

March 21,
2011

Report of The Mayor's Street Outreach Task Force



Prepared for The City of Ann Arbor

Sabra Briere
Mary Jo Callan
Mary Campbell
Charles Coleman
Ray Detter
Brian Durrance
Maggie Ladd
Peter Ludt
Doug Martelle
Susan Pollay
Paul Sher
Maura Thomson

The Mayor's Street Outreach Task Force Report

March 21, 2011

Table of Contents

Recommendations.....	1
Executive Summary.....	1
Findings.....	3
Attachment 1: Draft Amendment to the Solicitation Ordinance	7
Attachment 2: Have a Heart, Give Smart campaign	8
Attachment 3: Minutes of the Task Force	14
Attachment 4: AnnArbor.com coverage.....	25
Attachment 5: Ann Arbor Chronicle coverage	30
Attachment 6: Michigan Daily coverage.....	37

The Mayor's Street Outreach Task Force undertook a complex and challenging assignment within a limited timeline. Members met twice a month for six months. They invited representatives from The Delonis Center, Project Outreach (PORT), Ozone House, and Home of New Vision to speak about the services available. They also listened to downtown merchants, residents, and representatives from The University of Michigan about the impact of panhandling on the quality of life in Ann Arbor.

Task Force members included representatives from organizations that provide services to the homeless, panhandlers, and to those with mental health and substance abuse problems (Charles Coleman, Dawn Farm; Brian Durrance, Camp Take Notice; Paul Sher, Legal Services).

The Task Force also included representatives from downtown merchant associations (Mary Campbell, Kerrytown District Association; Peter Ludt, State Street Area Association; Maggie Ladd, South University Area Association; Maura Thomson, Main Street Area Association).

Staff provided valuable insight on the Task Force (Chief Barnett Jones and Doug Martelle, Ann Arbor Police Department; Mary Jo Callan, Community Development; Susan Pollay, Ann Arbor DDA).

Ray Detter ably voiced the concerns of many residents downtown on behalf of the Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council.

The Task Force benefitted from the insight of several non-appointed participants. Leslie Stambaugh, Chair of the Human Rights Commission, attended nearly every meeting and participated fully. Ellen Schulmeister and her staff, representing the Delonis Center, helped the Task Force understand the impact of the economy on the service sector. And Christina Tabaczka from the Michigan Theatre helped clarify the impact of panhandling on quality of life.

Our thanks also go to City Council member Sabra Briere, for chairing the Task Force, including coordinating speakers, compiling minutes, and helping us all come to consensus.

The Mayor's Street Outreach Task Force is proud to present this report to the Ann Arbor City Council. Our key finding is that to address negative issues related to panhandling the entire community must work together in partnership. There is a role for The University, the City government, the business community, the service community and the residents to each play their part.

Recommendations

- The Task Force recommends that the City Council revise the solicitation ordinance, expanding and clarifying the areas where solicitation is limited.
- The Task Force requests that the Chief of Police and the City Administrator refocus police attention in the downtown area, with targeted foot patrols during the busiest hours of the week.
- The Task Force further requests that Community Standards personnel increase their interaction with the public. This improved public contact will allow Community Standards staff to report any aggressive panhandling situations they witness and will encourage the public to seek support regarding panhandling.
- The Task Force finally requests that the Downtown Marketing Task Force undertake an expanded role that includes working with residents, merchants, service providers and the City to provide a safe and clean downtown. This Task Force previously worked to increase awareness of services already available in the community. The outreach campaign planned and ready to implement is a perfect complement with the Downtown Marketing Task Force's mission.

Executive Summary

Panhandling is a challenging issue that presents competing concerns of free speech and safety and affects the quality of life in downtowns of all sizes. No community has found the perfect, long-lasting solution. During the summer of

2010, some Ann Arbor residents told City Council and local media that they believed there had been a dramatic increase in the overall amount of panhandlers, as well as the amount of aggressive and demanding panhandling. The Mayor's Street Outreach Task-Force was re-formed to understand the issues surrounding panhandling and to formulate recommendations for ways in which the issue could be addressed.

Clearly, panhandling is seen in a variety of ways. Some see it as a symptom of poverty and a sign that Ann Arbor lacks affordable housing. Some sectors of society see panhandling to be a failure of society – the result of alcohol and substance abuse; the outcome of a failed mental-health system; the failure of an economic and legal safety net for families; or the result of decisions and actions by those unable or unwilling to find work or sustain themselves by other means. While those who are concerned about the negative effects on business may argue that panhandlers create an atmosphere of danger, are negatively perceived by the public, lower property values and cost businesses customers, others recognize that panhandling is protected by the First Amendment and that it is a typical feature of urban life.

The Task Force is well aware that panhandling is an expression of free speech, protected under the First Amendment. So, the Task Force never seriously considered eliminating panhandling from Ann Arbor. Rather, the approach that was taken in our work was to understand better the unmet needs in our community as well as the approaches that would keep in balance the rights of those that panhandle with the rights of others who prefer not to be made to feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

There is support within the downtown area associations for programs such as street outreach that compassionately assist those in need to transition away from panhandling in front of businesses.

Members of the Task Force spent much time learning from professionals in the human service field, as well from panhandlers themselves, and came away with a deeper understanding that 'panhandlers' are not the same as 'homeless'. While some see panhandling as a sign of poverty and lack of services, including affordable housing for marginalized groups, others view it as a way of earning a daily income, which unfortunately may have a negative effect on business and residential life. Interviews with panhandlers here in Ann Arbor indicated that panhandling is often used to supplement income for those unable to work due to mental illnesses and/or alcohol or substance abuse. Interviews with service providers revealed that panhandlers frequently were receiving services through the many service agencies in the Ann Arbor area, but were often unable or unwilling to find a solution for their persistent problems with mental illness and/or substance abuse.

Often the public perceives that the homeless and those who are panhandlers are one and the same. The Task Force learned that all panhandlers are not homeless, although some certainly are. Some panhandlers work as part of a group, earning hundreds of dollars per day and paying rent. They have their territories (the exits off freeways are very effective) and many are known as familiar downtown faces. Some panhandlers are youth, attracted to a lifestyle they see as romantic. In some cases, they return to their parents' home each night; in other cases, they travel during the summer and return in the fall. Punk Week attracted some of these traveling youth to Ann Arbor in 2010; their aggressive demands for funds caused many in Ann Arbor's downtown business district concern.

Increased and improved enforcement or better services for the needy? When the Task Force began its discussion, members were initially unsure about the best possible solutions. Would the community benefit most from increased and improved enforcement by the police of ordinances, or should the non-profit sector increase its services to handle an increased demand for housing, substance abuse prevention, and other poverty-related concerns? Whichever tactic the committee looked at, the reality was each choice brings the need for increased funding at a time when the community faces a decreased funding capacity.

Innovative and low-cost solutions can make a significant difference. As the discussions matured, it became clear that a proposal focused too narrowly on one sector (the responsibility of the City, for instance) could easily fail over time, as shifting priorities required an alteration in responsibilities and job descriptions. Further, the issues surrounding panhandling are multiple and complex, thus the Task Force had to consider a variety of recommendations.

To address these concerns, the Task Force recommends a program of educational outreach to the community that will target specific goals.

- The University of Michigan’s orientation program for new students should include information about panhandling and the community of services available. The Downtown Marketing Task Force should meet with the Michigan Student Assembly at least semi-annually to help keep the communications with students fresh and relevant regarding panhandling.
- The Task Force recommends regular meetings with local media to communicate updates about issues related to panhandling as part of the Downtown Marketing Task Force’s mission.
- The Task Force, using donations from the DDA and Downtown area associations, has designed a three-part campaign that will provide residents, merchants, visitors and panhandlers with information about the City’s ordinances, the services available to those in need, and ways to contribute to service providers.
- The Task Force has also established a web presence that will provide testimonials from the homeless and former panhandlers. This web site will also direct those who wish to donate to service providers.

The Task Force recognizes that panhandlers and the homeless are also members of our community.

The Street Outreach Task Force was not tasked with solving – or even addressing – homelessness in our community. In the course of our meetings, the Task Force heard from advocates for the homeless and from those who provide services to the homeless. PORT works to provide mental health care to those in our community who need it but have not been receiving it. In order to provide this service, the team members go to St. Andrews' breakfast service, the tent communities and other areas that attract the homeless, and work with those who need their services. PORT subscribes to the 'housing first' model – first provide their clients with housing to help them become stable, then help them get the care they need. Over the past seven years, they have worked closely with the Ann Arbor Police Department as well as downtown merchants to help people who are living on the streets get mental health care, get off the street and stay out of jail.

