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## NEWS RELEASE

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# City of Atlantic City Forms Boardwalk Improvement Group, Hires Outreach Team to Address Homelessness, Other Quality of Life Concerns

**Atlantic City, N.J. (October 25, 2023)** – During a news conference, today, along South Tennessee Avenue, City of Atlantic City Mayor Marty Small, Sr. announced the formation of the Boardwalk Improvement Group (BIG), as well as the addition of new employees in the city’s Health and Human Services department, both tasked with addressing homelessness issues in the city, among other quality of life concerns.

BIG is a proactive partnership between the public and private sector that aims to improve the overall quality of the Atlantic City Boardwalk and beaches. BIG features an integration of city departments that conduct 24/7 observation and reconnaissance, with attention to prevention, abatement, cleanup, engagement and enforcement. Since the formation of BIG, daily visual Boardwalk and beach inspections have been conducted, ‘See, Click, Fix’ was created internally to form one, central database where all information and communication comes from, and it was determined what ordinances needed to be changed or added.

BIG addresses homeless individuals sleeping and loitering around the Atlantic City Boardwalk and beaches, as well as removal of encampments, while supporting the idea of these individuals finding a successful path in life. The group was formed early this year under the leadership of Atlantic City Police Department (ACPD) Sergeant Brian Shapiro. The group originally featured police, the Atlantic City Office

of Emergency Management (OEM), Atlantic City Department of Public Works and the NJ Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) Special Improvement Division (SID). By Summer, the group also consisted of the city's Department of Licensing and Inspection, Solicitor's Office, Information Technology Department and Health and Human Services Department. Also involved in BIG are the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Atlantic City Casino Association and social services groups from throughout the area, including Jewish Family Services of Atlantic & Cape May Counties, Volunteers of America, Hope One Atlantic County, Angels in Motion and NJ Rise. Representatives meet bi-weekly to discuss improvement tactics, and how to best coordinate with everyone involved. While homelessness is a major component, BIG also addresses aggressive Boardwalk performers, bicycle violations, public smoking, open container violations, and many other issues with the hopes of keeping the Atlantic City Boardwalk world class.

"We are well aware of the number of homeless individuals gathering in our city, it's something the Small administration discusses daily as we want to make things better," said Mayor Small. "And in the end, we put our money where our mouth is, by forming BIG to aggressively tackle this issue, and by hiring professional personnel to deal with the homeless and drug addiction issues in the Great City of Atlantic City. We've been working hard, and will continue to do so, until we see the results we are seeking. The group says 'Boardwalk' but rest assured, our commitment is cleaning up the entire city."

"Mayor Small has made the determination to create a strongly-integrated, well-staffed, and adequately-funded program to address local issues," said city Policy Advisor Judge Steven Perskie. "The critically important foundation for BIG is the degree of interagency communication, cooperation, and integration of function on which it is based. Atlantic City does not have a homeless problem, rather the issues are highlighted by the fact that many of the homeless in the city have created resting areas under the Boardwalk."

"This is the first time all levels of city government, large and small, have come together to work collaboratively to address the homeless and quality of life issues on the Boardwalk," said OEM Coordinator Scott Evans. "For the overall health and wellbeing of Atlantic City, organizations working together in this fashion goes a long way in keeping our community clean and safe. Our homeless population is our most vulnerable population. It's important we look at those who can't protect themselves and who need the most help."

"When we all got together, we realized what our strengths and weaknesses truly are, and where our focus should be directed and where our resources should be going," said ACPD Lieutenant Jody Hersh. "This has proven to be a great initiative that helps alleviate some of our most difficult and persistent issues, and has been very eye opening for all of us in the City of Atlantic City. This all-hands-on-deck approach actually brings issues to the table, where they can be addressed."

"Now, when an officer or member of the casino spots a homeless person under the Boardwalk, or sees a different issue, it's no longer word of mouth communication," said Assistant Director of the Department of Public Work, Ahmid Abdullah, Sr. "They can send us pictures so we have better insight into what we are getting into. This keeps everyone on the same page. And rather than just removing a homeless individual we find under the Boardwalk, BIG has given us the opportunity to reach out to other agencies to provide these individuals with the services they need."

The City of Atlantic City has also been working with the DCA to bring a homeless czar into the city. Interviews are wrapping up, and the hired individual is expected to be announced soon. In addition, during today's news conference, Health and Human Services Director Jarrod Barnes introduced six, highly-qualified new employees in his department, who were brought in to help deal with homelessness throughout Atlantic City. The new hires include:

Joya Banks, Social Worker

Keith Dunn, Drug Prevention and Recovery Specialist

Brandan Hargrore, Reentry Services Program Specialist

Kamau Johnson, Reentry Services Assistant Coordinator

Kenneth Mitchem, Director of Community Relations/Social Services (with an emphasis on homelessness)

Anthony Woodard, Social Worker

"We fully understand the concerns that are out there as it relates to homelessness in Atlantic City, so we wanted to bring in experts in the field to navigate us through this issue," said Director Barnes. "I have full confidence in my staff, and since these positions were filled, we are already seeing positive results as we've been able to connect many homeless individuals with the critical services they so badly need."

The City of Atlantic City is looking to fill eight Community Service Aide positions aimed at supporting quality of life improvement in Atlantic City, particularly along Atlantic Avenue, through community outreach and interaction, and by working closely with the city's community and drug specialists. The jobs will be posted before the end of the week. Atlantic City residents are encouraged to apply for these positions on the city's website under Careers: <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/atlanticcity?>

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