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NEWS RELEASE

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City of Atlantic City Fully Implements Boardwalk Improvement Group to Address Homelessness Among Other Concerns

Atlantic City, N.J. (July 1, 2024) – Following an announcement this past October that the City of Atlantic City formed the Boardwalk Improvement Group (BIG) to address homelessness and other quality of life concerns on the world-famous Atlantic City Boardwalk and throughout the entire city, Mayor Marty Small, Sr. and members of the newly-formed group announced as of today the program has been fully implemented. 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, and city as a whole. BIG features an integration of city departments that conduct 24/7 observation and reconnaissance, with attention to prevention, abatement, cleanup, engagement and enforcement. Daily visual Boardwalk and beach inspections are conducted, while ‘See, Click, Fix’ was created internally to form one, central database for all information and communication.

BIG addresses homeless individuals sleeping under 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 under the leadership of Atlantic City Police Department (ACPD) Sergeant Brian Shapiro and guidance by Judge Steven Perskie, Policy Advisor to Mayor Small. The group consists of police, the Atlantic City Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Atlantic City Department of Public Works, Atlantic City Department of Licensing and Inspection, Atlantic City Solicitor’s Office, Atlantic City Information Technology Department and Atlantic City Health and Human Services Department. Also involved in BIG are the NJ Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) Special Improvement Division (SID), New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Atlantic City Casino Association,

Atlanticare, 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 regularly 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 clean and safe.

“Never before in the history of Atlantic City has a plan like this ever been created to address homelessness,” said Mayor Small. “This problem wasn’t started overnight and it’s not going to be solved overnight, but it’s my job as mayor to give all these departments involved the necessary tools to succeed, and we’re doing that in a big way. We’re excited for BIG to fully launch and are currently working on an ordinance to crack down on individuals sleeping on Atlantic City property.”

“We’ve brought almost all of the departments in the City of Atlantic City together, joined by outside agencies, to make a difference, and we’re already seeing results,” said Atlantic City Office of Emergency Management Coordinator Scott Evans. “This is the first time anything like this has happened, where everyone works on the same game plan from one playbook to make sure the Atlantic City Boardwalk is among the safest in the country.”

“This collaboration represents a significant step forward in our efforts to enhance the safety, enjoyment and overall experience of one of our city’s most cherished landmarks,” said Atlantic City Chief of Police James Sarkos. “This collective effort aims to create a secure and more welcoming environment for residents and visitors alike.”

“You would never imagine some of the things we’ve found under the Boardwalk,” said Atlantic City Assistant Department of Public Works Director Ahmid Abdullah, Sr. “Cleaning under the Boardwalk is not, by any means, easy, but the mayor has given our department the equipment needed to safely accomplish this task on a daily basis.”

“We’re out here every day assisting not just homeless individuals, but also individuals dealing with drug and alcohol problems,” said Atlantic City Department of Health and Human Services director Jarrod Barnes. “This initiative and what we do every day is not just about clearing out homeless, it’s about assisting them in any way we can, and getting them the help that they need.”

Coinciding with the efforts of BIG, over the last year the City of Atlantic City has formed a Homeless Outreach Team, consisting of Director of Community Relations/Social Services (with an emphasis on homelessness) Kenneth Mitchem, Drug Prevention and Recovery Specialist Keith Dunn and Social Workers Joya Banks and Anthony Woodard. The City of Atlantic City has also filled ten 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.

Following today's news conference, the city organized a bus tour for media and residents to see hotspots where homeless individuals tend to gather, including Kentucky Avenue between Atlantic and Pacific Avenues, Renaissance Plaza and the marshes right off Brigantine Boulevard. You can report homeless encampments anytime by calling 609-347-5437.

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