

Feedback from City Employees on Conditions in CCB

Hi Sally! I am sending this email because I am having a problem having to deal with all the homeless people that are everywhere in our building. The problem is getting worse & I'm tired of no one doing anything about it. As employees, why do we have to deal with this? I am sick of having to walk thru the trash and the stench every day. I'm tired of having to tell these people to move from our chairs on our floor so we can have a seat for our defendants or even fellow employees to sit during court or employees during their breaks. There has even been some trash bags and personal items stuffed into our lockers that we use for defendant during court. These are not lockers meant for the public! I was counting out the money at our front office window before hours this morning & was physically getting sick to my stomach because of the overwhelming stench of stale alcohol that was filling the hallway & coming into our office from the guys sitting on our floor and directly below us! C'mon, this is ridiculous!! The employees of this building used to be able to take breaks & go & sit on the first floor in the chairs we have there, but no one can anymore because they're filled with drunks, garbage bags & urine! I've had family members who live outside the city come to our building to do business and they can't believe the state of the building I work in—a city building!

Kelly
9/16/13

Good Morning Sally,
Sorry to dump on you first thing in the morning. In saying that I came into work at approx 7:15 and was greeted by 2 homeless women and 2 police officers on the 5th floor, one of them arguing with the Police of why they should be here. This is really getting out of hand! I understand this is a government building but it is not a homeless shelter. I realize everyone needs access but I and many others also work here and deserve to feel safe too. I do not feel safe.

I know there is not too much that can be done except call the Police. I appreciate we can do that but it seems to me like a lot of wasted resources. Thank You for listening.

James
9/27/13

Hi Sally,
I just wanted to tell you my experience coming into the building last night. I'm usually gone by 5:30 when this happened, but I had to return to the CCB to retrieve something from my office. As I approached the building, there were several homeless individuals camped right in front of the MLK doors. One man smoking a cigarette (in violation of the smoking ordinance) and seemingly very intoxicated yelled to me "Hey, Miss – you want to have some great sex later?" On my way out of the building, I encountered a different man yelling "F" this and "F" that and other obscenities. I am very concerned that we continue to allow people to camp out on the building grounds, both inside AND out. MLK is the most common pathway between Monona Terrace and the Hilton to the Capital and State Street areas. If I am appalled as an employee to encounter this type of behavior on a regular basis (last night was especially troubling), what kind of image are we portraying to the visitors of Madison?

Christie
10/15/13

Thank you for the opportunity to address some concerns/issues that I have experienced with activities of the homeless within the CCB.

I arrive at work each day around 6:30 a.m. My husband drops me off on the MLK side of the building. I have had to step over people sleeping in front of the doors. Other instances include being approached as I walk up the stairs to the building asking for handouts including money or cigarettes. My husband does not leave the area until he sees me in the office, but he has addressed when someone approaches me by stepping out of the car and calling attention to himself. The smell of liquor and body odor is overwhelming at times.

I know that I have been advised it might be better to enter on the Carroll St side of the building, but why do I have to be inconvenienced because of this situation with the homeless.

Other instances include using the first floor bathroom where individuals have bathed, washed hair, drink hand sanitizer or sleep in the stalls I am located by a window on first floor and am subject to constant arguments, fights, and cursing. This is very disruptive especially when trying to conduct business with staff and property owners. There have been instances when I have contacted 911 for fear of something or someone coming through the window. We are the first office as you enter the building, there have been times when individuals conducting business have stopped in to say some is bleeding or fighting in the hall or in front of the building.

I believe everyone has rights, but I feel this building is for business, not for a place to loiter during the entire day. Again, thank you .

Jo Ann

10/24/13

Here are a few situations I have encountered with the homeless over the months:

1. A homeless man entered the City Assessor's office, sat on a chair that is for patron's use and ultimately passed out. I sit at the front desk and I called 911. 2 City of Madison Police Officers arrived and removed him. She then turned and drank 2 handfuls of hand-sanitizer and left the bathroom. I was so scared!
3. 2 days later that same woman was either asleep or passed out in the diaper changing/nursing area of the ladies restroom. I thought I was alone in there until I could hear someone breathing. I did not go near her and called the non-emergency police number. I couldn't believe that the officer on the phone asked if I tried to wake her up. I said, "Are you nuts! I am not about to go near her". She gets quite nasty when sitting in the lobby.

