



Feb. 3, 2022

Dear CM Valenzuela:

I am writing to you as the president of Friends of Sutter's Landing Park (FOSL), a 501(c)(3) organization of diverse individuals dedicated to this unique place. The purpose of this letter is to address the possible utilization of the solar parking lot at Sutter's Landing Park (SLP) as a safe ground camping site.

We fully recognize the daunting challenge the City is facing with regard to our unhoused neighbors. Most of us live and work in or near midtown and thus observe and interact daily with the results of years of failure to respond appropriately, including overlooking the need to build more affordable housing. We note that a number of your Council colleagues failed to produce a sufficient number of potential sites for emergency shelter over the past year. We congratulate you for elevating these issues and making them a central part of your campaign and your work on the Council.

As an urban park, Sutter's Landing has been particularly impacted by the housing crisis, and over the last few years we have observed a steady increase in the presence of unhoused neighbors. We have also seen plenty who were likely housed but also created a lot of damage, leaving trash, destroying habitat, and eroding riverbanks in the one-mile stretch of the American River Parkway that adjoins the City's Sutter's Landing Regional Park. FOSL volunteers have responded with near daily trash cleanups of all of the parking lots which are in the City portion of SLP; as well as the trails, riparian forest, and beach of the American River Parkway in the County portion of SLP; we've even cleaned the loose garbage in the City's own corporate yard within SLP. We have intervened when visitors brought BBQs and set fires in the Parkway and at the main beach. In addition, we have introduced habitat restoration and other improvements to the park.

FOSL has functioned as a committed steward in communication with both City and County Parks Rangers and staff. One of our key volunteers, Betsy Weiland, has become the unofficial mascot of SLP with her regular presence there throughout 2020, 2021, and 2022, greeting and educating visitors about Parkway rules (which notably were not consistently enforced by the City and County), recruiting professional landscapers and facilities volunteers to help maintain the vegetation and improve the parking lot by the skate park, and recruiting and coordinating other volunteers to help share the load.

Because of our deep investment in Sutter's Landing Park and our awareness of realistic constraints on the City's ability to control unintended outcomes, we have serious concerns about the potential siting of a safe ground parking lot there. To cite a recent example of such constraints, we have been coordinating with the City and Parks Department to install a gate that would restrict vehicular access to the parking area near the skate park after the park's closing hours, in an effort to protect the main beach and nature areas from the after-hours destruction that we have been witnessing and addressing for the past few years. We undertook private fundraising to help finance such a gate because we strongly believe in its potential effectiveness. Unfortunately, several months after issuing its approval, the City still has not installed the gate

fundraising to help finance such a gate because we strongly believe in its potential effectiveness. Unfortunately, several months after issuing its approval, the City still has not installed the gate and those sensitive areas have since been set on fire twice and continue to be damaged by after-hours visitors. Moreover, City and County Park Rangers have pledged to support FOSL's efforts at SLP, but, due to understaffing, they are simply unable to respond as required.

As a result of FOSL's consistent efforts to restore and enhance the nature areas and beach, and to calm and clean the walkways and parking areas, **families once again feel that it is safe to return to SLP - and the visitors are not only from Midtown, East Sac, and McKinley Village; they are also coming from Oak Park, North Sacramento, Arden-Arcade, and beyond.**

Parks provide an invaluable service to the community and support extremely diverse populations with increasingly constrained resources. **As such, fundamentally, we believe that public parks are not appropriate choices for temporary or permanent safe parking. We, therefore, oppose the use of Sutter's Landing Park as a temporary safe ground camping solution for the unhoused.**

There are acres of large parking lots and parking garages that are underutilized throughout the city and could be leveraged for this short-term purpose without the risk of collateral damage that exists at SLP. **With many public and private offices and parking areas unoccupied because of the pandemic, and because of the urgent nature of the crisis facing unhoused neighbors, we believe that both the public and private sectors should step up and participate in the provision of more suitable temporary shelter/safe-ground locations.**

FOSL's vision is to *"Create a welcoming and safe place along the American River Parkway at historic Sutter's Landing Park in Midtown Sacramento where families and individuals can relax, recreate, and enjoy the beauty and wonders of nature, both now and for generations to come."* To this end, we strive to make this park an accessible place that all members of our community can benefit from, throughout all the seasons.

To help build out our vision, we have a number of other longer-term objectives that we are organizing to execute. One of these, a plan to elevate and honor the native history of the site, is underway with your recent help connecting our volunteer Kathleen Ave with regional tribal representatives. Thank you again for that assistance!

Additionally, we are investigating opportunities to connect restoration at SLP with other efforts along nearby sections of the Parkway, expanding awareness of the unique and sensitive habitat there. We look forward to more public discussion of the funding secured by Assembly Member Kevin McCarty and are excited by the possibilities that such funding can help bring to life. As we approach the end of the area's landfill post-closure plan we hope to continue working with you, the City and other neighbors to bring our collective visions to fruition.

Thank you for considering our comments, and for your continued leadership on these important issues.

Sincerely,

Sean Ward

Sean Ward, President
Friends of Sutter's Landing Park
<http://www.sutterslandingpark.org/>

