Community leaders seek city, county assistance in taking on homeless issue at Westchester Park

BY VINCE ECHAVARIA
Westchester is likely not among the first Westsiders communities to come to mind when thinking about places in Los Angeles where homelessness has been a major issue.

The communities of Venice and Santa Monica to the north have historically experienced larger numbers of homeless residents and have social service organizations dedicated to offering a variety of resources to those seeking assistance. But Westchester has hardly been removed from the effects of homelessness in the city of Los Angeles, which was found to have more than 23,500 homeless people in a count conducted by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) over three nights in January.

According to a report from the Neighborhood Council of Westchester-Playa’s Homeless and Vehicle Lot Living Committee, a separate overnight count of the council area’s homeless population in September last year found 48 homeless people along with 50 vehicles where people appeared to be living. The count involved volunteers from LAHSA. People Assisting the Homeless (PATH), U.S. Vets, Loyola Marymount University and the community.

While other Westside neighborhoods may struggle with homelessness on a much wider scale, Westchester residents note that homelessness is not just a problem in their area and a good portion of the homeless population has been concentrated at Westchester Park in recent years.

At a meeting of the homeless and vehicular living committee early this month, some residents and representatives of park facilities spoke of ongoing concerns regarding the homeless who sleep outside at the park. Committee chair Booker Pearson said he is unsure exactly how many people are sleeping at the park, but he counted nearly a dozen one morning and a population has consistently been staying there.

"I didn’t realize just how many people were living in the park," he said.

Some patrons of the Westchester Senior Center inside the park claim they have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with many of the homeless claiming a park resident of the seniors. Some no-sleep sign holders have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with some of the homeless claiming a park resident of the seniors. Some no-sleep sign holders have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with some of the homeless claiming they have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with some of the homeless claiming they have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with some of the homeless claiming they have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with some of the homeless claiming they have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with some of the homeless claiming they have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with some of the homeless claiming they have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with some of the homeless claiming they have been verbally harassed by homeless individuals, with some of the homeless claiming they have been verbally harass (Calitwisted) on page 4)