

Militant Defense Helps Delay and Prevent Encampment Evictions in Minneapolis

Anonymous

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Report on ongoing eviction defense of encampments in so-called Minneapolis as the city ramps up attempts to push out the unhoused.

Minneapolis encampment supporters are proving that decentralized, autonomous resistance to sweeps can and does work to delay and prevent camp evictions. Two successful defenses have been mounted in the past two weeks, as the city and Hennepin county undertakes a blitz campaign against camps for the unhoused, often in temperatures below zero degrees F.

Mpls PW and MPD dismantled the encampment of folks living at 26th & Bloomington. Propane was taken, people were once again displaced and their belongings trashed. This can't be reformed. Everyone should be and CAN be housed. End of story. pic.twitter.com/H2NNmBnUKd

— Twin Cities Workers Defense Alliance (@TC_WDA) January 13, 2022

While two smaller camps have been recently been swept, and more attempted evictions are on the horizon, the militant defense activities are showing that camps and supporters of their self-determination will not roll over without a fight, and the city, county, and their myriad nonprofit and community collaborators will have to expend huge resources in order to conduct sweeps.

One of the camps currently targeted is the Near North camp, where in March 2021 defenders fought off police half a block away, to stop the planned eviction (five defenders were arrested). A daily copwatch/defense presence in the months thereafter made the city back off their plans entirely. Now, the city cites the smaller size of the camp when discussing the new planned sweep – ignoring that it is precisely the stability afforded by the militant defense that has allowed many now-former camp residents the resources and ability to obtain regular housing.

Recent Events At Minneapolis Encampments

December 13

The long-standing “1913” camp in Northeast Minneapolis is violently evicted by Minneapolis Public Works and collaborators. Supporters draw many lessons from the events of the day, especially that eviction forces cannot be reasoned with and that workers supporting the eviction will lie about the availability of housing vouchers, hotels, shelter space, etc in order to enforce the city’s wishes of keeping vacant land vacant.

city employees are literally singing and laughing as they bulldoze people’s homes. and minneapolis has always been so quick to say, “they’re bobcats, not bulldozers!” well what the fuck do you call this? pic.twitter.com/2dEsnvqrlv

— dollar store groceries (@ProfessorPenis) December 14, 2021

The city/county seem to have changed tactics in anticipation of incoming lawsuits, rather than any desire for “humane” eviction practices. City workers played the facade of a consensual removal, waiting to annihilate dwellings until residents left under the promise of shelter that never materialized. People then returned to an empty lot where their community used to be – many back at square one with their belongings either destroyed outright or taken to an insecure storage facility.

December 30

The city of Minneapolis posts an eviction notice for Near North, giving the date of 1/11/22. Some camp supporters organize calls to elected officials and lesser known bureaucrats responsible for the sweep campaign, while others plan copwatch and militant defense tactics, recalling the events of last spring.

We will actively resist this wave of monstrously cruel evictions in subzero temps during an unprecedented covid surge. We call on all who are able to join us in standing alongside our unhoused neighbors and demanding an end to the subordination of people to property in Mpls. pic.twitter.com/c69fBlfNhE

— Twin Cities Encampment Responders (@TCparkresponder) January 6, 2022

January 11

Expecting a showdown, 75 defenders and community members gather at Near North before the crack of dawn. They find that city officials have added the small words “Week of” to “1/11/22” on the posted eviction notices, which are subsequently burned. No eviction forces show up. Five city council members (four newly elected), one day after being sworn in, show up to speak to media and deliver platitudes about the right to housing. Supporters of camp autonomy maintain that, in the absence of the political will for immediate dignified housing for all camp stability is a prerequisite for long-term housing.

This morning the city/police did not attempt an eviction of Near North as dozens of community members gathered to defend the encampment of the unhoused.

