

From: Chief David Zack
Sent: 4/20/2021 9:15:13 AM
To: "Debra Campbell" <dcampbell@ashevillenc.gov>
Cc:
Subject: Fwd: I am sure you are well aware of this person, and their completely made up rhetoric .We are trying to fight back, as neighbors and homeowners.

Attachments: [image008.jpg](#), [image003.png](#), [image006.png](#), [image010.jpg](#), [image009.jpg](#), [image001.png](#), [image005.png](#), [image007.jpg](#), [image002.png](#), [image004.png](#)

FYI

David J. Zack
Chief of Police
City of Asheville Police Department
Office: (828) 259-5901
Email: dzack@ashevillenc.gov

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Mike Lamb** <mlamb@ashevillenc.gov>
Date: Tue, Apr 20, 2021 at 10:08 AM
Subject: Fwd: I am sure you are well aware of this person, and their completely made up rhetoric .We are trying to fight back, as neighbors and homeowners.
To: Police Executive Staff <policeexecutivestaff@ashevillenc.gov>

This was shared by a concerned SFB resident.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: <helenhyatt@charter.net>
Date: Tue, Apr 20, 2021 at 9:58 AM
Subject: I am sure you are well aware of this person, and their completely made up rhetoric .We are trying to fight back, as neighbors and homeowners.
To: Captain J.E.Silberman <jsilberman@ashevillenc.gov>, Mike Lamb <mlamb@ashevillenc.gov>

**The
Asheville
Blade**

Cutting to the point

**Support
The
Asheville Blade**
 **patreon**

NewsViewsAboutWho we are





Eviction season

by David Forbes April 19, 2021

Asheville police lie about a brutal crackdown on houseless campers and the locals supporting them as city hall ramps up its efforts to please the tourism industry at all costs

Above: A banner outside the Aston Park houseless camp. Special to the Blade

Blade reporters Veronica Coit and Orion Solstice contributed to this piece

Late afternoon last Friday a drove of Asheville police [marched](#) down South French Broad towards Aston Park. They had come, in the middle of a pandemic, to kick houseless locals out of a city park.

In the time that followed the APD would gather nearly 40 officers on the site, belligerently harassing both the remaining houseless campers and locals who had shown up — at the campers’ request — to support their right to housing. The police would brutally attack and arrest four people, sending three to jail and one Black houseless person to the emergency room in handcuffs.

Then they lied about it. Guns and batons aren’t the only weapons in the arsenals of cops or the government they serve. In the hours afterwards city hall put out a blatantly false statement, lying about everything from the level of aid they offered to the houseless to spreading “outside agitator”-style myths that blamed scary protesters for the police’s violence.

However, *Blade* reporters and plenty of locals were there and saw what happened. Aston Park was the latest in a series of cruel sweeps and evictions aimed at expelling any hint of poverty from the view of wealthy tourists. That has involved a relentless push to destroy houseless camps, often just before particularly cold nights (Friday dropped into the 40s). City government does this despite CDC warnings saying houseless camps should be left alone during the pandemic.

With one tepid exception city council members have stayed absolutely quiet even as the wave of evictions has escalated. But locals aren’t silent. One of the reasons city hall feels the need to lie so blatantly about Aston Park is because the actual truth — houseless people getting solidarity from the wider community to resist their evictions — scares the hell out of them.

Casual destruction

“The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike from sleeping under bridges and begging for bread.” — Anatole France

Houselessness has always been a reality that doesn’t sit comfortably with the lily-white craft beer liberal veneer Asheville’s establishment likes to project to the world. It’s the obvious result of a city built on low pay, sky-high housing costs and segregation.

If there’s one thing gentry hate it’s facing the consequences of their own actions. So the default response to the wave of houselessness created by rapid gentrification is a relentless push to hurt those struggling with it until they disappear from view. This is a major reason for the APD’s relentless expansion in recent years — and why the gentry are losing it as Asheville cops quit in droves. It’s also why it’s such a common sight to see multiple cops interrogating a single houseless person. That would be demonstrated at Aston Park, when the APD dispatched basically their entire on-duty force (and then some) to destroy a single camp.