I can hear their arguing and swearing from where I sit. I walk in the front doors and immediately smell alcohol and their body odor.

Now that it is dark in the morning I don't feel very safe when I arrive early and have to step over people sleeping in front of the doors. Also, you have to be very careful walking up the ramp out front because there have been mornings when there are feces on the ramp.

It used to be enjoyable to sit in the lobby or on nice days sit out front and read or just chat with friends. Now, I wouldn't sit in either of these places for fear of what I might be sitting in. We were informed of the lice situation out there, but what about bed-bugs.

They do not just die off, if they get on any of us and we carry them to homes or other establishments; Is the county going to foot the bill for getting rid of them?

I feel bad for anyone who walks into this building to utilize public services, especially anyone with children who are subjected to what they see upon entering.

As far as our office is concerned, I think we should have access cards to the back door, as do police employees; so we do not have to be constantly exposed to what continues on a daily basis in this building. Thank you Sally.

Marie

City of Madison Assessor's Office

10/24/13

Because my office window faces directly on to the CCB patio, very often the homeless people are smoking, or arguing or (lack of a better word) public displays of affection right outside my window. It is very distracting. The increasing frequency of these activities is affecting my work. I feel frustrated by the loud noises, and/or smoke. I do not feel comfortable staying at the office past 5p.m. as they are all gathering at the doors to get their bedding materials on the ground just prior to 5pm.

10/24/13

I work for Madison Parks and have felt unsafe entering/exiting the City-County Building during business hours. Due to our proximity to the lobby, our office has had to call for police assistance on multiple occasions. I have witnessed yelling, fights, drunk/passed out individuals and accusations of left. I've been asked to help locate abandoned belongings, check on the status of individuals in the lobby and verbally harassed while trying to do my job.

It is my understanding that as a public building, the CCB should serve the public. Currently there are seven to ten people dwelling in the lobby area on a daily basis. These seven to ten people occupy all of the seating (and frankly, even when they are not here, which is rare, no one is interested in sitting in the soiled seats). As of July 1, 2012, Madison had an estimated population of 240,323, therefore our public lobby is serving less than one one-hundredth percent (0.00291%-0.00416%) of the population.

I believe the persons often inhabiting the lobby are trespassing, and are in violation of multiple Madison General Ordinances:

23.07 UNLAWFUL TRESPASS

23.07 (5) No person shall possess or consume any amount of an alcoholic beverage, whether in an open or closed container, on the property of another without the permission of a person lawfully upon the premises. (Cr. by Ord. 10,924, 6-17-94)

23.07 (6) (a) No person shall sleep, lie down or take temporary habitation on the property of another without the permission of a person lawfully upon the premises.

23.07 (6) (b) No person shall possess or use items commonly associated with sleeping or habitation, including but not exclusively, beds, mattresses, sleeping bags, bedrolls, blankets, pillows, sheets,

quilts and comforters on the property of another without the permission of a person lawfully upon the premises. (Cr. by Ord. 10,924, 6-17-94)

Jamie , Madison Parks

10/24/13

Sally Miley

I will be unable to go to the CCB Liaison Committee meeting, but I wanted to let the committee know that I'm concerned about the safety of my co-workers in the Assessors' Office. The homeless utilize the space in the lobby outside the doors to the Assessors' Office starting early in the morning until late into the evenings. I don't know how early they arrive, because they're here before I get to work at 7:00 on Monday and Wednesday mornings. Similarly, I don't know when they leave, because they are still in the lobby after I leave. My latest departure is at 5:00 on Thursdays. There are times when some of my co-workers are alone in the office after I leave, and I wonder about their safety. There have been a number of times when the police have been called because of any numbers of problems that have occurred outside of our office door. Fights, drunkenness, and, now, we have been given notice that some of the homeless could potentially be spreading lice.

There are some mornings when the odors outside of the Assessors' Office range from poor hygiene, alcohol consumption, tobacco use and/or purging of bodily fluids or fecal matter. Those odors typically persist all day.

I've suggested that my department head investigate the possibility of moving our office to another location. Due to the nature of our office, we have a large portion of the public visiting our office. I'm concerned about their safety, too.

I get the feeling that this is a "NOMO" situation. "Not Outside My Office." I'd be curious to find out if any other office in the CCB would prefer to be in our location. I know there are strong advocacy groups for the homeless, and I wonder how open their offices are for the homeless. Are there people outside their doors all day, every day?

