



Dear Oak Park Business Owner:

The Village of Oak Park acknowledges your concern regarding unhoused individuals within the community. We observe that they primarily congregate around Oak Park's public transportation stations. The following information is meant to provide you with an update on the situation and with the links to additionally useful information.

Bill of Rights for the Homeless Act

The State of Illinois enacted the Bill of Rights for the Homeless Act in 2013. The Act provides that the homeless have "the right to use and move freely in public spaces, including but not limited to public sidewalks, public parks, public transportation, and public buildings, in the same manner as any other person and without discrimination on the basis of his her or housing status." 775 ILCS 45/10(a)(1). "Housing status" under the Act "means the status of having or not having a fixed or regular residence, including the status of living on the streets, in a shelter, or in a temporary residence." 775 ILS 45/10(b).

Panhandling

It is important to distinguish the unhoused, or homeless, population from the panhandling population. Panhandling is the act of soliciting money, often in public places. Not all panhandlers are unhoused. In fact, many have access to housing and other resources and panhandle as a source of income. A person is considered unhoused if they lack a fixed and regular nighttime residence; or if their main nighttime residence is a supervised shelter that provides temporary accommodations; a halfway house; or a similar facility that provides a temporary residence for persons intended to be institutionalized; a place not normally recognized as a place to sleep (i.e. hallway, train station, library, car, etc.); or a temporary stay in the residence of another person.

Oak Park Police Department

The Oak Park Police Department has prioritized community engagement and proactive measures to address the needs of the unhoused individuals living within the Village. The Police Department has aligned with Housing Forward with this partnership steadily resulting in the successful placement of some unhoused individuals into stable housing. Patrol officers across both 12-hour shifts conduct hourly checks at primary congregate areas to prevent loitering, aggressive panhandling and criminal activities near public transportation stations. Their presence has significantly deterred such activities and created a safer environment for everyone. Furthermore, these officers routinely make arrests for possession of controlled substances, and serve warrants, etc., contributing to a reduction in potential illegal activities.



Alternative Response to Calls for Service

The Village of Oak Park Board of Trustees has approved Phase 1 of our Alternative Response to Calls for Service initiative. This program marks a significant step forward in enhancing community safety and support. Through the deployment of Community Care Navigators and Community Service Officers (CSOs), we are introducing an unarmed, compassionate response to non-mental health related calls. Community Care Navigators will play a pivotal role in providing outreach, connecting individuals to vital resources such as housing, mental health and substance use treatment, and distributing harm-reduction supplies and information. They will also offer support to those impacted by community trauma, providing training and serving as a closed loop referral option. This innovative approach underscores our commitment to fostering a safer and more resilient Oak Park, and will be an available resource to all residents and businesses.

Resources

Below are a few of the resources which are available to individuals in the Oak Park community. Included with this letter are resource cards that can be distributed through your business employees, posted in the workplace, and/or given out to individuals in need of support. Resources include crisis, utilities, food, legal aid, shelter, children and family support, employment, and mental health and substance use supports. For more information on how to use this information, technical assistance, or to access more resource cards please contact the Village at the number below.

Village of Oak Park: <https://www.oak-park.us/unhoused>

Housing Forward: <https://www.housingforward.org/>

Oak Park Homelessness Coalition: <https://www.endhomelessnessoakpark.com/>

If you have any additional questions or concerns please feel free to contact, Village of Oak Park staff, Vanessa Matheny, at vmatheny@oak-park.us or 708-358-5416, thank you.

Upcoming Events – Fall 2024

- ❖ **Panhandling Campaign:** Learn more about constructive approaches to addressing the hunger and homelessness that creates the need for panhandling.
- ❖ **Preventative Homelessness:** Learn more about policies, programming, and strategies designed to prevent homelessness for individuals and families.