

Dear Councilors Shannon, Barlow, and Dieng (ccing Councilors Paul and Traverse as I believe Callahan cuts across both Wards 5 and 6),

I see on Front Porch Forum that there will be a meeting of the Parks Arts and Culture Committee on Wednesday at 4PM to discuss public safety in Burlington's parks. I likely will not be able to attend, but wanted to share my comment with you via email.

I live right across from Callahan Park - I am looking out my window at some people gathered there now who are huddled under a tarp to keep out of the rain. I cannot speak to City Hall Park or Smalley Park, but the folks who gather in Callahan do not appear to me to pose any risk to public safety.

It seems likely that these folks have no other place to go, and they have created a community in a public park. If there were daytime shelters or services available, I expect many would be there - especially on a dreary, rainy day like today. But there aren't, so they aren't.

I have on occasion seen episodes of disruptive behavior and on rarer occasion law enforcement responses, but for the most part the community is self-regulating. I have **never** seen any incident that I would consider to be a danger to members of the public. When there are disputes among members of the community, they unfold and resolve within the community.

My impression is that some view the gatherings of members of the unhoused population in our public parks as "dangerous" because they equate poverty, homelessness, and/or addiction with dangerousness. They are not synonyms. It would be great if the state of our social safety net were such that these folks did not need to seek shelter in the public park, but it's nowhere close.

My recommendation to the City would be to continue to do what it's been doing - provide support and services to these folks where they are gathering. I have noticed that a recycling bin and port-o-let have appeared in the park. That's awesome. I wish that mental health counselors, substance abuse counselors, housing advocates, trays of warm food, and bottles of water would also arrive.

The fact that members of our community who are struggling have a place to gather means it's easier to help them. So we should help them.

Kevin