This status quo also often goes hand-in-hand with a complicit non-profit complex. While ostensibly supposed to help the houseless many local non-profits only do so with a lot of strings attached, requiring them to lose their belongings or support animals and live in a prison-like setting to receive basic food and shelter. Others even exclude some populations entirely (multiple shelters don’t allow trans and queer people). The APD and city government then use the non-profits as an excuse for their violence, to claim that anyone not in a shelter is “refusing services.” Many non-profits, either due to their own paternalistic attitudes or in fear of losing local government funds, remain largely silent about the APD’s abuses of the houseless.

Asheville’s poverty worsened during the pandemic. Before hotels re-opened a growing movement had pressed city hall to put houseless locals up for free in them for the duration of the pandemic. Instead officials packed houseless people into the civic center. This was clearly a pandemic disaster in the making and even other municipal governments in NC had abandoned such quasi-prisons in favor of supplying hotel rooms. When challenged on this assistant city manager Cathy Ball directly said houseless people couldn’t be trusted unless monitored 24/7 so they didn’t deserve individual hotel rooms.

The comments were blatantly cruel enough that there were calls for her resignation then. In response to the public backlash, city hall partly funded rooms for the houseless at the Red Roof Inn — a notoriously crumbling spot far from services, amenities and the eyes of tourists — and claimed it as some sort of altruistic act.

Late last spring local governments started down a path of keeping hotels, breweries and the wider tourism industry open no matter how bad the pandemic got. Not surprisingly, it got really bad, with multiple waves of infections and the [highest death rates](#) and most deaths (by population) of any major NC city/county. With the focus on pandemic tourism city hall’s campaign against the houseless ramped up as well.

Even the CDC — not exactly a bastion of radical leftism — has repeatedly warned local governments not to destroy houseless camps during the pandemic. Instead city hall escalated camp destruction from previous levels. Multiple camps were demolished in the dead of winter. Far-right realtors [outright](#) told city council they wanted the houseless gone so they could more easily market the area to wealthy. On Feb. 1, with no warning even to establishment non-profits, city government and the state Department of Transportation [demolished](#) a houseless camp under the Lexington Avenue overpass, hours before the coldest night of the year. The city first claimed vague “safety concerns,” but it then emerged that the complaint they were acting on was literally just griping that houseless people shouldn’t be allowed to exist near tourists.

DESCRIPTION

Homeless people should not be allowed to sent up a camp underneath an overpass especially one that was commissioned to be aesthetically pleasing to tourists and tax payers

Seriously, that’s all it said

So city hall then blamed NCDOT (the camp was partly on highway land), even though it was city officials who pushed them to demolish the site, helped them do it and provided armed cops to back them up.

In this they were cheered by the local far-right. Whatever their other disagreements with Asheville’s ostensibly liberal government they both hate the poor and want them gone. Ball, who oversees both the police and the city’s houseless services/economic development efforts (the latter are, tellingly, in the same department), has been [particularly obsequious](#) to far-right business owners.

The next wave of evictions would largely take place in city parks, land Asheville’s government owns entirely. Other than their hatred of the poor there’s nothing stopping them from just letting people in need stay there. But early last week police visited multiple camp sites, handing out eviction notices with a list of shelters and programs on the backside. They demolished one on Cherry Street, sending personal items like cookbooks and family photos into piles destined for the trash. By the time campers reached Aston some said they had moved eight or even 10 times over the past months.



Eviction notice from the Asheville police. Special to the Blade.

In bitter irony many of the shelters and programs listed on the city’s eviction notices are full, have steep restrictions on who can use them or have major waiting lists. Some houseless people who’d been evicted from the Cherry Street camp were even told to go to Aston Park. But, of course, city officials didn’t care.

Asheville’s city council offered little opposition as the evictions have escalated. Some had even supported the evictions. At their recent retreat Council member Sandra Kilgore (a conservative realtor, naturally) talked of wanting to “clean up” the city by removing houseless people. At their meeting last week only one member, Kim Roney, condemned the camp evictions. The rest remained absolutely silent. Last Thursday Roney sent an email to Campbell and the rest of council asking them to “pause the clock.” The next day she had her response from her peers and the APD: they threw the clock right back.

