 3:50:30 PM
To: Mike Lamb <mlamb@ashevillenc.gov>
Cc:
Subject: Fwd: Homeless Camp Removals

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Ursula Wren** <ursulawren.reporter@gmail.com>
Date: Wed, Dec 15, 2021 at 11:54 AM
Subject: Re: Homeless Camp Removals
To: Samantha Booth <sbooth@ashevillenc.gov>
Cc: Beth Bechel <bbechel@ashevillenc.gov>, Bill Davis <bdavis2@ashevillenc.gov>, Brian Huskey <bhuskey@ashevillenc.gov>, Nikki Reid <nreid@ashevillenc.gov>, Polly McDaniel <pmcdaniel@ashevillenc.gov>

Ms Booth,

Whether you call it "enforcing trespassing laws" or "closing encampments," the fact reamins that APD has - on multiple ocassions throughout 2021 - been deployed to remove residents from homeless encampments under threat of charges.

In the City's recent press release on the subject, they include the following statement: " APD gave the initial notification to the campers a few weeks ago and advised them individually that they needed to relocate because they were trespassing on NCDOT property and shared concern with them about continued safety issues. APD officers made at least eight trips to the campsite to reinforce that message."

Based on that, it does appear there are ways for the city and/or APD to determine how many times they were deployed to homeless encampments for this purpose. It is important for the public to have the full scope of this information: how many times, when, and at what locations this has happened in the year 2021.

Is my question unclear or are you saying that between the City and APD there is no way of determining this information?

Ursula

On Dec 15, 2021, at 8:46 AM, Samantha Booth <sbooth@ashevillenc.gov> wrote:

Good morning Ursula,

The public records request was closed because the Asheville Police Department does not close encampments, we only enforce trespassing laws. Therefore there is nothing to provide.

Respectfully,
Samantha Booth

On Wed, Dec 15, 2021 at 7:13 AM Ursula Wren <ursulawren.reporter@gmail.com> wrote:

> Good morning.
>
> Now that my public records request has been closed with no responsive records (as I suspected would happen), I am following up because my question remains unanswered.
>
> How many times, when, and at what locations, have Asheville Police participated in the removal or 'closure' of homeless encampments in our city in 2021?

It is important that the public know the scope of this activity and I'm disappointed by the "pass-the-ball" approach I've received so far. The grounds on which the public records request was denied were that APD doesn't keep records directly related to camp closure - I didn't expect they did. However, I do expect there to be a way for the city to determine this information.

If I am mistaken, and the official answer is that the City of Asheville has no way to track or determine the scope of this activity, I will accept that as an answer too.

Ursula

On Mon, Dec 13, 2021 at 10:33 AM Ursula Wren <ursulawren.reporter@gmail.com> wrote:

Thanks Beth and Leslie.

On Mon, Dec 13, 2021 at 10:32 AM Leslie Coty <lcoty@ashevillenc.gov> wrote:

Thanks, Beth.

Ursula, I will add your request to the public records portal and will respond when I have the requested information. Please let me know if you have any questions in the meantime.

Regards,
Leslie

Leslie Coty
Public Records Officer, City of Asheville
(828) 259-5631 lcoty@ashevillenc.gov

THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE

On Mon, Dec 13, 2021 at 10:22 AM Beth Bechel <bbechel@ashevillenc.gov> wrote:

Good morning!

Here is the City's statement regarding the I-240 homeless camp
https://www.ashevillenc.gov/news/a-message-to-our-community-regarding-the-i-240-homeless-camp/

As for the specific request of

"how many times, when, and at what locations, Asheville Police have participated in the removal or 'closure' of homeless encampments in our city in 2021"

I have copied our public records officer, Leslie Coty, to add to the public records queue.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Beth Bechel
Communication Specialist
Communications and Public Engagement Department

bbechel@ashevillenc.gov
828-712-1481 - Cell

THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE
NORTH CAROLINA
"TEAM WORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK"

On Mon, Dec 13, 2021 at 7:57 AM Ursula Wren <ursulawren.reporter@gmail.com> wrote:

Good morning Beth,

Following up on this.

Thanks,
Ursula

On Thu, Dec 9, 2021 at 12:58 PM Ursula Wren <ursulawren.reporter@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Beth,

It's likewise nice to make your acquaintance.
Having this information by Monday would be ideal.

Thank you,
Ursula

On Dec 9, 2021, at 12:35 PM, Beth Bechel <bbechel@ashevillenc.gov> wrote:

Good afternoon Ursula,

My name is Beth Bechel and I work as a communication specialist for the City of Asheville. It is nice to meet you and I look forward to working with you.

We are working to juggle several situations so I, along with my colleagues, will be working to coordinate a response to you.

There are several departments involved when it comes to our response to encampments. We are working to gather all the information for you to have a complete story.

Can you tell me what your deadline is?

My contact information is listed below if you have any questions.

Beth Bechel
Communication Specialist
Communications and Public Engagement Department

bbechel@ashevillenc.gov
828-712-1481 - Cell

On Thu, Dec 9, 2021 at 7:12 AM Ursula Wren <ursulawren.reporter@gmail.com> wrote:

Hello all,

My name is Ursula - I'm a reporter with the Asheville Free Press.

When speaking with some of the homeless residents in our city about the removal of their encampment, I have been repeatedly told that there are "many" instances where Asheville Police have closed camps. Aside from a few of the higher-profile removals which have made it into the local media, I'm having a hard time tracking down documentation of these instances.

I understand that the City's position is that most, if not all, of these camp removals were done at the behest of NCDOT (I have reached out to them, as well), so I want to pre-empt that point and make my question more specific and scoped: I want to know how many times, when, and at what locations, Asheville Police have participated in the removal or 'closure' of homeless encampments in our city in 2021.

Thank you for your prompt response,

Ursula Wren
Reporter and Editor
Asheville Free Press

--

--

Samantha Booth
Administrative Assistant to The Chief of Police & Communication Specialist
Asheville Police Department
100 Court Plaza
Asheville, NC 28801
(O) 828-259-5813
(M) 828-230-4471

--

Samantha Booth
Administrative Assistant to The Chief of Police & Communication Specialist
Asheville Police Department
100 Court Plaza
Asheville, NC 28801
(O) 828-259-5813
(M) 828-230-4471