

Homelessness is not a crime, nor is begging. On the other hand, the Phoenix City Code says it is "...*unlawful for any person to use a public street, highway, alley, lane, parkway, sidewalk or other right-of-way, whether such right-of-way has been dedicated to the public in fee or by easement, for lying, sleeping or otherwise remaining in a sitting position thereon, except in the case of a physical emergency or the administration of medical assistance.*" (<https://phoenix.municipal.codes/CC/23-48.01>)

We have met some who prefer to be homeless, and it is their right under current law. However, some homeless people are not the best citizens. Some are junkies and some have warrants for their arrest. Some will steal stuff from your backyard. There have been reports of homeless people in our neighborhood and we want to let you know what you can do to help them and keep our neighborhood safe.

Don't confront or approach them. There is a good chance they might be in an altered state (through drugs and/or mental illness) and could cause serious harm. Of course, if it is an emergency, call 911. For non-emergencies, call 602-262-6151 and request a follow-up from the officer who is assigned to the call. Unfortunately, it may take hours for a response.

Fortunately, you also have the option of notifying the Office of Homeless Solutions - a Phoenix City service dedicated to dealing with the homeless. <https://www.phoenix.gov/administration/departments/homeless-solutions/coordinated-homeless-response.html>. You may have heard of them as CARES (Community Action Response Engagement Services).

Here's what they say are the criteria for contacting CARES:

When a crime is NOT in progress and:

- You see an encampment
- You see a person experiencing homelessness in need of services
- You see homelessness-related debris
- You see unattended personal belongings

If you can take pictures - safely - you can include them when you file a report. They will come out to the site you specify and work with the homeless, offering free services and directing them to shelters. For encampments, the CARES folks will often have a few police officers on hand to check those people for warrants and arrest them on the spot. Our experience has been that CARES usually take care of the situation within a week.

For those people who are merely acting suspicious, we rely on our neighbors to provide a

little intelligence to weed out the bad actors. For one thing, if you know all your neighbors, then you can easily identify someone who should not be sitting on their front porch. Conversely, if you are expecting visitors, it's a good idea to let your neighbors know.

If you have a few cameras around your house, this would help identify these people for the police. While some folks are adamantly opposed to the use of security cameras, citing privacy concerns, they do help police investigations when a crime does occur.

If you see something, say something. Report 'squatters' to CARES. Talk to your neighbors about unfamiliar or suspicious people.