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Supervisor Rafael Mandelman calls for Safe Sleeping Sites for unsheltered people to combat COVID-19

A resolution introduced at the Board of Supervisors urges San Francisco to quickly establish Safe Sleeping Sites for unsheltered people to encourage social distancing, improve sanitation and slow the spread of COVID-19

SAN FRANCISCO — To help slow the spread of COVID-19 among the homeless population, District 8 Supervisor Rafael Mandelman introduced a resolution today at the San Francisco Board of Supervisors calling on the City to use now-vacant parking lots as Safe Sleeping Sites.

“In the Castro and many other neighborhoods in San Francisco, tent encampments are growing, largely without adequate social distancing or access to hygiene and sanitation, creating a public health hazard to encampment occupants and neighbors,” said Mandelman. “To keep all of us safe during the COVID-19 crisis we need to embrace new and different strategies like Safe Sleeping Sites that will provide safer alternatives to unsheltered people for whom we do not currently have an apartment, a hotel room or a shelter bed available.”

The resolution urges the City to plan for and expeditiously establish Safe Sleeping Sites in now-vacant parking lots and other appropriate spaces. These sites would follow public health best practices including maintaining adequate social distancing and providing access to sanitation facilities, food, and water. Each such site would include a safety plan, 24/7 staffing, janitorial services, and other services to maintain the health and safety of those at the site and the surrounding neighborhood.

“While housing folks indoors in hotels or apartments remains our first priority, we still need to give our unhoused residents somewhere to safely shelter in place,” said District 5 Supervisor

Dean Preston who co-sponsored the resolution. “A legal, safe campground gives access to the essentials to keep us all safe.”

The Centers for Disease Control issued guidance regarding tent encampments during the COVID-19 emergency, that includes not clearing encampments, encouraging people staying in encampments to set up their tents with sufficient space between them and ensuring nearby accessible and adequately stocked restroom facilities.

“My office had been working with City departments on a plan for safe camping sites before COVID-19, and I hope that this resolution will add political support and urgency to the work already underway to create these sites,” said Mandelman. “I look forward to working with the City and neighbors in the District I represent to open a safe sleeping site to serve the Upper Market/Castro area as quickly as possible.”

The resolution is expected to be voted on by the Board of Supervisors next Tuesday, April 28, 2020.

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