75% of those with substance abuse problems have mental health problems.
Statistics offered by PORT

The SOAR program helps PORT, the Delonis Center and other organizations get services for clients quickly, although providing the necessary documentation is still difficult. The problems of the mentally ill/substance abuser are more visible than they used to be, as there is less of a safety net. Resources of individuals and families are stretched too thin in many cases, and more people end up on the streets as a result. While some people do come to the Ann Arbor area from other parts of Michigan looking for services, the best result is to get them closer to their homes, where they know others and have a natural support system.

Home of New Vision works with the homeless or precariously housed alcohol and substance abuser. Long term engagement is needed in order to break down resistance to treatment for substance abuse. The Engagement Center in Ypsilanti is available to help people sober up prior to treatment. The Ann Arbor police and service providers often help get people to the Engagement Center rather than taking them to the Emergency Room. This alternative to conventional medical treatment has only eight (8) beds, and is often full in the winter.

Among other factors, prison release is contributing to panhandling, as there are barriers to both employment and housing for former felons.

Information provided by
Home of New Vision

Ozone House fields requests for food, housing, and even access to a bathroom. Some youth who panhandle do it "for the thrill", and others for the image and an opportunity to associate with the hard-core street kids, even as they return to their homes in the evenings. But for many young people, living on the street isn't always a 'choice'.

Ann Arbor will always have relative wealth, but it's important to be realistic about available resources. Avalon Housing currently has about 320 units of affordable housing. There are other sources of housing for those in need, but there aren't enough – even for people who are working, recovering from addiction, or disabled.

Dawn Farm provides emergency care, residential facilities and outpatient care for recovering addicts. Their 18 beds in the Spera Recover Center are always full; their outpatient program also helps individuals withdraw from drugs and alcohol safely. 1300 people go through the detox center each year, but both programs have a waiting list. Dawn Farm's Street Outreach, which is funded in part by local businesses, reaches many of the people 'on the streets' (addicts and alcoholics) including panhandlers. Once engaged in discussion, Dawn Farm is able to offer outpatient services, detox, and even long-term residential programs. Their continuum of care makes a significant difference to those living on the street.

Providing Services

Task Force members learned that no organization has the mission of delivering services specifically to panhandlers.

Panhandlers may be homeless, mentally ill, jobless, young or old. They may have long-term problems with substance abuse or recently addicted to drugs. Panhandling is a symptom of a current situation or it's a temporary solution to a problem or, in some cases, it's simply become their "job" and the means to earning a living.

Several organizations work with people who may, from time to time, panhandle on the streets. These outreach organizations offer shelter, food, medical and mental health care and resources to help with recovery from addiction.

Generally, panhandlers are part of a larger population of people who need human services.

When three local people who panhandled – either routinely or occasionally – came to the Task Force to discuss their experiences, all were familiar with the services available to them. Representatives of the service community who were present also knew them personally and their histories. These panhandlers were people who regularly received services in Ann Arbor, but still panhandled. (See Attachment 4: Reports from The Ann Arbor Chronicle and Attachment 3: Minutes from the Street Outreach Task Force / December 15 Meeting)

What is the impact of panhandling in Ann Arbor?

The Task Force heard anecdotally about panhandlers who could earn between \$100 and \$300 per day, but the amount received every day varied by the amount of time given to panhandling and the location. Some

Do you think aggressive panhandling is a problem in downtown Ann Arbor?

- Yes, I think it's a huge issue.
 56%
- Somewhat, but no more so than other communities.
 22%
- No, I haven't had a problem with it.
 12%
- I don't know, I never go downtown.
 8%

AnnArbor.com poll created on Sep 21, 2010 Total Votes: 1,239

"Panhandlers are visible in areas where the community will support panhandlers... which is why you see many more panhandlers in college towns... college students by in large tend to be quite generous to panhandlers."

"If you want to stop panhandling, you need to modify culture. But first is to make sure you're separating homeless from panhandlers."

Ann Arbor Chronicle comment, 1/5/11

"Apart from the 'professional' panhandlers, most street people have substance abuse and mental illness issues and are looking to buy alcohol, drugs or smokes. If we really wanted to attack the source of the problem we would create a supportive housing program. Many will find that morally distasteful but from a purely practical standpoint, in the long run it's cheaper than running the same people over and over again through jails, shelter programs and emergency rooms."

AnnArbor.com comment, 9/26/10

panhandlers may pay the rent, buy food and other necessities with the money they get panhandling. One of those who spoke to the Task Force described his alcoholism; the others talked about their problems with mental illness and homelessness. However, although they were offered immediate services by those present, no one accepted the help.

Business owners describe the impact of panhandling on their customers in a variety of ways. **Peter Ludt**, a Task Force member, said that some people would take over Espresso Royale's outdoor café

on South State Street, soliciting money from people walking by, and then use the bathroom, leaving bottles and drug paraphernalia. As a result, he began locking the bathroom. He also began making more phone calls to the police department. “Customers don’t feel comfortable when they are solicited several times in one block.”

At this time, soliciting of any kind is prohibited on campus, but **Jim Kosteva, the UM Director of Community Relations**, emphasized that students, faculty and staff interact with panhandlers **off campus**. Panhandlers often work those busy areas on State Street and South University, but hang-out at the Diag. Students, especially those out celebrating in a group, often give \$20 or more to a panhandler who is waiting outside a bar.

That \$20 can result in a call to the police and a trip to the emergency room or **The Engagement Center** in Ypsilanti. Doug Martelle from the Ann Arbor Police Department described several situations where downtown merchants called the police because someone needed help due to severe intoxication or drug overdose. In those cases, the police and emergency services are called; in other cases, merchants often call **Charles Coleman** from **Dawn Farm** or another counselor to help with sobriety services and emergency shelter.

Location matters

Main, Liberty and State are prime streets for panhandling. Some people complained that a walk between Main Street and State Street can result in repeated requests for money. **Ray Detter** of the **Downtown Citizens Advisory Council** reported many complaints about Liberty Plaza, the alleys between Washington and Liberty near the Michigan Theater, and the sidewalk outside of Borders Books. Others reported being solicited in front of the Ann Arbor District Library’s downtown branch, the downtown (Liberty) post office / Federal Plaza, and outside the State Street Theater. Of the downtown parks, Doug Martelle pointed out that the greatest number of complaints came from activity at Liberty Plaza while there were almost no complaints about behavior at Sculpture Plaza. Task Force members agreed that certain areas appeared more ‘tolerant’ than others, and that certain areas drew greater densities of panhandlers than others.

The Task Force urges City Council to consider our recommendations carefully. Task Force members remain available to discuss any and all aspects of this report.

“I was at the downtown library this eve with my kids. On the way back, we saw the crutch man. He was loitering around the intersection of S. Ashley and W. Washington (Near Cafe Zola). We pulled into the empty lot on the SW corner and just observed for about 15 minutes. My kids got a real education in the falsity of human nature. This guy would walk around completely at ease, then would go into his act whenever he saw a target. We saw this over and over. At one point we saw him saunter into the parking lot to count his money. He had his crutch sandwiched under his arm and was just strolling along unencumbered. I can understand panhandling (whatever happened to the word 'begging?'). However, to put on a false act is disgusting. I'm sorry you believe his 'story', but I'm not buying a bit of it.”

AnnArbor.com comment, 9/26/10

“In warmer weather, walking to various shops, venues and services downtown, I’m met with a barrage of the regular panhandlers, for some reason they haven’t yet recognized me as a member of the non-enabling crowd. Crutch-man, the Pope, limping lady, and the “professional” that hangs out in front of the Co-op. I call him professional as it appears to me he’s panhandling for a “homeless cause” other than himself. In cooler weather, just the professional remains.

None of them frightens me, except “the outsiders”. These are the out-of-place thugs who show up for a few weekends a year... looking for easy marks, panhandling is their front as they observe the behavior of passing humanity. Cross on the other side of the street from these guys.”

Ann Arbor Chronicle comment, 1/5/11

9:70. - Solicitation.

Except as otherwise provided in Chapters 79 and 81 of this Code, it shall be unlawful for any person to solicit the immediate payment of money or goods from another person, whether or not in exchange for goods, services, or other consideration, under any of the following circumstances:

1. On private property, except as otherwise permitted by Chapters 79 and 81, unless the solicitor has permission from the owner or occupant;
2. On any public transportation vehicle or public transportation facility;
3. In any public parking structure and within 12 feet of any entrance or exit to any public parking structure;
4. **In any public alley and within 12 feet of any entrance or exit to any public alley, as that term is defined in Title I, Chapter 1, section 1:8 of the Ann Arbor City Code;**
5. From a person who is in any vehicle on the street;
6. By obstructing the free passage of pedestrian or vehicle traffic;
7. Within 12 feet of a bank or automated teller machine;
8. By moving to within 2 feet of the person solicited, unless that person has indicated that he/she wishes to be solicited;
9. By following and continuing to solicit a person who walks away from the solicitor;
10. By knowingly making a false or misleading representation in the course of a solicitation;
11. In a manner that appears likely to cause a reasonable person of ordinary sensibilities to feel intimidated, threatened or harassed;
12. Within 12 feet of the entrance to or exit from the Nickels Arcade, located between State Street and Maynard Street; the Galleria, located between S. University and the Forest Street parking structure; the Pratt Building, located between Main Street and the Ashley parking lot; [the Ann Arbor District Library, located at the corner of 5th Avenue and William Street](#) or
13. From a person who is a patron at any outdoor cafe or restaurant.

