



To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

January 6, 2026

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SUBJECT: GUIDELINES ON PANHANDLING & RESPONSIBLE GIVING

The purpose of this informal report is to provide an update on the guidelines on panhandling and responsible giving. This report offers expanded guidance, including context around legal considerations, public safety, homelessness services, and the City's broader strategy for addressing homelessness.

The goal is to provide clear talking points and a deeper understanding of the dynamics that influence panhandling activity, and to advise constituents in a manner that is compassionate, realistic, and aligned with citywide objectives.

Key Points for Constituent Guidance:**1. Not all panhandlers are experiencing homelessness.**

While many residents assume panhandling automatically indicates homelessness or hardship, this is not always the case. Individuals engage in panhandling for a variety of reasons, including:

- **Acute need** (loss of employment, temporary crisis, eviction)
- **Chronic instability** (mental health conditions, substance-use disorders)
- **Lack of access to services**
- **Intentional profit-seeking**, where individuals capitalize on public generosity
 - Some panhandlers strategically choose high-traffic intersections
 - Some travel between municipalities
 - Cash-based exchanges can create financial incentives to continue the activity

This diversity of motivations underscores why direct monetary giving is not always the most effective or responsible approach. Clarifying this reality helps constituents make informed decisions based on long-term impact rather than immediate emotion.

2. Panhandling itself is not illegal, but certain behaviors are.

Residents may be unaware of the legal framework surrounding solicitation in Texas and Fort Worth. Council Members can help clarify:

- **Peaceful, non-aggressive panhandling is protected under the First Amendment.** This includes standing or sitting with a sign, quietly requesting assistance, or passively accepting donations. However, panhandling in certain locations is prohibited, such as within 20 feet of a teller machine (ATM), entrance to a bank, entrance to a government building, within five feet of a curb or the edge of a street, or an entrance to a restaurant. For a full list of prohibited locations reference Fort Worth City Ordinance 30-16.



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- **Enforcement actions can occur when behavior becomes unlawful**, such as:
 - Aggressive confrontation
 - Blocking or interfering with pedestrian or vehicular traffic
 - Approaching vehicles in moving lanes of traffic
 - Solicitation near ATM machines or in certain restricted locations
 - Disorderly conduct or intoxication

Educating the public on what is, and is not, an enforceable offense helps reduce frustration and supports appropriate reporting.

3. Encourage “Responsible Giving” as a guiding principle.

Responsible Giving focuses on strengthening the homelessness response system rather than reinforcing behaviors that may not support long-term stability.

Direct cash gifts, although well-intentioned, have limitations:

- They do not ensure the recipient is homeless or in legitimate need.
- They do not address underlying issues such as addiction, untreated mental illness, or chronic unemployment.
- They can unintentionally encourage continued solicitation in high-volume public areas.
- They bypass the coordinated services that are designed to move individuals toward housing, treatment, and stability.

Responsible Giving encourages residents to instead:

- Donate funds or supplies directly to established service providers.
- Volunteer with reputable organizations.
- Support outreach teams already working with individuals on the street.
- Offer resource information, **not currency**, if they wish to engage.
- Contact **817-392-4222** or use the **MyFW App** to report unsafe behavior or violations.

This approach channels compassion into high-impact, measurable support.

4. Guide constituents toward service-oriented, evidence-based solutions.

Fort Worth participates in the **Tarrant and Parker County Continuum of Care (CoC)**, which is a coordinated, regional network of nonprofits, outreach teams, treatment providers, health systems, and housing partners.

Directing residents toward CoC partners strengthens:

- **Rapid rehousing programs**
- **Permanent supportive housing**
- **Street outreach efforts**
- **Mental health and substance-use treatment**

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- **Case management and wrap-around care**
- **Crisis intervention services**

These organizations have established accountability measures, outcome tracking, and professional staff trained to address complex needs contributing to homelessness.

5. Encourage volunteerism and sustained community engagement.

Residents consistently express interest in helping, but many lack clear direction. Connecting them with vetted organizations ensures that:

- Their time and resources are used effectively.
- They contribute to long-term solutions.
- They support agencies with proven track records in reducing homelessness.
- They become partners in strengthening the city's coordinated response.

Volunteerism not only supports the service network but also increases public understanding of the real challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness.

Additional questions or information requests should be directed to Deputy Chief Monica Martin at 817-392-3634.

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City Manager