



# MIKE BONIN

City of Los Angeles  
Councilmember, Eleventh District

December 11, 2013

Venice Neighborhood Council  
PO Box 550  
Venice, CA 90294

Dear VNC Board Members,

Happy Holidays!

The cold weather is here and the emergency winter shelter program has started. As you all know, a debate has been renewed over a program allowing people in Venice without home or shelter to voluntarily store their belongings. At the same time, frustration continues to mount over the accumulated debris on and blighted appearance of Venice Beach, Third Avenue, and a number of streets and sidewalks in our residential neighborhoods.

As was evident during your December 2 meeting, these are contentious issues -- and easy, universally popular solutions are elusive. Accordingly, I have had to make some tough decisions, which I want to share with you, while asking for your cooperation moving forward.

In short, I am going to authorize a voluntary storage program for participants in the emergency winter shelter program and I am instructing City crews to conduct regular and comprehensive clean-ups of materials on our streets and sidewalks.

I support the voluntary storage program because: it will help people in need; it will encourage more people to seek assistance; it will help keep our streets and sidewalks blight-free; and it will protect the City legally. I am encouraging frequent clean-ups because we all deserve to live free of debris on our streets and sidewalks. Venice residents deserve neighborhoods as clean as those in other parts of our district and our City.

### Clean-ups

For the past several years, there has been a frequent accumulation of materials on our streets and sidewalks. Much of the stuff appears to be trash, debris, and even materials used by Venice Beach street vendors. Much of it appears to be encampments, including tents, furniture, bedrolls, and the personal belongings of people who are living on the streets.

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As many of you know, the City has been hamstrung in its ability to clean these areas due to several court cases brought and won by those who argue the City's removal of personal belongings in the public right of way is a violation of the civil rights of people who are homeless. The parameters of those rulings have been broad, which makes it incredibly difficult for City crews to remove what appears to be debris from some of our streets, as long as there was some potential that it could be the unattended possession of someone who is homeless. The situation has been untenable.

Fortunately, the City has crafted a protocol, already in use in downtown Los Angeles that will allow City employees to better distinguish between abandoned materials and unattended belongings. It will permit City crews to remove materials and debris, after giving a 72-hour warning, bagging and tagging removed objects, and storing them for 90 days – or until someone requests the objects be returned (at which point someone from the City will deliver and return the items).

The City conducted such a clean-up on Third Avenue last week and City crews have committed to me that they will conduct regular, comprehensive clean-ups using that protocol. Several members of the community have helped raise funds to augment the City's clean-up efforts.

#### Voluntary Storage Program

It is important that there also be a voluntary check-in program. To protect the city legally, we need to demonstrate to the courts that we are giving people a chance to store their belongings before we tell them we may remove them. This is also similar to what is done downtown, where they have both voluntary check-in programs and regular clean-ups.

The voluntary program is a necessary complement to the winter shelter program. We all want fewer people sleeping on our streets, and giving people the opportunity to store belongings that they cannot carry or take to the shelter program provides additional incentive to stay at the shelter. That means fewer people sleeping on streets, and less stuff stacked up on our neighborhood streets and sidewalks. That is good for everyone.

Most importantly, a voluntary storage program is the right thing to do. As long as people live on our streets, it is humane to give them a place to store their belongings. If someone is sleeping in a tent on cold pavement, it is fair to give them a place to store the tent during the day, especially if there is a chance their belongings would otherwise be stolen, collected or removed. Providing secure and safe storage of belongings to people without shelter gives them both peace of mind and dignity.

Fortunately, civic-minded Venetians have come forward to help with this program, too. The Venice Community Housing Corporation and a team of dedicated volunteers has agreed to operate the voluntary program for the duration of the winter shelter program.

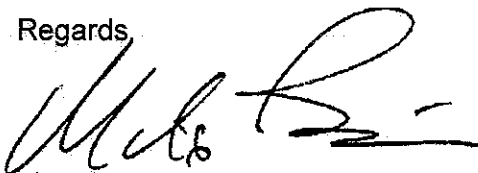
Locations

For the voluntary program to be functionally successful, the storage location and check-in center needs to be in Venice. Since the winter shelter program has begun, and since the need is both urgent and time sensitive, I have asked the Department of Recreation & Parks to allow VCHC to use an existing storage container at Venice Beach, next to the paddle tennis courts. It is not a new structure, and it isn't moving to a new, more visible location. The container currently stores sports equipment. For the duration of the winter shelter program it will store and secure belongings checked in to the voluntary program. For the program to continue, we may need to find a more permanent location.

I understand from your board vote on December 2 that some in the community and on your board object to this location. I appreciate those concerns, and will gladly entertain an alternative location -- if the Venice Neighborhood Council, after a public process, recommends one. I'd certainly appreciate VNC's public vetting of a permanent, long-term location for the program. In the meantime, though, in order to keep our streets and sidewalks clean, in order to facilitate clean-ups, and in order to treat homeless people humanely, in order to get people off the streets and into emergency shelter, we need a voluntary program, and it needs to start right away.

Finally, I want to thank each of you for the work you do in our community. Especially in situations like these, when easy answers are hard to find, we depend on a spirit of collaboration and a commitment to our community to find the best solutions for everyone in Venice. I salute you for your demonstrating that spirit in your service on the neighborhood council and in the community.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Bonin", with a stylized flourish at the end.

**MIKE BONIN**

*Councilmember, 11th District*