(Ord. No. 22-96, § 2, 8-5-96; Ord. No. 25-03, 7-7-03)

A three-part strategic educational approach will address panhandling in our community. The goal is to educate the community, merchants and panhandlers about the availability of local social services (food, shelter, sobriety help) and to shift donations to local social service agencies.

1. Ann Arbor Alternatives: Real Help for Those in Need (Exhibit I)

Merchants, residents, and those in need have asked for a simple tool that will help them find the right organization to call or visit. The Task Force created a pocket size, folded, two sided business card that provides information on the broad range of free services available to those in need, including food, shelter and sobriety help. This card stresses the fact that panhandling is typically a symptom of a greater need.

The cards will go into production by **early June, 2011**, in time for the summer special events. These cards will be distributed through local businesses, the Ann Arbor Police Department, Community Standards officers and other agencies in contact with those in need. They will also be given to customers and other community members who may encounter panhandlers.

Distribution channels of cards will include the downtown merchant associations, the Ann Arbor Police Department and Community Standards Department, and targeted social service agency outreach departments.

Generous financial support from the DDA and the Downtown area associations will underwrite the costs of printing and distribution.

2. Have a Heart, Give Smart

Make Your Money Count At: www.a2cares.org (Exhibit II)

Launching June 15, 2011, **Have a Heart, Give Smart** is a community wide campaign to drive people to one website in an effort to redirect donations directly to agencies providing services to those in need. All promotional materials, bumper stickers and posters will feature a consistent branding message: **Have a Heart, Give Smart** and an easy to remember website, www.a2cares.org. The tagline and web address emphasize compassion and prudent giving.

Task Force members agreed to purchase the domain name www.a2cares.org. This web site will serve as a portal that links to the sites of service providers (such as Dawn Farm, the Delonis Center, Home of New Vision, Food Gatherers, etc.) that provide services to those in need, including food, shelter and sobriety help. Visitors will be able to give donations directly to these local social service agencies.

In addition to driving visitors to those agencies accepting donations, the site will help educate the public on the plight of those in need and the reality of where the majority of dollars given directly to panhandlers are being spent.

One of the features of the site will be testimonial videos from former panhandlers. These will add a strong message of truth and hope.

The Task Force expects that various local media outlets will become partners in spreading the message that giving to panhandlers doesn't help our community provide for the hungry, the homeless, the sick or the addicted.

www.a2cares.org will utilize analytics to give the Task Force the ability to measure the success of the campaign. Analytics will provide the number of visitors to the site, the number of 'clicks' and the links visited. This will help the Task Force evaluate the program for effectiveness each month.

3. **Re-educate and remind downtown merchants about the difference between passive and aggressive panhandling. An informational piece specifically stating that panhandling is legal in Ann Arbor under certain conditions, a copy of the solicitation ordinance that prohibits and defines aggressive panhandling, and best practices on how to handle problem situations. (Exhibit III)**

While not for mass distribution, this reminder will empower businesses with information and guidelines by listing the ordinances and contact numbers for enforcement and support. Merchant associations will take the lead in distributing this piece via email and door to door delivery. The Task Force will consult the Ann Arbor Police Department and service providers to create the **best practice guidelines** for those merchants comfortable with addressing situations directly.

Generous financial support from the DDA and the Downtown area associations will underwrite the costs of printing and distribution.

FREE MEALS IN ANN ARBOR AREA

7:30 am Breakfast everyday and Saturday Bag Lunch
St. Andrews Breakfast – 306 N Division St Ann Arbor

**12 Noon Lunch & 5pm Dinner weekdays,
3pm Dinner on weekends:**
Food Gatherers Community Kitchen @ the Delonis Center –
312 W. Huron Street, Ann Arbor

Additional Meals throughout Ypsilanti –
call 211 for information

Ann Arbor Alternatives: Real Help for Those in Need

Ann Arbor is a generous community, and strives to provide options for all – ***especially those in need.*** Our community supports a broad range of free services to those who are homeless or experiencing economic hardship.

For more information about how you can help, go to Have a Heart, Give Smart at www.a2cares.org.

Money for food, transportation, or some other emergency?

There are better – more complete – options for pan-handlers, and they are provided for free at several agencies throughout the community. Below is a list of resources that can provide immediate help to those in need.

SHELTER/HOUSING

SOS Community Services Housing Crisis Line	484-4300
The Delonis Center – 312 W. Huron Street, Ann Arbor . . .	662-2829
Project Outreach (PORT) – 110 N. Fourth, Ann Arbor	222-3750
The Salvation Army's Staples Center – 3660 Packard Rd., Ann Arbor	761-7750
Ozone House (youth ages 10-20) – 1705 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor	662-2222

SOBRIETY HELP

Dawn Farm Street Outreach.	485-8725
Home of New Vision	975-1602

inside of fold over business card

Have a Heart, Give Smart

Make Your Money Count At:

www.a2cares.org

DID YOU KNOW . . .

Panhandling is protected speech under the First Amendment and is legal in Ann Arbor?

However, the City of Ann Arbor Solicitation Ordinance does prohibit panhandling in the following areas:

- On private property, unless permission is granted by the owner or occupant
- On a public bus or in a public transportation facility
- In parking structures and within 12 feet of the entrance or exit of a parking structure
- From a person in a vehicle on the street
- Within 12 feet of a bank or ATM
- Within 12 feet of Nickels Arcade (State St.), the Galleria (S. University) and the Pratt Building (Main St.)
- From customers in outdoor seating areas

The City of Ann Arbor Solicitation Ordinance also prohibits **aggressive** panhandling in the following situations:

- Moving to within 2 feet of the person solicited
- Following and continuing to solicit a person who walks away from solicitor
- Knowingly making a false or misleading representation when soliciting
- In a manner that is intimidating or threatening
- Obstructing the free passage of pedestrian or vehicle traffic

If you encounter any of these prohibited behaviors in or around your business you should:

Call 911 and report it to the Ann Arbor Police Department

AND / OR

IF you do not feel there is a safety issue, approach individual and point out that the behavior is in violation of rules set by the City of Ann Arbor. Ask the individual to kindly stop, move on or otherwise advise them of services available to help them obtain food, shelter or other services. (see information card provided by the Mayor's Panhandling Task Force)

Have a Heart Give Smart
www.a2cares.org

Minutes from the October 27, 2010 meeting

Members present: Ray Detter, Brian Durrance, Maggie Ladd, Mary Campbell, Peter Ludt, Paul Sher, Maura Thompson, Susan Pollay, Sabra Briere, Daniel Chan representing the Office of Community Development

Members absent: Doug Martelle (representing the AAPolice), Charles Coleman

Guests present: Leslie Stambaugh

Members of the committee and guests briefly introduced themselves and identified the groups and organizations they represented.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as written

Outreach Strategies

Ray Detter described a need to be clear about the nature of the problem. For instance, he indicated that almost all the panhandlers in the State Street area are young people. There are different groups on Main Street and South University. Different types of solutions need to be found.

State Street attracts younger, more aggressive panhandlers who keep moving. They are more professional and don't appear to be drug or alcohol seeking. Others at the table noted that young users may not show the damage of drugs and alcohol, but still be seeking money to acquire more.

Fall is the off season. It's not a good time to go looking for panhandlers. During the summer the State Street area was very busy; there were people who staked out the State Street entrance to Nichols Arcade and ignored the ordinance that said this is not allowed. They were aware that enforcement isn't occurring.

Brian Durrance pointed out that At Camp Take Notice there were more young people who seemed very well organized, but they were the ones who brought heroin and other drugs into the camp. Drug use just doesn't show as much until it has been going on for years.

There are two possible solutions: 1) change the ordinance; 2) identify the problem and the location and then find ways outside the ordinance to deal with the problem. Enforcement continues to be an issue. While seasonality is an issue (no one likes to stand around in the cold), panhandlers are here year-round. We need to make certain our residents are educated – whether they are incoming Freshmen at the University or permanent residents.