Shows of force

During all this public anger has continued to mount. The city’s population mostly doesn’t own homes, have struggled with poverty and do not support the “tourism at all costs” direction pushed by city hall. Many have moved noticeably to the left during the past years — leftist demonstrations are several times the size they were even two years ago — and supported more militant tactics. This shift has also reduced government-backed non-profits’ ability to steer anger into approved channels.

As a statement later released by the Aston park eviction defense effort put it “Asheville’s unhoused residents deserve better support than the NGOs and City offer them. The autonomous resistance of unhoused people will always be supported by anarchists and other allies in Asheville.”

So by the middle of last week the remaining camp residents requested local support in staying in their homes. They got it. A *Blade* reporter observed that this decision was the residents’, though local supporters had made it clear they were ready to help if asked.

“The eviction of the Aston Park camp is particular in the cruelty of its timing, and the first to be resisted by a coalition of unhoused residents and their allies,” the later statement from eviction defenders read. “Camping in public parks is not a surprising or unforeseeable tragedy. It is a rational choice made in the face of inhumane conditions, in response to the unaffordable rent prices and pitiful wages.”

The site was a telling one. Aston Park hosts famous tennis courts and city government charges for their use (season passes start at \$299). It’s located right on the cusp between gentrifying “South Slope” and mostly Black Southside. Just yards away from the tents were showers and full bathrooms reserved for the users of the tennis courts. Campers had to make due or walk to nearby shelter facilities to even use the bathroom.

On Friday morning protesters — houseless campers and local supporters alike — were awoken by a cadre of police led by Capt. Mike Lamb. They had token coffee and biscuits, but more importantly they had video cameras, guns and tasers. The core of their message was a threat: leave your homes or be arrested. While the city would later claim that the cops offered help, this was untrue. They just told the residents to leave and suggested they get services elsewhere.



APD Capt. Mike Lamb leads a cadre of officers Friday morning to threaten houseless campers with arrest if they don't leave Aston Park. Photo by Veronica Coit.

Some did leave. Police have a lot of power to seriously harm houseless people's lives. But more remained.

Early afternoon parks and recreation director Roderick Simmons showed up at the site and tried to start personally taking down a tent. When people at the camp told him to stop, he yelled at them, then called the cops and claimed "agitators" were attacking him. City hall would later use Simmons' lies to claim this constituted "obstruction" of the sacred act of removing tents.

Shortly after Simmons left the cops started moving in. One of their commanders, Lt. Brandon Moore, repeatedly said that this eviction was personally ordered by city manager Debra Campbell (who makes \$250,000 a year and was working from home). A large group of cops marched down South French Broad, another came over a hill. They yelled at the remaining protesters and moved in to attack. They dragged people across their ground and put elbows on the back of their necks.

The city would later claim only three "protesters" were arrested, but that too was a lie.

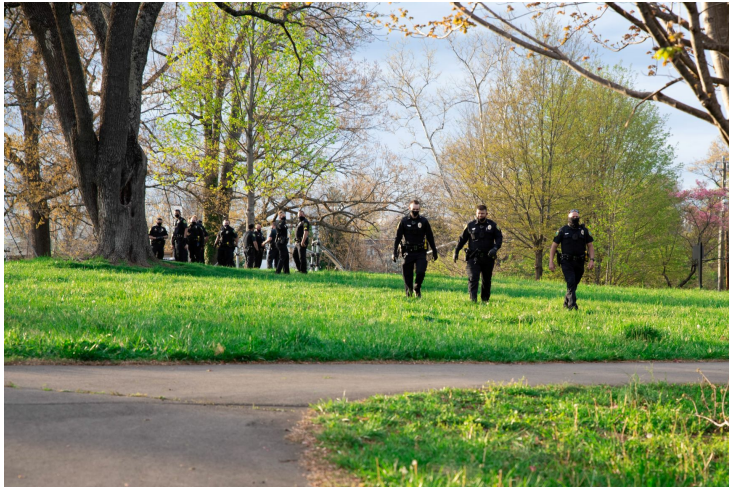
Blade reporters and others on the scene observed Capt. Jackie Stepp, known for being particularly vicious in going after anyone who's not white and wealthy, order the arrest of a pregnant Black houseless person still at the campsite. This is verified by images obtained by the *Blade*. Of the four people arrested three were charged (one with a false assault charge, two with the vague charge of "resisting" the police) and the houseless person was taken, in handcuffs, to the hospital.