I would like there to be a place for the homeless to go. I would not like to be in their shoes. It must be realized, though, that this is a place of business, as well. Those of us who work here should be safe when we come to, are at, and are departing from our jobs.

I appreciate the fact that there is a committee investigating solutions to this issue.

Sincerely,

Ken

Property Appraiser

10/24/13

In regard to tonight's CCB Liaison Committee meeting:

I am have many on-going health and safety concerns due to the homeless people using the CCB as a shelter. I have personally witnessed many acts of violence, drinking, cursing and spitting and have seen them use the restrooms for sleeping and doing laundry. I have also heard many stories from fellow

employees who have felt threatened or uneasy in their presence. On Tuesday we were given notice that at least one individual, not unexpectedly, is carrying vermin. They now occupy the benches in the CCB lobby all day and year round in addition to storing their personal effects there. In addition, many of them are unkempt and have personal hygiene issues. It is a sorry spectacle for citizens and city/county employees to see and smell when they come here to do legitimate city and county business.

I am not insensitive to the plight of the homeless. I do volunteer work for non-profit organizations that aid poor and homeless individuals and families. There should be a better way to resolve this issue than simply letting these folks loiter all day in the CCB. This is my workplace and I feel I have legitimate health and safety concerns due to what has become their permanent presence. Please urge the CCB Liaison Committee to address this problem.

Thank you,

Dave
Property Appraiser
10/24/13

I don't have any concerns about people I don't know meandering around the CCB, or lounging, or conducting business, or whatever it is folks do in a public building. (I think the data will show that, generally, employee workplace safety issues are prompted by fellow employees, not "strangers" or members of the general public.)

Folks have a right to be in a public building. If they are conducting business, they have a right to do so without jumping through a bunch of hoops or flashing ID badges or "signing in" and so on. (What if someone wants to explore an STD issue, or a Child Support issue, or any number of other issues that should only be between the "customer" and whatever service provider he or she seeks.) In fact, I suggest that if we have surveillance cameras in and around the building that they be removed, with perhaps a few exceptions. I trust that if something were to happen, we have an entire Police Force in the basement that could be called upon to lend a hand.

I certainly understand that folks may have some concerns, but we need to be darned careful about implementing any policy that constrains the public from full access to its government—whether folks like the public or not, or people look funny, or wear too much or not enough cologne, or whatever. We are mere stewards of a public resource—it ain't about us.

I'm sure employees may have on occasion an uncomfortable encounter with the public (I know that folks who staff the front desks of various department are cussed out not infrequently). Well, welcome to Public Service!

As an employee and citizen, I'll be disappointed if we implement a policy that erodes a sense of open government in any of its manifestations, including being able to access public buildings. So, if you are crafting a memorandum or some such that "represents" the spectrum of Finance employee perspective, I'd appreciate it if you include mine as well.

Thanks very much!

Dan

While I have the greatest sympathy for the homeless population that has chosen our lobby to spend their time, I am becoming exceedingly uncomfortable with the situation.

Our office is directly off of the lobby and has glass doors. I sit at a counter directly in front of those doors so am exposed to this behavior on a daily basis. My coworkers and I have had to contact the police on numerous occasions. I have personally had to call the police (via both the non-emergency number and 911) at least a dozen times, once three times in one day. Most of the calls involve intoxicated individuals who are not only vulgar, but can be frightening. They fight with each other and I've seen issues directed toward the public as well. I witnessed someone just outside the front doors yell at and threaten a couple who had walked by him for getting too close to him. There have even been members of the public who have come into our office complaining of these people's behavior and possessions that have been left.

These issues are occurring with, on average, about a dozen people. It has just started to get cold. That number is going to rise significantly with the bad weather.

My concern for myself personally is that I work until 4:45pm, which is 15 minutes past when most people in this building leave. Earlier this week when it first started to get really cold (and was also overcast) there were at least 20-25 people in the lobby when I had to leave. The sheer number of people was unsettling, but it was also getting dark and I was very nervous. Not only did I have to walk through this large group (several intoxicated), but then I needed to walk alone to my parking space which is over a block away and poorly lit.

The situation is not only uncomfortable to both the employees and the public, but it is frightening and unsafe.

Nicole, City Parks