An effective tool to educate both the public and the panhandlers – and the merchants – continues to be mentioned: educational cards that both outline the ordinance and list places where help is available. The last time, the merchants paid for printing these cards; merchants and police distributed them to panhandlers and the public. When the stock ran low, the merchants turned to the City for funding. By that time, however, there were other options for dealing with street outreach; the panhandling problem was being addressed by increased enforcement of the ordinance, and the City Council chose other priorities. If this solution is pursued, it will have to be as part of a major educational project with clear funding sources.

It may also be necessary to institutionalize the committee, as clearly the problem isn't solved and won't go away.

Changing the current ordinance language

After reviewing the City's ordinance and comparing it to ordinances from other Michigan cities, members of the committee felt the current ordinance language was clear. However, the need to increase enforcement is also clear.

Enforcement and education

Several other ideas were brought forward. Panhandling could be outlawed in the parks – all parks, period. Obstructing sidewalks could be enforced, so pedestrians could feel less intimidated while shopping on Liberty and

State. The Street Occupancy permits could require merchants ensure that those sitting at their tables actually be customers.

Next Steps:

A representative from PORT, New Vision, the VA, Ozone House will be invited to attend the November 10 meeting.

New Idea

Leslie Stambaugh offered to conduct a survey of the merchants in the Main Street, State Street, South University and Kerrytown areas. She wanted to help identify fact-based data regarding the impact of panhandling on business and customer-impressions of Ann Arbor's downtown. She asked whether the representatives present would help facilitate this survey. Those present encouraged the survey, but added that residents of downtown and customers should also be surveyed.

Adding these groups may make the survey more difficult to conduct.

Next Meeting

Agenda:

Discussion will focus on outreach, learning from those organizations involved with the panhandling demographic.

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30 pm, Wednesday, November 10, 3rd Floor Conference Room.

Subsequent meeting: 3:30 pm, Wednesday, December 1

Minutes from the November 10, 2010 meeting

Members present: Ray Detter, Brian Durrance, Maggie Ladd, Charles Coleman, Peter Ludt, Paul Sher, Maura Thomson, Sabra Briere, Mary Jo Callan, Doug Martelle (representing the AAPolice)

Members absent:, Mary Campbell, Susan Pollay

Guests present: Leslie Stambaugh, Daniel Chae (Office of Community Development), Deb Pipans (PORT), Chris Tabaczka (Michigan Theatre), Shannon Ellis (Home of New Vision), Colleen O'Brien (Ozone House)

Members of the committee and guests briefly introduced themselves and identified the groups and organizations they represented.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved with minor corrections. Leslie Stambaugh pointed out that she offered to help conduct a survey, not do one by herself.

Doug Martelle (dmartelle@a2gov.org) asked to be added to the distribution list, to ensure he gets meeting notices.

Outreach Strategies of various organizations

Deb Pipans from Project OutReach Team (PORT) began the discussion by describing the services available through PORT. Their focus is people who need mental health care but who are not receiving it. They subscribe to the housing first model; get them housing, then care. The team members go to St. Andrews' breakfast service, the tent communities and other areas that attract the homeless, and work with those who need services. They have a good success rate, and many have received housing in the last seven (7) years. Merchants in Ann Arbor have become familiar with PORT and call if they believe there's someone who needs their services. They work closely with the Ann Arbor police Department to help keep those in need of mental health care both off the street and out of jail.

75% of those with substance abuse problems have mental health problems.

The SOAR programs helps PORT and other organizations get services for clients quickly, although providing the necessary documentation is still difficult. The problems of the mentally ill/substance abuser are more visible than they used to be, as there is less of a family safety net. Resources of families are stretched too thin in many cases, and more people end up on the streets as a result. While some people do come to the Ann Arbor area from other parts of Michigan looking for services, the best result is to get them closer to their homes, where they know others and have a natural support system. PORT, Delonis and other organizations help do this.

Charles Coleman commented that panhandlers aren't homeless. Panhandlers see their job as panhandling; there are instructions on the internet on how to panhandle, and "crispy punks" – middle class kids who don't want to work – have seen panhandling as a 'lifestyle choice'.

Shannon Ellis from Home of New Vision pointed out the New Vision works with the homeless or precariously housed drug and substance abuser. They also subscribe to the housing first model; helping people find housing, then providing services. Long term engagement is needed in order to break down resistance to treatment for substance abuse. The Engagement Center in Ypsilanti is available to help people sober up prior to treatment; the Ann Arbor police and service providers often help get people to the Engagement Center rather than taking them to the Emergency Room. This alternative to conventional medical treatment has only eight (8) beds, and is often full in the winter. To access the Engagement Center, merchants and others would need to go through the police or an outreach program like Home of New Vision.

Ms. Ellis said that prison release is contributing to panhandling, as there are barriers to both employment and housing for former felons.

Sabra Briere reminded everyone that there was consensus about panhandling. Panhandling is not about being homeless. She asked about services being provided to panhandlers and the implications panhandling brings to demands for each organization's services.

Colleen O'Brien of Ozone House described an economic reality that included fewer social supports, and those more tenuous for teens. Teens used to 'couch surf' at friends' houses more; now their friends' parents cannot afford to let them stay. Ozone House fields more requests for food, housing, and even just the bathroom. Living on the street isn't always a 'choice', she pointed out. Ozone doesn't see folks with choices.

Mary Jo Callan from the Office of Community Development interjected that Ann Arbor will always have relative wealth. There need to be options for merchants, students and permanent residents to make certain that options are available and known. It's important to be realistic about available resources.

Enforcement and education

Peter Ludt encouraged increased educational outreach. The opportunity and financial resources necessary to hire additional police to routinely patrol downtown just won't be available in the next few years. The best way to tackle panhandling is to focus on educating the public that panhandling is not about being homeless, but usually about substance abuse. There are services available in the community to help with substance abuse problems and finding people meals and housing; that message needs to be told over and over to merchants, students, residents and the people on the street.

The committee discussed this educational process, and suggested that there should be a protocol established, including the creation of a standing committee, so the City doesn't have to reinvent things every few years.

Doug Martelle provided a copy of a three-fold brochure from 2003 that contained the Solicitation ordinance, a list of Community Resources and services, and some frequently called City numbers and services. He also brought copies of the loitering ordinance, for those who had not recently read it.

Next Steps:

Mary Jo Callan offered to draft language for a prototype (and very simple) card that could be distributed to merchants, residents, students, and police.

A representative from the University of Michigan and the VA Hospital will attend the December 1st meeting. .

New Idea

Old parking meter heads could be repainted and mounted downtown; people could put their spare change in these meters as a way to collect for services for the homeless and panhandlers. Sabra agreed to contact Susan Pollay to see if any meter heads were available.

Next Meeting

Agenda:

Discussion will focus on outreach to veterans and students.

Old business: draft hand out card (to review)

New business: Maura Thomson met with AnnArbor.com to discuss outreach

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30 pm, Wednesday, December 1, 3rd Floor Conference Room.

Subsequent meeting: 3:30 pm, Wednesday, December 15, 4th Floor Conference Room

Minutes from the December 1, 2010 meeting

Members present: Ray Detter, Brian Durrance, Maggie Ladd, Charles Coleman, Maura Thomson, Sabra Briere, Mary Jo Callan, Susan Pollay, Doug Martelle (representing the AAPolice)

Members absent:, Mary Campbell, Peter Ludt, Paul Sher

Guests present: Leslie Stambaugh, Jim Kosteva (University of Michigan)

Members of the committee and guests briefly introduced themselves.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved with minor corrections.

No representative from the VA was available. We may invite someone later.

Outreach to the University community

Jim Kosteva from the University of Michigan started the discussion with a reminder that any solicitation on campus is prohibited. It's what happens near campus but still affects University staff and students that this committee could change.

Student education regarding panhandling needs to be constantly refreshed. Orientation often occurs months before students actually start living in Ann Arbor; by the time they are confronted with making decisions, many of the things they heard during Orientation have been forgotten. Including information about panhandling as part of the safety handbook could change that; MSA has a Safety Committee; the two committees could work together on this issue to ensure that information becomes institutionalized.

Getting University faculty involvement as well as student support would also help. If a social-work professor is researching panhandling, having some of that research done and discussed locally as part of an educational program could increase University buy-in and community support.

The City has a web page for City/University relations: A2gov.org/goblue. The City could put a section on that page – and keep it current – regarding panhandling. This would serve as another reminder to students about how to handle aggressive requests and about the many services Ann Arbor already provides.

New ideas

Maura Thomson met with Laurel Champion and Tony Dearing at AnnArbor.com to discuss the Street Outreach Committee's work. AnnArbor.com is very interested in working with the committee; they discussed banner ads, editorials and articles. They agreed that the committee needs to craft a message and design a strategy first. It was especially important that the message be one where those in need win and the community wins.