Police gather late Friday afternoon before destroying the Aston Park houseless camp. Photo by Veronica Coit.

It is worth remembering that this is the same police department that claimed last summer that they had to destroy medics’ water bottles because they might be explosives. The APD lies.

The city claims that the police had offered all remaining campers a stay in the Red Roof Inn site and that they all accepted. But this is untrue, and a pretty clear effort to erase the campers’ agency by portraying them all as the passive poor, thankful for aid and never resisting. A *Blade* reporter on the ground observed that this offer wasn’t universal: it was only extended selectively to some campers. The cops said it was only for a single night (sources with Homeward Bound now claim the campers who went to the hotel site will be able to stay into June). Otherwise, the officers threatened, campers could “go to jail.”



Police gather in Aston Park. Around 40 would go there to evict one houseless camp. Special to the Blade.

Of the over 20 houseless people there at the start of the day, most left to other camps or locations. As the police presence escalated in the coming hours six did eventually choose to leave for the hotel, but they did so under threat, “in the presence of nearly 40 officers, over a dozen squad cars and a paddy wagon” as the eviction defenders’ statement later put it. That matches with what *Blade* reporters witnessed: a show of force clearly meant solely to intimidate. The APD were there to make arrests.

“Even putting aside pandemic safety concerns, it should be absolutely clear that shelter simply isn’t the same thing as housing, even in the form of self-furnished campsites. Limited, temporary shelter beds simply cannot fulfill the same housing needs.” the statement continued. “Unhoused people have the right to refuse the ‘support’ offered by NGOs, the city and its police. All people deserve freedom to determine the conditions of their own existence.”

The next wave

Roney showed up at the campsite after the main police presence — and the brutal arrests that came with it — were over. She has not answered requests by the *Blade*, through social media, about if she or other council members knew of the evictions in advance, or if she will be demanding the city manager’s resignation.

If past evidence of her and other “dissident” council members is any evidence, they’ll probably put out some tepid objections but balk at seriously challenging the status quo. Punishing the poor is, after all, one of the points of government. Polite questions don’t change that.

City hall hasn’t even slowed its evictions, even as COVID infections and deaths have both risen notably in the past week. More camp demolitions are slated for the coming weeks, including another of the Lexington Avenue camp, and Riverbend Park. They are set to begin as early as tomorrow.

Beloved House, a non-profit that’s been more critical of city hall, has condemned the evictions and released a video earlier today calling on city government to halt them.

However Homeward Bound, probably the largest houseless services non-profit in the area, has been notably silent. City officials and police have repeatedly claimed the organization’s cooperation in the evictions and used the services offered by them to campers as an excuse to proceed.

With warming weather, more vaccinations and lifting restrictions expect city hall to continue to double down unless stopped by public outrage and action.

But if non-profits and elected officials are hesitant, eviction defenders remain determined:

“We will not allow our neighbors to be swept into dark corners. We will continue distributing food, medical aid, clothes, camping supplies and other resources, offering assistance with relocating people and their belongings and defending encampments with words, deeds and bodies — until we win a moratorium on evictions and universal housing.”

—

Blade editor David Forbes has been a journalist in Asheville for over 15 years. She writes about history, life and, of course, fighting city hall. They live in downtown, where they drink too much tea and scheme for anarchy.

The Asheville Blade is entirely funded by our readers. If you like what we do, [donate directly to us](#) on Patreon or make a [one-time gift](#) to support our work. [Questions?](#) [Comments?](#) [Email us.](#)

Copyright © 2021 The Asheville Blade. All Rights Reserved.