



To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

September 15, 2020

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**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON PANHANDLING**

The purpose of this Informal Report is to respond to a request for information on panhandling calls, enforcement efforts, and a general overview of the current process in the City of Fort Worth.

It is important to note at the onset that there are legal constraints that limit the ability of law enforcement to enforce panhandling laws. The U.S. Supreme Court has held that panhandling is a form of speech that is protected by the First Amendment.

In 2017, the City of Fort Worth established the Aggressive Panhandling Ordinance, which clarified the previous ordinance with clear definitions and gave the Fort Worth Police officers a better tool to address the problems associated with aggressive panhandling. Even with the changes there are still concerns surrounding aggressive panhandling in the City of Fort Worth.

The Fort Worth Police Department takes a multi-step approach when dealing with panhandling complaints. Once a complaint is received or a violation observed, officers will attempt to gain compliance through educating the violator about available resources along with notifying them of the current city ordinance prohibiting aggressive panhandling. If those education efforts fail, a citation will be issued. If the citation does not correct the behavior, a custodial arrest can be made through our Class C cash bonding process. The custodial arrest is only used when all other efforts to gain compliance have failed.

The below chart shows the number of panhandling calls that the Fort Worth Police Department received between January 1, 2019 through July 31, 2019 compared to January 1, 2020 through July 31, 2020:

	2019	2020	% change
Central	829	341	-58.87%
East	266	130	-51.13%
North	109	102	-6.42%
Northwest	107	56	-47.66%
South	371	171	-53.91%
West	691	301	-56.44%
Total	2373	1101	-53.06%



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The below chart shows the number of panhandling citations or reports made by the Fort Worth Police Department between January 1, 2019 through July 31, 2019 compared to January 1, 2020 through July 31, 2020:

	2019	2020	% change
Central	83	52	-37.35%
East	30	11	-63.33%
North	12	21	75%
Northwest	6	3	-50%
South	19	8	-57.89%
West	60	40	-33.33%
Total	210	135	-35.71%

This year we have had some unexpected challenges due to the COVID pandemic. The charts show that the panhandling calls for service along with citations/reports have decreased considerably, with the exception of North Division. During the COVID pandemic, many citizens have been staying at home and this could account for the lower number of calls received. Another variable associated with the pandemic was that we limited the number of individuals taken to the Fort Worth City Jail in order to minimize COVID exposure. One of the limitations was the suspension of the Class C cash bonding procedure, which impacted our ability to address the extreme aggressive panhandling cases.

One interesting note during the review of this information was the number of calls that were cancelled prior to the officer's arrival, or where officers made the scene only to find the subject had already left the location. This is significant to point out because many of the violators are no longer on scene when the police arrived, and we were unable to provide the educational component needed to reduce reoccurring violations. The below chart shows the number and percentage of calls cancelled, or where the subject was not able to be located between January 1, 2019 through July 31, 2019 compared to January 1, 2020 through July 31, 2020:

	2019	2020	2019 % of total calls	2020 % of total calls
Central	317	107	38.24%	31.38%
East	115	64	43.23%	49.23%
North	39	25	35.78%	24.51%
Northwest	42	31	39.25%	55.36%
South	159	81	42.86%	46.78%
West	260	101	37.63%	33.55%
Total	932	408	39.28%	37.06%

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It is important to note that not all panhandlers are homeless and not all homeless are panhandlers, and sometimes the public combines these two groups together confusing their true intention for panhandling. The Fort Worth Police Department will continue to respond to aggressive panhandling calls for service and work with our NPOs to address the on-going issues in each division. We will continue to work with TPW and place signage at our problem locations to notify individuals that panhandling in the streets is prohibited. We encourage the citizens to continue to report aggressive panhandling issues so they can be addressed in a timely manner.

Should you have any questions regarding Panhandling response, please contact Assistant Chief Robert Alldredge at 817-392-4131.

**David Cooke**  
**City Manager**