Mary Jo Callan shared a very draft business-card sized hand-out that contained information about the services available and the reasons to support those services rather than giving directly to panhandlers. During the brainstorming session that followed, some changes and additions were offered for the text on the card. Jim Kosteva suggested reformatting it to look like a dollar bill. This idea was accepted with enthusiasm.

Others suggested expanding the campaign to posters that could be placed in business' windows and to see if donations for printing costs could be sought from AATA, United Way, other donors. An outreach campaign would also need a simple slogan that would be memorable and meaningful; each committee members was asked to help think about slogans.

There are a number of ways the materials can be distributed. In addition to printing posters, Community Standards staff can hand out the 'dollars'; so can merchants. However, the more things the committee wants to print, the bigger the budget.

One low-cost idea would be to create an omnibus website with all the services available. Human capital is vital to continuing this work, but so is keeping the information the committee acquires available. How difficult would it be to assemble a list of all the available services? How big a commitment would it be to keep that list current?

Next Steps:

Mary Jo Callan will work with Susan Pollay on the further refinement of a handout. Susan will see if the designer the DDA works with will donate the design. Sabra Briere agreed to help refine the text and design of the handout.

Next Meeting

Agenda:

Brian Durrance offered to invite a panhandler, so we can learn more from those who see this as their job.

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30 pm, Wednesday, December 15, 4th Floor Conference Room.

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!

Minutes from the January 5, 2011 meeting

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

Members absent: Mary Campbell, Doug Martelle (representing the AAPolice) , Maggie Ladd

Guests present: Leslie Stambaugh,

The minutes of the previous meetings approved, with amendments offered for the December 15th meeting to reflect the changes in the transient population of panhandlers who use the State Street / Liberty / Diag area as their home base. These transient youth are sometimes quite aggressive, and while their presence may be connected with Punk week, others may be there 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.

Discussion of outreach strategies

- Outreach to the Community: Suggested mechanisms
- Pay the homeless to distribute stickers (with services) / dollar bills (with services) or other small tokens
- Provide a list of available services to merchants
- City should provide more training to community standards staff so they can engage public effectively
- Place fact-filled articles every year to help educate the public – July & September for the Daily, April for AnnArbor.com
- Work with GroundCover to place message
- Put posters/signs in specific locations to provide list of available services
- Merchants could place notices April – September
- University could publish in freshmen orientation paper.
- Non-smoking information could also be vehicle
- Create single point of service through SOS
- Increase publicity, not fundraising

Student community and other communities are different. These need different approaches.

Possible catch phrase for credit card campaign: “Give us some credit”

Next Meeting February 2

Agenda:

Continue Action phase

Work through matrix of outreach strategies

Education: finalize the message(s)

Budget: determine the first year; design mechanism for continuing

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30 pm, Wednesday, February 2, 3rd Floor Conference Room. Beware of construction!

Minutes from the February 2, 2011 meeting

Members present: Ray Detter, Susan Pollay, Peter Ludt, Charles Coleman, Sabra Briere, Doug Martelle (representing the AAPolice)

Members absent: Mary Campbell, Brian Durrance, Mary Jo Callan (Office of Community Development), Paul Sher, Maggie Ladd, Maura Thomson

Guests present: Leslie Stambaugh

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as written.

Those attending the meeting referred to the matrix of proposed solutions for discussion points. Some had edited the matrix; these ideas may be incorporated into the final report.

The committee held a lively discussion about the message and how best to convey it to the community. Comments and discussion included:

‘Panhandling changes the nature of your community.’

‘We have to be willing to accept that we want to limit and reduce the amount of panhandling, not just control aggressive panhandling.’

‘The outreach card will be valuable to a large number of stakeholders.’

The committee members discussed possible tag lines and again talked about the media campaign.

Sub-committee assignments

In order to meet the schedule of the Task Force’s assignment, three sub-committees were formed. One committee would focus on creating a final Message that will be both part of the presentation to Council and, if approved by Council, the message to the community. The task-force members who agreed to server were Peter Ludt, and Charles Coleman. They agreed to ask Mary Jo Callan and Brian Durrance to work with them on this task.

A second sub-committee would work to determine whether the City’s ordinances should be amended. The members who agreed to work on this group were Ray Detter, Susan Pollay, Doug Martelle, and Sabra Briere. They also asked Paul Sher and Brian Durrance to join them.

The third sub-committee would draft, edit and design the final presentation. The members who agreed to serve were Sabra Briere and Susan Pollay; they would ask Maura Thomson, Mary Campbell and Maggie Ladd to work with them. The work on the third sub-committee would not begin until the other two had met and reported out.

Work from the Message and Ordinance sub-committees is to be completed by the February 16th meeting, in order to finalize the report for Council by either March 7th or March 28th.

Next Meeting

Agenda:

Review sub-committee reports

Plan report to Council

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30 pm, Wednesday, February 16, 5th Floor Conference Room. Beware of construction!

Editorial: Panhandling problem needs compassionate solution

Tony Dearing

Posted: Sep 26, 2010 at 6:00 AM [Sep 26, 2010]

Reports of aggressive panhandling in downtown Ann Arbor beg the question: just how serious is the problem, really?

It depends on whom you ask. Our perception is that in-your-face panhandling is less than a crisis, but enough of a concern to justify reconvening a Task Force on the issue, which the Ann Arbor City Council voted unanimously to do last week.

If the Task Force is diligent and gets the cooperation it needs from police, social service agencies and downtown interests, it should be able to lower the level of aggressive panhandling, much as it did nearly a decade ago.

The amount of panhandling that's going on in downtown is hard to quantify, and opinions differ. If you were to randomly ask people who spend time downtown, some would tell you they are rarely approached by panhandlers, while others would describe encounters that left them feeling uncomfortable and intimidated.

Whatever the reality, there clearly is a perception that panhandling is getting out of control, and perception has a way of become its own reality, particularly if it begins to discourage people from coming downtown. And panhandling tends to escalate, so dealing with it now is better than waiting until it becomes more severe.

In 2003, similar concerns led to the forming of a Downtown Street Outreach Task Force, which recommended, among other things, new regulations that prohibit aggressive panhandling and the formation of neighborhood police patrols in downtown Ann Arbor.

Last year, budget constraints led the Police Department to eliminate the practice of having downtown beat cops patrol on foot or on bicycle.

Some observers say the loss of this visible police presence led to the resurgence of aggressive panhandling.

This problem is too complex to point to a single cause - or solution. And given the city's financial challenges, a return of downtown beat cops is improbable, though some limited, targeted enforcement by police would be helpful.

One concern the Task Force will have to address is the rise in the number of professional panhandlers - scam artists who come to Ann Arbor and conduct their "begging" in a very organized, calculated way. Some of the perception also was driven this summer by out-of-towners who came for Punk Week festivities and hung out downtown, aggressively accosting passersby.

Then there are our regulars, local panhandlers whom frequent visitors to downtown recognize and know, sometimes by name. That's always been the case. Ann Arbor has long attracted panhandlers because of its reputation for generosity toward those who appear to be in need.

Addressing City Council last week, Ann Arbor Police Chief Barnett Jones raised a few eyebrows when he acknowledged that years ago, a police department he worked for in a town some distance from here dealt with panhandlers by putting them on a bus to Ann Arbor. While his candor might have been a little surprising, the revelation itself was not.

Ann Arbor, as one of the wealthiest cities in Michigan, should be compassionate toward those in need. While some panhandlers are scammers, others are people with serious substance abuse or mental health problems, or who have been thrust into hardship by the economic downturn.

The goal should not be to simply push these problems out of sight. We should be a caring community, but that means discouraging any form of panhandling, while directing our support to social organizations that address the underlying issues of need in the community.

As the city reconvenes its Task Force, fall and winter are coming. Colder weather will quell the level of panhandling, and the Task Force can use that lull to develop strategies in time for spring.

Those strategies might include the occasional use of targeted enforcement to reduce the numbers of professional panhandlers. And reengaging with providers of social services also should help identify ways to help those with legitimate needs.

Whatever solutions it finds, the answer is not to give money directly to panhandlers, which does nothing to move them into a supportive situation where their basic needs can be met.

Yes, it can be hard to walk out of a coffee shop with a \$3.50 latte and tell a street person, “Sorry, I can’t spare any change.” But there is a difference between being compassionate, and being an enabler or an easy mark. If you feel moved to help someone on the street, then offer to buy a sandwich or give directions to a shelter or a meal program. But save your cash donations for organizations that are doing real good for those in need.

[illegible]

BEHIND THE BLUE LINE

q&a: Is it legal for a person to beg on freeway ramps in Michigan?

Posted: Mar 15, 2011 at 5:49 AM

Behind the Blue Line — Michigan State Police Trooper Duane Zook takes your law enforcement questions

Question: Is begging legal on freeway ramps?