The vacate signs now have additional words, "week of," written before the January 11 eviction date. <https://t.co/j0KJNBh69F>

— Unicorn Riot (@UR_Ninja) January 11, 2022

January 13

A small encampment on the sidewalk at 26th St and Bloomington Avenue in south Minneapolis is swept by the city, with collaboration from longtime eviction enablers like American Indian Community Development Corporation, whose executive director Michael Goze is on scene to taunt and threaten residents. Some of the displaced move to two camps on nearby 14th Avenue. None of the city councillors who showed up on 1/11, came to advocate for residents at the Bloomington Avenue sweep.

At the same time, the large North Loop encampment is told they should expect to be evicted 1/18. The North Loop camp was established in late summer on private land at the invitation of multimillionaire developer Hamoudi Sabri. The temperamental and volatile Sabri has a history of conflict with city government and also of harming unhoused people under the guise of short-term, well-gatekept humanitarian aid. After the continued evictions of so many other camps, dozens of displaced residents with no better options decided to settle there.

January 18

Aware of the ongoing threat to both Near North and North Loop, 30-40 encampment defendants gathered early in the morning at Near North for a breakfast and brief training session covering topics such as encampment-oriented copwatch, recent history of Minneapolis camp evictions and defense tactics, and best security practices for militant, abolitionist encampment defense.

Just as the training concluded, defenders already stationed at the North Loop camp raised the alarm of Public Works bulldozers beginning to gather, and the mobilization began. Landowner Sabri attempted to convince camp supporters to help him evict just select "troublemakers" from the camp, but after being told that only the wishes of residents would be acted upon, he spat on supporters, threw a tantrum and stormed away. Two MPD officers entered the camp under the ruse of a fire hazard call, but were soon chased back the street as well.

currently a standoff. requesting more bodies. <https://t.co/AUF7HdXtWP>
<https://pic.twitter.com/EP8BAH0x02>

— Twin Cities Encampment Responders (@TCparkresponder) January 18, 2022

With the help of 10 feet tall snow piles, accesses to the camp area were easily blocked by defender vehicles. Traffic control officers arrived to ticket the (legally parked) vehicles and others nearby; however, the tow trucks they called to remove them quickly left due to various tactics from the black-clad crowd.

Meanwhile, more Public Works equipment and personnel began to arrive. As a bobcat began to move toward camp it was quickly surrounded. Two weary looking police officers moved in but backed off after being confronted by the crowd. A bulldozer was similarly blocked down the street, and a large fire was built at one of the entrances. Defenders made it clear to Public Works personnel they would not back down, and a stalemate ensued.

People successfully defended North Loop camp from several Public Works bulldozers on site this morning after a community breakfast and copwatch training at Near North camp, also under eviction threat.

Whether it lasts a day, a month, or indefinitely, that's a big W. (thread) → <https://t.co/kmatgdJXM2>

— Not An Activism Do-er #LootBack (@muffinsurrecta) January 19, 2022

With the militancy of the crowd becoming obvious, Public Works and other bureaucrats retreated to a nearby building with Sabri to discuss the situation. Around 11:30 they emerged and directed their mercenaries to stand down. One by one each bulldozer and city truck left to jeers of “Don’t Come Back!,” and the landowner Sabri found that his black Porsche SUV had also received a traffic ticket. Lunch was delivered and defenders stayed to be sure the eviction forces wouldn’t return that day.

January 19

While already maintaining copwatch/defense at the two North camps, defenders respond to the two camps on 14th Avenue. At one, county officials had posted a large sign forbidding camping due to the parcel’s status as “slated for redevelopment” (it’s been unused for 15 years). Workers from TreeTrust – a nonprofit and landscape services group contracted by the county, better known for its youth job programs – arrive and help sweep this camp, with the assistance of Hennepin County Sheriffs. The other camp, on a city owned parcel, remains.

Today one half of the encampment at 25th st and 14th ave was evicted. The northern lot, owned by the county, was cleared by HC Resident and Real Estate Services, HC Security, HC Sheriff pigs, and contracted ‘clean up’ crews from @TreeTrust.

