

OPERATION CHILLOUT

NEWSLETTER



LAKESWOOD, N.J. - Residents of a homeless encampment in the woods near the Jersey shore have agreed with government officials on the details of a plan to close down the camp after its 80 or so residents have found homes. Both sides in the seven-year dispute have signed a consent order and submitted it to a judge, who is expected to approve it soon. The parties reached an agreement in principle last month. The consent order spells out how Lakewood's Tent City will close down. It was sent to Superior Court Judge Joseph Foster on Thursday. It says any camp resident who refuses to be screened for welfare or housing benefits can be ejected from the camp. It also guarantees residents one year of indoor housing, no more than two months of which can be in a motel. They can be evicted from the camp if they refuse the offer. "This consent order gives the people of Tent City everything they wanted, and more, given that a year or more of housing equates to the federal definition of permanent housing, not just emergency shelter." said Jeffrey Wild, the lawyer for the homeless residents of the camp.

Lakewood and Ocean County officials have been trying to close the camp for years. It sits on township-owned land near a minor league baseball stadium. The deal allows supporters of the camp to keep bringing food, clothing and supplies to the camp, obligates Lakewood to collect trash put in receptacles by camp residents, and permits outside vendors to service and clean portable toilets at the camp. A potholed, rutted dirt road leading through the camp can be filled in and smoothed out, but not paved. It also spells out in some detail how the camp will be depopulated and eventually returned to Lakewood's control. As each resident is provided housing and moved out, the tent in which they lived will be removed by Lakewood if the resident doesn't take it with them. New occupants will be prohibited from the camp; the consent order gives Lakewood the right to bar new entrants either by applying to the court, "or other lawful means." Code violation charges brought by Lakewood officials against camp residents for things like having illegal stoves or heaters will be dismissed. Earlier this year, Lakewood threatened daily fines of \$1,000 for each of the site's 100 tents and 80 wood burning stoves. They cited health and sanitary issues at the site, as well as complaints from nearby residents. Lakewood's mayor called conditions there "disgusting" and "horrendous."

Wild also said Ocean County officials have indicated a willingness to discuss establishing a homeless shelter somewhere in the county. Advocates for the residents say there is no shelter anywhere in the region for homeless adults and the governments have not done enough to provide safe housing for them.

SOURCE: Philly.com



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OUTREACH

Visit to Tent City delivering 100 filled backpacks with new winter clothing. Pictured (L to R) Rev. Steve Brigham, Dcn. Ray Chimileski, MAJ Tony DeStefano USAR RET, and Joe Iozzia.



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"No Borders – No Boundaries"