Answer: Webster's Third International Dictionary states "begging" is to entreat earnestly, implore, or supplicate. It often occurs for the purpose of securing a material benefit, generally a gift, donation or charitable donation. When done in the context of a public place, it is known as "panhandling."

Under Michigan Law, "begging" is illegal and falls under the "disorderly person" law (MCL 750.167) when a person is found begging in a public place. This includes freeway ramps.

This article is not meant to stereotype the homeless population. It is for information, based on my law enforcement experiences.

On Dec. 28, 2007, I was called to the Ann Arbor-Saline park-and-ride lot to investigate the death of a suspected homeless man who had been exposed to the cold of winter for some time. I say "suspected homeless" because during the course of my investigation, I learned the man had a home, a place to stay. The man also had a job working at a local mechanic shop in Ann Arbor.

Time and time again prior to this man's death, I would see him "working the ramp" at Ann Arbor-Saline Road. I would wave to him, pass him by and leave him be, thinking he was legitimately homeless. I chose not to take any enforcement action or shoo him away from the ramp. Only after investigating this man's death, I realized I was naïve.

From that day forward, I made it a point to make contact with every panhandler working freeway ramps. Since 2008, I have learned the stories of 18 panhandlers working the ramps. All but one, I found, has a substance abuse addiction, mainly heroin. And only two are legitimately homeless. One man in

particular has full medical insurance, receives Social Security benefits and has a Michigan Bridge card, yet he's working the ramp because the majority of his money is going to heroin use.

So how much money do they make by working the ramps? Over the past two years, I have learned of the subculture involved in working the ramp. There are high-dollar and low-dollar ramps, along with seniority. On a high-dollar ramp on a good day, some of the people working the ramp make \$120 to \$200. Those working the low-end ramps may only receive \$20 to \$40. Ramps where the bus lines run, from Rawsonville Road in Ypsilanti Township to Jackson Road in Ann Arbor, are typically worked.

I have arrested several people working the ramps, not just for being on the ramp, but for having outstanding warrants for their arrest. Each person whom I have had contact with has been offered some type of literature for substance abuse treatment, family counseling, or mental health services. To this date, only one out of the 18 has made the choice to help herself out and go to a treatment program.

For information on how to obtain help for substance abuse, contact Washtenaw County Health Services Access at (800) 440-7548.

Posted: Sep 21, 2010 at 6:20 AM [Sep 21, 2010]

Police Chief Barnett Jones confirmed Monday night what some already [suspect](#): Panhandling is a growing problem in [downtown Ann Arbor](#).

"This was a summer where the No. 1 crime that occurred in our community was aggressive panhandling," Jones said, addressing the [Ann Arbor City Council](#).

"We have been experiencing that because of the culture and the nature of our fine community," he said. "We have had daily numbers of people from around our area that have made it into our downtown area because we have the wherewithal to share some of the resources that we have.



Council Member Sabra Briere, D-1st Ward, brought forward a resolution Monday night to reconvene a Task Force to look at the problem of aggressive panhandling in the downtown.

Ryan J. Stanton | [AnnArbor.com](#)

"They've come as far away as Jackson, they've come from Detroit, they've come from other communities — because that is the nature of our community. We like to take care of the people we can try to take care of. We've even had people pretending to be down-and-out in our downtown area, taking advantage of the goodness of the people in our community."

Jones' report came as the City Council voted unanimously Monday night to reconvene a Task

Force to look at aggressive panhandling and other issues facing the downtown.

Council Member Sabra Briere, D-1st Ward and a sponsor of the [resolution](#), noted it was exactly nine years ago to the day that the city first established the [Downtown Street Outreach Task Force](#) to address the larger issue of unmet outreach and service needs downtown.

In May 2003, the Task Force recommended neighborhood patrols in the downtown business districts, encouraged increased outreach by social service agencies and proposed a panhandling ordinance that the City Council subsequently adopted. The ordinance doesn't outlaw panhandling, but includes specific regulations to prohibit aggressive panhandling.

Despite that ordinance, Briere said aggressive panhandling appears to have increased in the downtown area since 2003, and the Task Force needs to be reinvigorated.

The Downtown Street Outreach Task Force is expected to meet regularly for no longer than six months to identify issues surrounding panhandling and "suggest potential solutions that may involve the community, the service sectors and safety services."

The resolution also directs the Ann Arbor Police Department to continue efforts to enforce the existing panhandling ordinance as written.

Briere acknowledged some residents have expressed a desire to restore downtown beat cop positions that were cut last summer, but the city's budget is tight these days.

Until last summer, a handful of police officers were assigned to walk or bicycle downtown, but as part of a restructuring of the Ann Arbor Police Department, those patrols were eliminated. Some say panhandlers have become more aggressive since the city pulled beat cops off the street.

Jones acknowledged the police department has struggled with a minimum number of officers on foot and bike patrols to curb aggressive panhandling. He said the department has been sporadically moving officers between Liberty Plaza and other parts of the downtown.

"When we were no longer there, they were there," Jones lamented.

Jones mentioned the annual [Punk Week festivities](#) this summer, which resulted in the arrest of multiple people who converged on Ann Arbor for a week of illegal behavior in August.

"They took advantage of the goodness of our community and the downtown area," Jones said. "At night, they were there with signs saying, 'You don't like us, we don't like you. Give us money and we'll go away.' That is how brass and how bold they were this particular time."

Jones said there is a crop of "new intruders" from outside of Ann Arbor who "sometimes don't know our laws" and "they are used to the other way they panhandle in other areas."

He suggested Ann Arbor has a reputation of being fertile ground for panhandlers. He acknowledged that years ago, when he worked as a police officer in another community far outside Ann Arbor, it actually was standard practice to shuttle people in need to Ann Arbor and drop them off here.

"We did the shuttle service because we knew in our community we had no homeless shelter, we knew that in our community we had no goodness of people," he said. "So we would shuttle them to Ann Arbor so that they'd know that they might get taken care of. That may not take place today, but the people still come here because of the goodness of the people in this community."

Mayor John Hieftje cautioned Monday night the city needs to make sure it is reacting to actual problems and not perceptions about what's happening downtown. He said he's been told that it's primarily

a couple of individuals causing problems on Main Street.

"Panhandling is not illegal, and in fact it's a protected right," Hieftje said, though he added it can be regulated and it's worth taking another look at the issue.

Ann Arbor Task Force Consults Panhandlers

Street outreach members now midway through their work

By [Jo Mathis](#)

December 31, 2010

Editor's note: At its [Sept. 20, 2010 meeting](#), the Ann Arbor city council reappointed a downtown street outreach Task Force – aka the “panhandling Task Force” – which had existed in the early 2000s. The current group’s charge is to work for no longer than six months to identify cost-effective ways to achieve better enforcement of the city’s ordinance against panhandling, and to provide help to panhandlers who are addicted to drugs.



The sum of one panhandler's afternoon collection on Dec. 31, 2010 on the sidewalk next to Border's Bookstore on East Liberty Street in downtown Ann Arbor. (Photo by Dave Askins.)

Now that the Task Force is roughly halfway through that six-month period, The Chronicle attended its December meeting to check in on the group's work.

You buy local, think global, pay it forward, recycle.
You're a good person.

So how do you respond to a panhandler? Is opening your wallet helping someone in need? Or is it enabling an addiction? Can you look the other way and still consider yourself compassionate?

At the Dec. 15 meeting of the city's panhandling Task Force, three paid consultants gave their perspective on the issue – as panhandlers. Geoffrey Scott said he enjoys talking to the people almost as much as he appreciates the money they give him.

But one member of the city's panhandling Task Force says people don't realize the damage they do in the name of kindness.

“Unfortunately, panhandling hurts a delicate economy, which is like a delicate ecosystem,” says Brian Durrance, secretary of [MISSION](#), which supports people who are homeless in Ann Arbor. “And if you have an invasive species that comes in and damages it, it will be altered. Ann Arbor survives because it's an attractive place for people to come who have money and are willing to spend it. And as they're spending that money, they are being taxed. And that money is used to help people of all kinds. Panhandlers are not contributing to that system, and particularly the aggressive ones are destructive.”

That's because it takes some extra effort to get downtown, says Durrance. And merchants spend a lot of money trying to get people there. And if people are put off by aggressive panhandlers, they'll go elsewhere.

The three panhandlers who spoke at the Task Force's December meeting were each paid \$20 – or about what they might have collected on the streets during that time.

When Task Force members learned that Durrance had paid the three out of his own pocket, they

pitched in to reimburse him, cheerfully calling it “another example of panhandling.” That line settled well with Tate Williams, who after the meeting said we’re all panhandlers from time to time.

