

Missoula County Commissioner's Statement on OccupyMissoula 12.22.2011
Posted on December 22, 2011 by OccupyMissoula

The County Commissioners will be reading the statement below at their 1:30 meeting today in Room 201 of the Missoula County Courthouse Annex.

Please feel free to contact the Commissioners' Office with questions.
Commissioners' Statement Regarding Occupy Missoula 12/21/11

We have directed County staff to communicate with Occupy Missoula about their encampment since its inception in October. We have increased the frequency of our correspondence with them in the last two weeks in an effort to encourage them to remove their tents from the Courthouse lawn. Despite attempts from both our staff and many of the Occupiers to engage in constructive communication, the tents remain, as do the problems the tents present. As a result of Occupy Missoula's unwillingness to help Missoula County solve the problems their camp presents, we are developing a policy that will prohibit camping on County property. The City of Missoula's No Camping Ordinance does not apply to the Courthouse lawn. The County policy and the resulting ordinance are still being developed, but would require any group using the Courthouse lawn to secure a special use permit. Please do not mistake this policy as a means to limit free speech. Protests and demonstrations are still welcome on the Courthouse lawn, but sponsors of demonstrations that encourage prolonged use of the public space – a space we are charged with managing – must offer assurances that activities on County property will not jeopardize the health, welfare, and safety of the general public, or restrict the public's rightful use of a public space.

We have removed the port-a-potty we have been providing from the Courthouse lawn in an effort to encourage the removal of their tents. We cannot continue to subsidize the Occupy camp with tax payer dollars. The port-a-potty was provided as a means to reduce instances of unsanitary conduct and protect the public and our staff from pathogens. We will continue to protect the public and our staff, but can no longer provide a facility to the camp that is funded with tax payer money.

As an interim measure, before the County ordinance is passed, we have directed County staff to identify unoccupied tents on the lawn as abandoned property and remove them.

We have received numerous calls and emails from constituents complaining about the camp for months. We have made every effort to acknowledge the concerns of those constituents while protecting Occupy Missoula's right to free speech. We ask that Occupy Missoula acknowledge that they have a responsibility to conduct their protest in a way that is accountable to the Missoula community.