

Nongovernmentality: Designs, Cultures, Politics

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THE POLITICS OF THE GOVERNED

There are an estimated 1,000 homeless people in Ann Arbor but only 60 beds in the city's only homeless shelter. Since 2007, some of Ann Arbor's homeless have lived at "Camp Take Notice," a collective settlement that has been created and subsequently evicted from five pieces of "public property" in the city.

The following are five accounts of Camp Take Notice. How is a politics of the governed manifested in these accounts through differing interpretations of "property," "community," "rights," "morality," "participation," and "public interest," as well as differing capacities to act on behalf of a given interpretation?

1. Camp Take Notice

Camp Take Notice (CTN) is a democratically self-governed community of homeless people in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A democratic, self-governing tent community offers an alternative approach to the traditional government and private systems that provide shelter and basic resources for the homeless. CTN's emphasis on community sets it apart from other services. The idea is that this type of homegrown effort is necessary for sustainably meeting the needs of homeless individuals.

During the past four years, the camp has been tenting on various tracts of land, surviving by way of will and ingenuity, of no expense to taxpayers and with the support of many local churches. Campers are strongly encouraged to be sober and dedicated to the well-being of the community.

As of June 22nd, 2012, CTN was evicted from their last site. Of the 70 campers that were living there upon eviction, 12 are housed, 13-17 sleep in a shelter, while the rest are scattered across the city, routinely being shoved out from under bridges and off of park benches.

(<http://camptakenotice.wordpress.com>)

2. "Neighbors"/"Residents"/"The Homefull"

Not everyone is satisfied with the status quo at Camp Take Notice. Scio Township resident Joe DaSilva Jr. is circulating a petition to try to expedite the tent city being moved and said he's gathered 114 signatures in one week. He said signees include residents and nearby businesses such as Radio Shack, Kroger, and the Clarion Hotel.

"This is our backyard. We live there," said DaSilva.

DaSilva's wife, Marissa, said they have lived with their nine-year old son within walking distance of the camp since 2003. She said she fears for the safety of the campers and the people in the surrounding neighborhoods.

"I have sympathy for people who struggle. Our intention is not to make it harder, it's the specific location. It's not a location that's meant for that," DaSilva said, pointing out there is no running water and that people have to climb over a guardrail to get there.

"It's not safe," she said.

Marissa DaSilva said flyers were circulated when Camp Take Notice originally moved there, saying it would be a temporary thing. She said she's concerned with the community's growth and seeming permanence.

The transient nature of the camp's population is also a concern of residents. Another Scio Township resident, who asked not be identified for fear of repercussions, said a main concern of his was that registered sex offenders could be staying there and residents in the surrounding area would have no way of knowing.

("Crowd supports Camp Take Notice as Neighbors of Ann Arbor Tent City Circulate Petition for Eviction," *Ann Arbor.com*, May 24, 2012)

3. Michigan Dept. of Transportation

The Michigan Dept. of Transportation (MDOT) is putting up an 8-foot-tall, chain-link fence to block a homeless encampment from returning to a nearly 9-acre site on a state highway median west of Ann Arbor.

According to a MDOT spokesman, "We've been hearing from the community and from Camp Take Notice that the homeless have been using this area for a long time as a makeshift home ... There have been complaints from nearby residents that the homeless have left the area a mess ... We really wanted to resolve the issue once and for all, so after the camp is closed, we'll be closing off the area. It's not against Camp Take Notice specifically, but more to prevent a homeless encampment of any kind in this location."

4. Michigan State Housing Development Authority

Sally Harrison, director of the rental assistance and homeless solutions division of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), said subsidies for 40 households will be made available to CTN residents and the program will be available for one year. She clarified that a "household" could be single- or multiple-person living arrangement.

Harrison said MSHDA is also working with the Salvation Army on building additional shelter beds in the area and to provide possibly displaced individuals with motel vouchers.

"Homelessness ends with a place to live," Harrison said in a press release. "We look forward to collaborating with all of the key stakeholders to develop long-term solutions for the members of the Camp Take Notice encampment."

(MDOT Targets June 22 as Final Day for 'Camp Take Notice to Vacate State Property, *Ann Arbor.com*, May 30, 2012)

5. Michigan Itinerant Shelter System: Independent Out of Necessity (MISSION)

The purpose of this organization is: to begin and support a self-governing itinerant shelter system for the homeless of Michigan that is a safe place free from drugs, alcohol, and violence; to inform, solicit, and accurately execute all decisions made by the democratic governing body of each partnering tent community; to connect the homeless population with available resources that promote recovery, community, service, and healing; to aid members of the camp to transition toward healthier, more stable lifestyles and positive contributions to society and local communities; to increase public interest in and awareness of homelessness in Michigan; to support and conduct non-partisan research, educational, and informational activities to establish the efficacy of tent communities; and to discover the best practice for the governance and operation of tent communities and to disseminate those results to existing and new tent communities.

(<http://missiona2.blogspot.com/2009/07/our-purpose.html>)

Brian Nord, a Rackham student and the president of the board of directors for Michigan Itinerant Shelter System: Interdependent out of Necessity — a non-profit organization in Ann Arbor that supports local tent cities — said the issue of CTN trespassing on state land boils down to the camp residents' constitutional rights. Nord said he believes evicting the residents of CTN would violate their constitutional rights to due process and to protection from cruel and unusual punishment. "You have to establish that the burden on the people whose rights you think are being violated...is larger than the burden on the public," he said.

("Tent City Eviction Draws Attention to Rights of Homeless," *Michigan Daily*, May 3, 2010)

6. American Civil Liberties Union

The American Civil Liberties Union issued a press release stating that it was "gravely concerned" by the eviction of the homeless community from the public land and that the relocation violated the rights of camp residents, saying, "It's simply not a crime to be homeless." Jessie Rossman, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, praised CTN's vision and its willingness to assist homeless people. "They maintain themselves, and this is exactly the type of (community) we should be allowing to happen," she said.

("Tent City Eviction Draws Attention to Rights of Homeless," *Michigan Daily*, May 3, 2010)