“The word panhandling is thrown out there to keep people in a different class,” said Williams, co-founder and resident of a tent community in Ann Arbor called [Camp Take Notice](#). “I can guarantee that over half of that room has solicited the private sector for campaign funds. They asked people for money; i.e., panhandling. Other people there have written grants asking other entities for money; i.e., panhandling. And everyone has opened their wallet at lunchtime and said, ‘Oh, I’m a buck short ... Got a buck?’”

Still, Williams agrees that aggressive panhandling is a serious issue that can scare visitors and deter commerce. Particularly problematic are the aggressive younger panhandlers who come to Ann Arbor during the summer.

Geoffrey Scott was the most vocal of the three panhandlers who spoke at the meeting. Scott, who says his drinking has made a mess of his life, lives in a parking structure and panhandles all day long, mostly at the corner of State and Liberty. “I specifically say I need a quarter for the bus,” says Scott, who contends he does not act aggressively. “After you’ve talked to 200 people, you have the money you need.”

Among Scott’s observations:

- Panhandlers come to Ann Arbor because there is money here, and because it’s home to a bunch of rich college kids with soft hearts, and because it’s known to be a liberal city with plenty of support services for the needy.
- The money he makes is not used for food. “If you don’t know how to find food in Ann Arbor, something’s wrong with you ... No one’s hungry.”

- The best money is made on expressway ramps.
- You’ll make a lot more money if you say you’re a Vietnam vet. Scott is not a veteran in that sense. “I say I’m a street vet,” he says. “That’s true.”
- The colder you look, the more money you make. “If you can cry, all the better.”
- Some panhandlers choose it as a profession. Others feed drug addictions.

Durrance says every panhandler he’s ever met has been mentally ill.

“We find that most of the panhandlers are suffering from one kind of drug addiction or another, and underneath all of that is a mental illness problem which is not being dealt with,” he says. “So they started with a mental illness that is not being dealt with. They self-medicate. They’ve developed addictions. And they are surviving in the way anyone would survive – by doing what they can do. And panhandling is one of the ways they survive.”

Durrance says the best way to help panhandlers is not to give them cash, but to help them get needed mental health services, which should be a higher priority at the federal level.

People need to know that Ann Arbor is rich in social services, so that panhandlers’ shelter, clothing, and food needs are already met, Durrance says.

He thinks the merchants themselves should be the educators, and the city should try to support those merchants. They could pass out cards listing the food and shelter help available, put up signs in their windows, collect money to help provide services for those in need, use the media to help educate students.

This past summer, Boise, Idaho launched a program called “[Have a Heart, Give Smart](#),” using posters and leaflets to encourage people to donate to charity

rather than panhandlers. Panhandling was down 10% within a few months.

Some may wonder why it's wrong for one person to ask another person for spare change. Durrance explains it this way: When a street musician performs for tips, he's offering something in return. The merchants, too, are paying into the tax system, which supports services for everyone. "Panhandlers are not offering anything in return," he says. "They're simply taking."

It's wrong to assume that the homeless are panhandlers, he says, noting that most homeless people are just trying to quietly get by. They come to Ann Arbor for its excellent social services, but they're more likely to collect cans than ask for handouts.

The problem isn't so much evident in the fall and winter as in the spring and summer, when transient young people move here for a while, says Peter Ludt, general manager of Espresso Royale and a board member of the [State Street Area Association](#). Ludt also serves on the panhandling Task Force.

The kids panhandle on State Street and on the Diag, often aggressively, and get involved in drinking and drugs. They would take over Espresso Royale's outdoor café on South State Street, soliciting money from people walking by, and use the bathroom, leaving bottles and drug paraphernalia.

At one point last summer, Ludt began locking the bathrooms.

"In the spring and summer, you can't walk from one end of State Street to the other without being solicited several times," he says. "Customers have said they don't feel comfortable walking down State Street. And that's a problem for the city of Ann Arbor when citizens or students or visitors don't feel comfortable walking down a street."

Ludt agrees that the Task Force needs to educate both the panhandlers about the social services available to them, and the public – especially college students – about the reasons to not hand out

money. "It's a cycle," he says, referring to the alcohol and other drugs that panhandlers buy with the money they're given. "People who think they're helping panhandlers are really just hurting them further."

First Ward city council representative Sabra Briere, who chairs the Task Force, says the city's 2003 panhandling ordinance specifically targets those standing in certain locations, or who are aggressive. It doesn't target everyone asking for a hand-out. From the city's ordinance:

9:70. Solicitation.

Except as otherwise provided in Chapters 79 and 81 of this Code, it shall be unlawful for any person to solicit the immediate payment of money or goods from another person, whether or not in exchange for goods, services, or other consideration, under any of the following circumstances:

1. On private property, except as otherwise permitted by Chapters 79 and 81, unless the solicitor has permission from the owner or occupant;
2. In any public transportation vehicle or public transportation facility;
3. In any public parking structure and within 12 feet of any entrance or exit to any public parking structure;
4. From a person who is in any vehicle on the street;
5. By obstructing the free passage of pedestrian or vehicle traffic;
6. Within 12 feet of a bank or automated teller machine;
7. By moving to within 2 feet of the person solicited, unless that person has indicated that he/she wishes to be solicited;
8. By following and continuing to solicit a person who walks away from the solicitor;
9. By knowingly making a false or misleading representation in the course of a solicitation;
10. In a manner that appears likely to cause a reasonable person of ordinary sensibilities

to feel intimidated, threatened or harassed;
11. Within 12 feet of the entrance to or exit from the Nickels Arcade, located between State Street and Maynard Street; the Galleria, located between S. University and the Forest Street parking structure; and the Pratt Building, located between Main Street and the Ashley parking lot; or
12. From a person who is a patron at any outdoor cafe or restaurant.

Because budget cuts have cut down on the number of police officers walking the streets downtown, merchants and residents have begun complaining more about panhandlers. Briere said it's clear the Task Force can't put more police on the streets – which is what merchants on the Task Force originally wanted. There's a push to get more residents downtown, which requires making them feel safe and comfortable there.

"If we can't do it by having a strong police presence because of budget issues, then we have to come up with some other way," she says.

Members of the Task Force were selected to represent different parts of the community. In addition to Durrance, Ludt and Briere, members include Raymond Detter, Maggie Ladd, Susan Pollay, Mary Jo Callan, Charles Coleman, Paul Sher, Maura Thomson, Barnett Jones and Mary Campbell.

Briere hopes the Task Force will somehow ensure the panhandlers' basic needs are met and educate people that giving money to panhandlers does not solve poverty or help them get back on their feet.

"It's tough to figure out how to meet the needs of people who frankly don't want their needs met," Briere says. "It's easy for us to think we're all doing enough. It's easy to fear that if we do too much, we'll become a magnet for people seeking support. I don't have any good solutions. We're just trying to work on ways to treat people humanely in our community."

How does Briere react to panhandlers?

"I've done a number of things, like everybody else," she says. "I once gave a panhandler my yogurt. It depends on the panhandler. The guy people call Crutchy – I've been known to give him a quarter. I've also been known to say no when approached by people I don't know. I've pointed people to help."

Doesn't that quarter contradict her advice? "I'm not noble," she says. "I'm human."

About the author: Jo Mathis is an Ann Arbor-based writer.

Copyright 2010 The Ann Arbor Chronicle

<Excerpt>Policing: Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Report

September 1, 2010

Ray Detter, who chairs the Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council, reported on that body's regular meeting, which takes place on the Tuesday evening before the DDA's first-Wednesday monthly board meeting. The existence of the CAC as a body is stipulated in the state enabling legislation for downtown development authorities.

Detter reported that the previous night's meeting had included chief of police Barnett Jones, deputy chief John Seto and Ward 1 city councilmember Sabra Briere. He said they'd spent two hours discussing crime, panhandling and the challenges of police in the downtown area, as well as throughout the rest of the city. The discussion had been prompted, Detter said, by the expressed concern of downtown residents about petty street crime and aggressive panhandling being on the rise. Some people are attributing this increase, he said, to the reduction in sidewalk police presence.

One of the CAC members is president of the Sloan Plaza Condominium Association, Detter said, and he'd reported five separate security issues in a one-month period – twice a homeless person had stolen items out of the lobby, a smash-and-grab break-in, as well as homeless people sleeping behind the building.

Detter indicated chief Jones had observed that some of the homeless population are homeless "because they choose to be." There's an increase in people sleeping on the street, in parks, under bridges, Detter continued, and Liberty Plaza – an urban park at the corner of Liberty and Division – has become a problem once again.

Detter said that the CAC admired the ability of the police department to cope with the problems of crime in the city. He noted that while crime statistics are going down, arrests are going up. The police force has been reduced from 216 down to 124, he said, and they need help to solve this city-wide problem.

