

[Street address redacted for public cc]
Santa Cruz, CA 95062
self@cruzio.com
[Mobile redacted for public cc]

June 17, 2018

Carol Scurich
Director of Parks and Recreation
323 Church Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Re: your leadership and the difference between feeling unsafe and being unsafe

Dear Ms. Scurich,

Regarding your decision to close the Loudon Nelson Community Center bathrooms to the community, which has forced houseless persons to urinate and defecate in public, you seem to be psychologically confused about the difference between *feeling* unsafe and *being* unsafe, as well as the difference between yourself and other persons. In your interview with Ashley Keehn of KION News Channel, published online June 14, you said, “number one for us is wanting to make sure that people that use the facility that are there for programs...*feel safe and comfortable* when they go into the restrooms, and that just wasn’t happening (emphasis mine).” Yet you did not describe any *tangible dangers* in the bathrooms that have caused persons to not “feel safe and comfortable.” So what are the real dangers? Have there been a set of recent instances in which persons using the facility for a program went into bathrooms and were truly physically harmed or threatened with physical harm?

For example, when facility program users enter the bathrooms, do injection drug users bolt out of the stalls and stab them with their needles? Do lice ridden houseless people tackle them onto the hard tile floors, rub all over them, and transmit their lice? Do greasy fingered old men with snot running down their noses hide in the ladies’ room naked under trench coats, open their coats, and molest teenage girls? If not, exactly what real dangers are you and your terrified facility users *feeling so uncomfortable* about? Perhaps your own stereotypes about people who are different and less fortunate than you?

While capitalism is inherently dangerous in that it creates global poverty and houselessness, which are dangerous conditions for persons it forces into them, the mere presence of houseless and poor persons in bathrooms is not dangerous. Likewise, while our perpetually failing and racist war on drugs incarcerates over two million Americans annually –more so Blacks and Latinos than whites– and reaps millions of dollars in profits for corporations that run the privatized prison industrial complex by criminalizing what is really a psychological and medical problem, such that most drug use is illegal, the mere presence of drug users and illegal drug use in bathrooms is not dangerous. In Jessica York’s May 30 Santa Cruz Sentinel article you said, “we’re finding people that are doing really, really unsafe and illegal activity in the restrooms.” Here, similar to your confusion about the difference between feeling unsafe and being unsafe,

you seem to be confused about the difference between yourself and others. “Doing really, really unsafe and illegal [*drug*] activity,” as you delicately side-stepped it, is unsafe for the persons doing it, who might overdose and die, not for you or other persons peeing next to them. Thus, unless you can demonstrate a set of recent incidents in which Loudon Nelson Community Center program users were put in real danger or real threat of danger in the bathrooms –such as by providing police incident reports or reliable witness accounts– then the bathrooms are not dangerous, and your position that you closed them as a matter of public safety is totally specious, and a flimsy screen for fear driven bigotry.

You are an adult, your emotions are your own, and barring actual physical trauma or threat of physical trauma done to you that automatically elicits a biologically based and uncontrollable fear reaction, nobody can make you feel anything. But instead of taking adult responsibility for your own feelings of discomfort with houseless persons and drug users, you are shifting the responsibility for your feelings onto them. Drug users and houseless persons are not responsible for your feelings about them. You are. Further, if you are so confused that the mere presence of persons who are houseless or using drugs in bathrooms automatically elicits a biologically based and uncontrollable fear reaction in you, this confusion is yours, and you should likewise take responsibility for it by sorting it out rather than projecting it onto them.

You remind me of college students who want “safe spaces” on campus in which they can *feel* safe from others’ *words*. While everyone should be free from verbal harassment, some students take “safe spaces” for feelings from words that are not dangerous to such an extreme that they violate others’ right to free speech. Like them, you seem to be a tyrant of feelings who uses her own emotions as an excuse for violating others’ human rights, in this case the right to use the bathroom. Because of your tyranny of feelings, people must now piss in bottles and shit on the sidewalks.

Notably, as reported in the Sentinel, when a homeless woman who could not hold in her pee urinated on the community center lawn, one of your rangers called the police, spurring six officers to arrive, who took her to jail. Shame on you and your inhumane, authoritarian tactics! As Parks and Recreation Director, you set the policy and tone for your staff, so you are partly to blame for your ranger’s thuggery. As Parks and Recreation Director, from the outset, had you taken a democratic leadership approach and involved community members in dialogue to resolve their conflicts and seek consensual solutions regarding their bathroom concerns, we might have some solutions now. Instead, your personal tyranny of feelings, subsequent knee jerk authoritarian behavior, and overall poor leadership and poor people skills as a director have needlessly heightened tensions, polarized our community, and derailed opportunities for community-based solutions. Given your poor leadership, it is you and your ranger thugs who are now a tangible danger to our community.

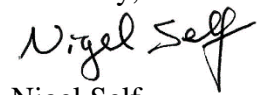
Two can play your game: I want my city parks and community centers to be “safe spaces,” and as you put it, I do not “*feel safe and comfortable*” with tyrants of emotion like you in charge of them. Thus, send me the police reports or reliable witness accounts of the recent set of instances in which Loudon Nelson Community Center program users were actually harmed or threatened with harm in the bathrooms, which prove that the bathrooms are so dangerous that your decision

Carol Scurich
June 17, 2018
Page 3

to close them is justified. Otherwise, take adult responsibility for your own feelings of discomfort, apologize for your mistake, immediately re-open the bathrooms to the public, and begin an in-depth process of democratic community dialogue in which all persons concerned can work toward common ground regarding bathroom use.

If you are incapable of doing these things, perhaps you should resign as interim Parks and Recreation Director, as authoritarian governments always take root with fear driven policies and thuggery that override human rights, and given what seems to be your penchant for engaging in such tactics from the outset, rather than democratic community building, it may be best that you not be in public administration for now.

Sincerely,



Nigel Self

Cc: Members, City of Santa Cruz City Council
Iseth Rae, Supervisor, Louden Nelson Community Center
Louden Nelson Community Center Facebook page
Louden Nelson Community Center users:
Juneteenth Facebook page
Robert Acosta, Supervisor, Santa Cruz Teen Center
Raymon Cancino, CEO, Community Bridges, Meals on Wheels
Narcotics Anonymous, Santa Cruz Area Admin Committee
Alcoholics Anonymous of Santa Cruz County
Daniel Mollner, Contact Improvisation dance teacher
Conscience and Action groups and persons:
Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs
Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom
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Comments, Conscience and Action Speak Out at Parks and Rec, Santa Cruz Indymedia