

ALINA TA | SPARTAN DAILY

Scott Wager (left), founder of Community Homeless Alliance Ministry, and a collaborator pass out free clothes and shoes to a group of unhoused people on Monday at the encampment in Roosevelt Park.

SJSU student organization fights houseless sweeps

By Alina Ta
STAFF WRITER

Students Against Sweeps is a student-run campaign fighting against police sweeps by advocating for houseless people to be treated fairly in San Jose.

Sociology freshman Armando Guillen, a member of Students Against Sweeps, said the students involved in the campaign are pressuring city officials to use alternative solutions to decrease houselessness.

Students Against Sweeps is campaigning for the city to stop doing police sweeps and to find other alternative solutions.

The campaign was created as a part of sociology and interdisciplinary social sciences professor Scott Myers-Lipton's sociology class.

Myers-Lipton said he invited Scott Wagers, pastor for the Community Homeless Alliance Ministry and co-founder of the Student Homeless Alliance, and other speakers to give students the opportunity to learn more about being more active in the community.

"The general idea of [it is] students come into the class and instead of just, like, taking notes and listening to lectures – the idea is that students still read books and read articles, but they [also] choose a campaign to work on. So about 50% of the class is the student campaign," Myers-Lipton said.

Sweeps, referred to by the city of San Jose as "abatements," are the forced disbanding of encampments on public property, including the removal of unhoused people and their respective property from that area, according to a Jan. 11 American Civil Liberties Union Washington article.

Wagers said during police sweeps they throw away or demolish houseless peoples tents and take their belongings.

"It's, you know, inhumane and it's a waste of money, waste of time," Guillen said.

San Jose city officials cleared 606 tons of debris from 303 encampments in 2019, according to a March 3, 2021 memorandum from the city of San Jose.

The city carried out a sweep of a large houseless encampment near San Jose Mineta International Airport, according to a Sept. 2, 2022 article by SFGATE.

City officials cleared away vehicles, personal belongings and makeshift homes belonging to around 300 unhoused people, according to the same SFGATE article.

Wagers said many city officials resort to doing police sweeps in response to concerns from housed community members living near encampments.

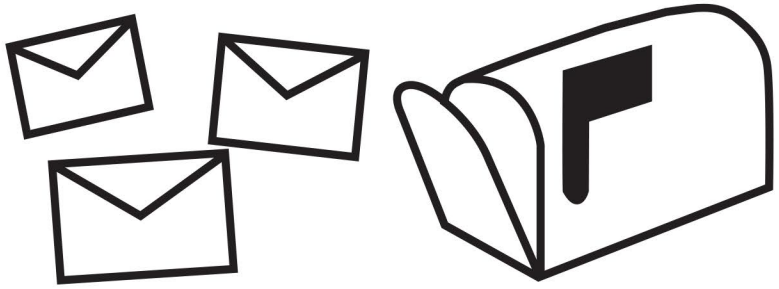
Guillen said the city is spending millions of dollars doing police sweeps.

San Jose spent $1,084,619 on "encampment abatements," another term for police sweeps, according to the city of San Jose memorandum.

The city of San Jose in 2019 also spent $4.85 million on police sweeps, according to a Dec. 2, 2021 San Jose Spotlight news article.

"Let's say this week, this camp probably cost $10, $12 [up] to $14,000 just for one sweep," Wagers said, referring to a houseless encampment in Roosevelt

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Park in Downtown San Jose.

He said this method is only a temporary solution.

Wagers said after city officials clear out houseless encampments, the people living in the camps either move across the street or back to the same location.

Sociology senior Angela Ramirez, a member of Students Against Sweeps, said the campaign is pressuring the city to follow their own promises.

"I wanted to also reiterate, [it] is our demand for the city [to follow] the abatement policy. They're not following it," Ramirez said.

The city would ensure those who are living in the encampments would receive the assistance and have their personal belongings properly managed, according to the same city of San Jose memorandum. The city also ensured the police sweeps would be done effectively and efficiently.

She said Students Against Sweeps have been using different strategies to pressure city officials to use more promising alternative solutions to decrease homelessness.

"So just by bringing awareness to it, and, you know, directly contacting the people that aren't following [or] enforcing the policy, sending them emails, trying to reach out to them, things like that," Ramirez said.

Guillen said Students Against Sweeps and another unhoused advocate are now trying to convince the city to donate one of their unused buildings to help the homeless.

She said the city passes out flyers at houseless encampments to let them know city officials will clear out their camps.

"They'll serve these flyers and they tell them, 'You know, we're going to do a sweep here,' and then weeks and weeks and weeks will go by and they won't do the sweep," Ramirez said. "So these unhoused people are living day to day not knowing if somebody's going to come and kick me out of here."

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