— Twin Cities Encampment Responders (@TCparkresponder) January 20, 2022

Analysis and Responsible Parties

Cities nationwide have taken increasingly violent and cruel actions towards unhoused people as increasing numbers of people cannot afford housing. Perhaps capitalism is too delicate to countenance even a small set of people visibly living “outside” of it. Regardless, the December and January focus on destroying encampments in Minneapolis may be due to displacing people just ahead of the annual “Point In Time” count of homeless people due to take place January 26.

The local surge of encampments in recent years in Minneapolis stretches back to the Wall of Forgotten Natives in 2018, a massive encampment eventually broken up by the city with the assistance of collaborator nonprofits such as AICDC (mentioned above) and others. An effort to retake the land in 2019 was met by the joint repression from Minneapolis police, Minnesota state police, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT).

Minneapolis residents turned a hotel into a communal sanctuary. Then things got complicated. <https://t.co/tZM2MmkgRa> <https://pic.twitter.com/fQJWa54pVU>
— Mother Jones (@MotherJones) June 18, 2020

In 2020 during the George Floyd uprising, a hotel was taken over for use by the unhoused for almost two weeks. Afterwards, the city’s Parks Board briefly allowed encampments in the vast park system, then quickly reversed their decision. As the surge of liberal and charitable interest in supporting unhoused neighbors soon waned, militant abolitionists and antifascist mutual aid groups became the main supporters of camps chased from vacant lot to vacant lot through violent and often brutal eviction tactics.

The City (particularly the Public Works Department and Department of Community Planning and Economic Development [CPED], and advisors to Mayor Jacob “The eviction guy” Frey), Hennepin County (responsible for many local homeless services), Parks Board, and myriad nonprofit, peace police and social worker groups have created a tangled web where none claim responsibility or ability to stop the sweeps, while all end up participating the continued displacement with little to no consequence.

We contend that whatever platitudes they offer, the point of these sweeps is simple: cruelty. The maintenance of capitalism requires that state authorities scare housed workers with the threat not only of losing their housing, but with the immense violence (both structural and immediate) shown toward the unhoused.

However, militant camp defenses, combined with intensive mutual aid survival programs that embrace conflict with the state and capital, over the past year and a half point to another way. In a court case stemming from a defense of the Peavey Park encampment in September 2020, police revealed that no fewer than five planned evictions of Peavey Park had to be called off because of defenders’ robust mobilization ability.

With more people willing to step between the bulldozers and our neighbors in tents, organize copwatches [which, in the context of camps, includes watching threats from cops to public works to bureaucrats and more], and plan defense activities from breakfasts to

barricades, all unhoused residents could be offered the stability and autonomy of a safe place to pitch a tent.

With well organized autonomous defensive activities in place, camp supporters could then turn to offensive activities to help ensure the safety of the unhoused. Such actions can of course overlap: Media reports in summer 2020 quoted county officials who cited the injuries to police at the March defense of Near North camp, as a factor in delaying the eviction of another camp. Minneapolis police are at their lowest staffing levels in recent history, suffering from mass resignations and low morale. Meanwhile, Hennepin County social service employees could go on strike as soon as February 2, potentially throwing another wrench in eviction plans.

Join the fight to defend your unhoused neighbors!

The following is an incomplete list of some of the bureaucrats intimately involved in the sweeps in Minneapolis. We offer it to note that they have faced little if any consequences.

- Peter Ebnet, Senior Policy Advisor to Mayor Frey (and a driving force behind the recent eviction blitz)
- Andrea Brennan, Housing Policy & Development Director and Interim Director of CPED [Department of Community Planning and Economic Development]
- Maikao Vue, Homeless Response Coordinator
- Erik Hansen, Economic Policy & Development Director
- Katie Topinka, Housing Policy Coordinator
- Erin Wixsten, Planning Analyst, Hennepin County Office to End (sic) Homelessness

More complete list with contact information: <https://solidaritynet.work/actions/call-call-te>

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