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Minneapolis encampment defenders sought to “strike” back against camp sweeps on Tuesday 5/25 with a, “You Sweep? We Strike!” breakfast and bowling event at a longstanding encampment. Defenders of camps have been organizing weekly morning get-togethers to defend against potential evictions, and display to the city that camps have popular support as the safest alternative for unhoused neighbors while the city refuses to provide housing.

Sweeps split up communities and families; cops and public works employees allow residents only a short time to spare whatever meager belongings they can from the bulldozers. The city recently shifted responsibility for camp evictions to the Department of Regulatory Services, whose director Saray Garnett-Hochuli recently gave a tirade before the city council in which she declared camps “will not be tolerated” in the city. Hochuli also falsely claimed that a police officer had a leg broken by camp defenders, whom she portrays as violent outside agitators. We demand Hochuli and city departments stay in their lane, stop playing gutter politics and leave camps alone.

The You Sweep, We “Strike” bowling event was inspired by a copaganda hit-piece on KSTP Channel 5 last week, in which white supremacist reporter Jay KKKolls (known for such stories as claiming antifa was behind the 1/6 US Capitol storming) decried a flier that threatened retaliation against city property for encampment sweeps, and gave the names of city officials who have encouraged and facilitated the sweeps. The segment was a continuation of a smear campaign by Mayor Jacob “The Eviction Guy” Frey, backed by conservative council members like

LaTrisha Vetaw, to manufacture alarm about alleged incidents of violence against city staff, attempting to pin such isolated incidents on encampments.

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At the same time as city officials manufacture these stories, a group of BIPOC city employees and white accomplices are organizing against the confirmation of Heather Johnston as city coordinator, arguably the most powerful unelected position in city government. The city staff have accused Johnston and other city leaders of fostering a racist and toxic workplace culture – showing that the biggest threat to city workers is coming from inside the house, not from activists defending their neighbors from displacement and state violence.

On Monday, an email from Johnston obtained via public data request was released, showing how she chided city council members who showed up at Near North camp in January to oppose a pending eviction attempt. In the email she called the actions of police and other workers who conduct sweeps

“caring and compassionate,” despite mountains of evidence to the contrary. Johnston’s confirmation vote is expected to take place on Thursday May 26.

Next week, a potential sweep of a south Minneapolis encampment on MN Department of Transportation (MNDOT) land is expected. Many of the residents were displaced by the massive eviction involving 120 MPD officers of the 5th and Lake camp just over one month ago. MNDOT follows a different process than the city of Minneapolis, and was responsible for clearing, “The Wall of Forgotten Natives,” camps in years past, where the land is now intentionally littered with industrial debris and fenced to prevent re-occupation.

As the summer heat and more potential evictions approach, Minneapolis camp supporters can use all the help they can get to provide for basic needs (connect with the Sanctuary Supply Depot, continue to put political pressure on the city, and resist evictions.

A zine with anecdotes from Minneapolis encampment defense, but perhaps also useful to other cities seeking to build defense capabilities, was recently released here (lib.edist.ro link). The authors of “So You Want to Stop an Encampment Sweep: 4 Lessons From Mpls Camp Defense 2021-2022” hope that all those seeking to defend neighbors in tents, whether in Minneapolis or somewhere else, will discuss, refine and adjust the lessons learned and put them to use where they live.