



## Memorandum and Order

To: Santa Cruz City Council; Santa Cruz Parks & Recreation Commission

From: Tony Elliot, Director of Parks & Recreation; Martin Bernal, City Manager

CC: Tony Condotti, City Attorney; Andrew Mills, Police Chief

Date: December 17, 2020

Re: San Lorenzo Park – Temporary Closure  
Parks Director Park Closure Order / City Manager Emergency Executive Order No. 2020-24

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Dear Councilmembers and Parks & Recreation Commissioners,

Pursuant to authority within the Santa Cruz Municipal Code<sup>1</sup>, we hereby authorize and order the temporary closure of the San Lorenzo Park and the Benchlands. The temporary closure will be accomplished in phases, with the goal of temporarily closing the entire park by January 6, 2021. We will aim to keep the lawn bowling green, playground, and Riverwalk path open during the closure period.

City staff may cause fencing to be erected to effectuate the closure, and signage will be posted indicating the closure.

The closure period will end on January 31, 2021, unless an extension of the closure is authorized. Per City Council Policy 7.1, the purpose of this memorandum is to inform the City Council and Parks & Recreation Commission of this action.

As I am sure you are aware, San Lorenzo Park and the Benchlands have been an encampment location since April of 2020. When unsheltered individuals first started to inhabit this area, the City attempted to implement a “socially distant” encampment layout, and the City provided trash services and hygiene resources to encampment occupants. Eventually, nuisance conditions became overwhelming, and the City and the County partnered together to establish a managed camp at the Benchlands. During the managed camp’s operation, there was still a significant presence of “unmanaged” encampments at this location, and the City continued to provide trash service and hygiene resources to those living in “unmanaged” encampments.

In September of 2020, the County determined that the Benchlands managed camp needed to be relocated for the Fall/Winter, given that the Benchlands is in a low-lying floodplain. On November 15, 2020, the County transitioned its managed camp program to The Armory, but unmanaged encampments remained, have grown in size and quantity, and have become more entrenched.

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<sup>1</sup> This action is authorized under various provisions of the Santa Cruz Municipal Code (SCMC), including SCMC sections 13.04.011 and 13.04.102 (authorizing the Parks Director to set parks hours and withdraw park areas from public use); sections 4.16.030 and 4.01.010(16) (authorizing abatement of public nuisances and life safety hazards); and sections 2.20.080 and 2.20.040 (authorizing the City manager to abate nuisances related to certain declared emergencies and also “[m]ake and issue rules and regulations on matters reasonably related to the protection of life and property as affected by such emergency.”)

In recent weeks, the conditions at San Lorenzo Park have deteriorated to the extent that we feel that a temporary park closure is the City's best and only realistic option. Specifically:

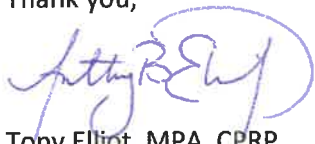
- The City's facilities have been vandalized with graffiti and illegal electrical taps.
- This site has been host to fires and fire safety issues.
- The City has received increased calls for service related to reported criminal activity in the area, including calls related to trespassing on nearby private property and even defecating within a neighboring garage.
- City staff has also observed a lack of social-distancing and mask wearing, and thus, it is possible that an encampment of this size and density could become a COVID-19 hotspot.
- The presence of criminal activity in the area prevents the City's park from being used as a park by the community.
- City staff is aware of theft of City tools and supplies.
- Encampments have destroyed the City's grass.
- Encampments are attached to trees, likely damaging those trees.
- Branches from the City's trees have been incorporated into encampment structures.
- Significant City resources are currently being used to manage the voluminous trash and needles that are created by occupants of the unmanaged encampments.
- This site has experienced large amounts of improperly disposed litter, in addition to human and animal waste.
- City staff no longer feel safe in the area and must operate in pairs.
- The City needs to conduct deferred maintenance in the park.

It is worth noting that the City recently paid over \$140,000 to clean and start the rehabilitation process of areas within the Pogonip. Especially during this time of significant budgetary constraints, we have a duty to preserve the park grounds and facilities and to prevent exorbitant rehabilitation expenses from becoming necessary at San Lorenzo Park.

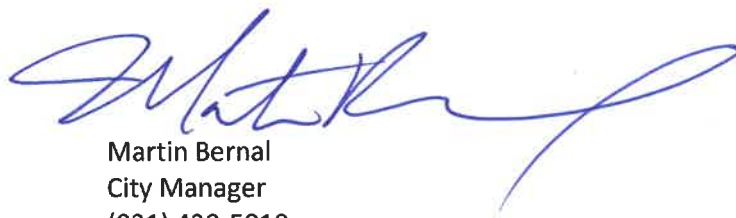
Individuals who currently reside in encampments in the park will be given reasonable written notice of this closure. We hope to work with the County to make sure that, to the greatest extent possible, outreach workers contact impacted individuals and try to connect them with any available shelter resources.

Please feel free to call or write with any questions you may have about this matter.

Thank you,



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