Homeless Legal Issues

How can I report a crime?
If you need to report a crime in progress, or you have an emergency, call 9-1-1. The non-emergency number for Clark County is 3-1-1. If you are outside Clark County, the non-emergency number is (360) 693-3111.

How can I assist in addressing non-criminal issues?
Many issues related to homelessness are not criminal, therefore calling 9-1-1 or 3-1-1 may not be the best use of police resources. The Council for the Homeless has a detailed and regularly updated resource guide available on their website that addresses a variety of issues. Please visit the Council for the Homeless website if you believe that the issue does not require the assistance of a Police Officer: http://www.councilforthehomeless.org/

Emergency services are dispatched according to priority.
Please note that when you call 9-1-1 (emergency) or 3-1-1 (non-emergency), your call is routed to the Clark Regional Emergency Services Agency (CRESA). CRESA provides dispatch services to the Vancouver Police Department as well as other local law enforcement, fire and medical services. Assistance is dispatched to the most critical calls first. Dispatchers seek to assign precedence from highest to lowest as follows: (a) threat to life, (b) threat to property/property damage, (c) general assistance.

Is it a crime for homeless individuals to camp in Vancouver?
On October 21, 2015, the City of Vancouver’s Unlawful Camping Ordinance was amended to allow camping on most public property between the nighttime hours of 9:30 p.m. and 6:30 a.m. “Camping” is characterized by the use of items such as tents, tarps, sleeping bags and related equipment. Therefore, simply sitting or sleeping in public is generally not a crime; even during daytime hours. But there are exceptions. Public entities (such as parks and public libraries) can enact property and building rules that prohibit camping at all hours – day or night.
Other common questions associated with homelessness:

- **Camping in parks:** Although it is legal to camp on most publicly owned property within the city limits between the hours of 9:30 p.m. and 6:30 a.m., this does not include public parks, which close nightly from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. It is against the law to camp in any City park and it is still against the law to be in a public park after the park’s posted hours of operation (all City parks are closed from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.).

- **Park Rules:** The following conduct is prohibited in all City parks: (a) allowing or permitting dogs to run at large; (b) discharging firearms or fireworks; (c) building fires except in designated areas; (d) smoking or using any form of tobacco product; (e) possessing open containers of alcohol. Violators may be excluded.

- **Storage of personal property on public land:** It is against the law to store personal items, including camping paraphernalia (such as tents, tarps, sleeping bags and related equipment), on publicly owned property during the day (6:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.).

- **Private property:** It is against the law to camp on private property without the property owner’s permission. Generally, this includes the doorway to most privately owned businesses.

- **Obstruction of vehicular or pedestrian travel:** Obstructing pedestrians or vehicle travel is against the law. This means that people may not: (a) sit or lay in a manner that blocks passage of another person or vehicle or requires another person or driver to take evasive action to avoid contact, or (b) sit or lay down on a public sidewalk between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. in a manner that blocks the sidewalk.

- **Aggressive panhandling:** (i.e. begging with the intent to intimidate another into giving money or goods) is against the law.

- **Alcohol and drugs:** It is generally illegal to open a container of alcohol or consume liquor in public. It is also illegal to use or consume marijuana or marijuana infused products in view of the public.

- **Fighting:** It is disorderly conduct to engage in a physical fight or brawl in a public place – even if both parties consent to fighting.

- **Noise:** It is unlawful to yell or shout on or near the public streets, particularly between the hours of 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., or at any time and place in a manner so as to unreasonably disturb or interfere with the peace, comfort, and repose of owners or possessors of real property.

- **Litter and human waste:** It is against the law to urinate in public and it is unlawful to litter. All property should be treated with respect, regardless of the value of the property and, as a community, we have a right to keep our city beautiful by requiring all citizens pick up after themselves.

For Additional Information
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