Detter said that Briere had indicated she'd be bringing a resolution to the city council at its Sept. 20 meeting to re-establish a panhandling Task Force. Detter alluded to the work done from 2001-03 by a previous Task Force, which had prompted a revision to the city's panhandling ordinance. The ordinance revision had been due in part to the efforts of Joan Lowenstein, Detter said, who was then a member of the city council.

Detter stated that now we need action again.

The city's "panhandling ordinance" is not known by that label in the city code. It's a part of Chapter 108 on disorderly conduct and is covered in the section on solicitation:

Ann Arbor Forms Panhandling Task Force

By [Chronicle Staff](#)

September 20, 2010

At its Sept. 20, 2010 meeting, the Ann Arbor city council unanimously approved the creation of a downtown street outreach Task Force. The group will work for the next six months to identify cost-effective ways to achieve better enforcement of the city's ordinance against panhandling, and to provide help to panhandlers who are addicted to drugs. The Task Force will include members representing the homeless community, the county/city office of community development, Dawn Farm, legal services providers, downtown merchant associations, the Downtown Development Authority, the Ann Arbor police department, the downtown citizens advisory council, and a member of the city council. Serving on the Task Force for the city council will be Sabra Briere (Ward 1), who sponsored the resolution.

This brief was filed from city council chambers. A more detailed report of the meeting will follow:

<Excerpt>Panhandling Task Force

Before the council was a resolution to establish a Task Force to address the problem of aggressive pan handling in downtown Ann Arbor. The group will work for the next six months to identify cost-effective ways to achieve better enforcement of the city's ordinance against panhandling, and to provide help to panhandlers who are addicted to drugs.

The Task Force will include members representing the homeless community, the county/city office of community development, Dawn Farm, legal services providers, downtown merchant associations, the Downtown Development Authority, the Ann Arbor police department, the Downtown Citizens Advisory Council, and a member of the city council. Serving on the Task Force for the city council will be Sabra Briere (Ward 1), who sponsored the resolution.

The topic has received discussion at the Downtown Citizens Advisory Council, as well as at [the](#)

[September meeting of the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority board.](#)

During public commentary reserved time at Monday's meeting, Lily Au stressed that not all panhandlers are homeless.

The city's "panhandling ordinance" is not known by that label in the city code. It's a part of Chapter 108 on disorderly conduct and is covered in the section on solicitation:

Briere led off the council deliberations by noting that nine years ago to the day, the council had established a previous Task Force to address the same issue. The purpose of re-staffing a Task Force, she said, was to find cost-effective solutions to enforcement that would not necessarily bring back downtown police patrols, while meeting the needs of those on the street.

Marcia Higgins (Ward 4) wanted to know the budget implications. Briere noted that previously one of the major efforts at enforcement was by means of foot and bicycle patrols in the downtown, and that the ordinance is still there, but the foot and bicycle patrols had been reassigned.

Sandi Smith (Ward 1) asked chief of police Barnett Jones to give an update. Jones indicated that from a practical point of view, the No. 1 crime in Ann Arbor this past summer was aggressive panhandling. He attributed it to the culture and nature of our community – it has both the wherewithal and the inclination to share, he said. He said that those who visited the city during Punk Week this year had taken advantage of the goodwill of the community, citing a post on a website that stated: "Let's see how much we can get away with." He also cited the sentiment of some of the Punk Week visitors: "You don't like us, we don't like you, give us money, we'll go away."

Smith thanked the chief for the perspective. She noted that in Northville and Plymouth there is not a panhandling problem. She noted that even if the panhandling is not aggressive, it's still perceived as aggressive.

At the urging of Margie Teall (Ward 4), representatives from State Street and Kerrytown were added to the Task Force.

Mayor John Hieftje stressed the need to react to facts, not perceptions. He suggested that some of the perception could be attributed to just a couple of individuals, one in particular. He noted that panhandling per se is not illegal. He agreed with Jones' sentiment that the problem was partly attributable to the culture of Ann Arbor and how it's perceived – Ann Arbor offers more support services than any other city, he said. He said that the goal of many panhandlers is to purchase alcohol. He also described how panhandlers at expressway ramps worked in shifts, with cars arriving to pick people up and drop others off.

Outcome: The resolution to establish a panhandling Task Force was unanimously approved.

Program aims to limit panhandling

By: Kara Wenzel Daily Staff Reporter

Published October 26th, 2001

A program that asks pedestrians to help homeless people in Ann Arbor by refusing to hand out money is catching on at area businesses and has already aided several panhandlers.



Paul Wong

Antonio Jose Williams, who is homeless, stands on State Street last night. He has been in Ann Arbor for 10 years. DAVID KATZ/Daily

Mayor John Hieftje's Downtown Marketing Task Force and a number of merchants' associations of Ann Arbor are participating in "Loose Change for Real Change," a program designed to take panhandlers with substance abuse problems off the street and into treatment.

"There are some people who make panhandling their occupation," Hieftje said. "They live with relatives or live in apartments paid by their Social Security checks. Some of them reportedly make up to \$25,000 per year."

Jim Kosteva, the University's director of community relations, said the number of people on the streets in Ann Arbor has noticeably increased in the past 18 months, causing merchants and residents to look for a way to decrease panhandling activity and get the people who need help with their substance abuse problems into treatment.

The Loose Change for Real Change program, which has been an idea of concerned citizens for years but did not get started until September, uses the money people would normally give to aggressive panhandlers to pay for their rehabilitation.

The program encourages people to deposit their loose change in collection boxes at a number of merchants in the downtown, State Street and Kerrytown areas instead of giving money to panhandlers.

The rehabilitation programs funded by the loose change take place at Dawn Farm at 502 West Huron St., a local nonprofit agency that helps people with drug and alcohol problems and provides housing assistance.

The program's downtown street outreach worker is Charles Coleman, a self-described former alcohol and drug addict and panhandler who now walks the streets of Ann Arbor in search of people who could benefit from the services of Dawn Farm.

Coleman said the money students and other pedestrians give to panhandlers is often used to support drug habits and that giving panhandlers money is actually hurting them.

"Word gets around that Ann Arbor is a gold mine (for handouts) and people come on buses to take advantage of students' generosity to buy drugs and alcohol," Coleman said. "As long as we continue to give the money, people are not going to change."

When Coleman spoke to students at the Michigan Student Assembly meeting Tuesday night, he encouraged them to either deposit their change in the boxes located inside businesses or simply not give money to panhandlers.

"There is no program like this in the country," Coleman said. "We have been so successful that already I was able to take two homeless people into

treatment my goal is to help two people a month from now on."

.....

Helping the homeless: Students need to think about the long term consequences of their generosity

By: The Michigan Daily

A new program designed to address the problems of panhandling and homelessness b

Published October 29th, 2001

A new program designed to address the problems of panhandling and homelessness by asking local merchants and the campus community for help has recently been implemented in Ann Arbor. "Loose Change for Real Change" asks customers to deposit spare change into special containers available at local businesses instead of giving it directly to panhandlers on the streets.

Funds collected from this program will support Dawn Farm, a non-profit agency that helps people with substance abuse problems and provides housing assistance.

The rationale behind the program is that some panhandlers use the money collected to support drug and alcohol habits. Through their generosity, students may actually be enabling some homeless people to pursue activities that only prevent them from helping themselves.

The outreach coordinator of "Loose Change for Real Change," Charles Coleman, was a former drug abuser and homeless person himself. He now walks the streets of Ann Arbor and urges local homeless people to get off the streets by seeking help.

With Ann Arbor's high level of retail sales, spare change is abundant. This fact has not gone unnoticed by many homeless people and it is clear that Ann Arbor, with its generous, liberal atmosphere, has become a magnet for the homeless from surrounding areas.

The program is a good example of how Ann Arborites' generosity can be channeled to ensure that it is maximally effective.

But students should not feel like this program is the only way to fight homelessness. Many students offer to buy snacks or meals for the homeless this is another way to make sure your money is actually helping someone. Another obvious way to fight homelessness is to join a campus service organization. Some students have even befriended individual homeless people and can be confident that their money is actually helping.

Unfortunately, most students are inclined to give change to panhandlers they don't know (or, worse, who they know are going to spend their money on drugs or alcohol) simply to feel better about themselves. This attitude has resulted in an unacceptable situation where there might literally be four or five panhandlers on a single block.

It is even more unfortunate that in recent years Gov. John Engler has closed many of the state mental hospitals that once served to curb homelessness by providing a home to those with mental illnesses.

Students need to behave more conscientiously toward the homeless it is not enough to give someone your spare change and hope he or she spends it on food. The only way to solve the homelessness problem in Ann Arbor is for students to take a more active interest in where and how they give their time and money.