

EUGENE CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY



Work Session: Homeless Camping in Parks and Open Spaces

Meeting Date: April 24, 2013
Department: Public Works Parks and Open Spaces
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Agenda Item Number: A
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ISSUE STATEMENT

This item is in response to council direction to hold a work session to discuss homeless camping in the City's parks and open spaces.

BACKGROUND

The Parks and Open Space (POS) Division manages 78 community and neighborhood parks and over 3,000 acres of open space. Many of the open space areas have one or more of the following overlay zones to protect sensitive habitat and water quality – Waterside Protection, Water Quality, Wetland Buffer, and Water Resources Conservation. The POS Division manages the City's parks and open spaces for the benefit and enjoyment of the community with a focus on keeping parks and open spaces –“Safe, Clean, & Green.”

The City's parks and open spaces have not been developed to accommodate camping and lack the level of services typically associated with a developed campground – water and wastewater services, garbage pickup, and security. In addition, the financial cost of managing the existing level of camping within parks and open spaces is substantial.

Homeless camps have a significant negative impact to parks and open spaces and require substantial resources to mitigate the impacts. Some of the impacts to the physical environment on parks and open spaces include the accumulation of garbage, human waste, and hazardous waste; degradation of water quality; and destruction of sensitive habitat. Homeless camps also affect the use of parks and open spaces. Certain open space areas and parks have seen a significant decline in use because of the presence of homeless camps. In addition, some volunteer groups are unwilling to work in certain parks and open space areas.

The POS Division goals in managing homeless camps in the City's parks and open spaces is to assure the safety of park users and City staff, minimize the impacts to parks and open space resources and to preclude the establishment of semi-permanent camps.

The critical elements of this management strategy include the following:

- Eugene Code 4.815 Prohibited Camping – This section of the Eugene Code defines camping and campsites and prohibits camping in parks and open spaces and other publicly owned property.
- Park and Open Space Rules – The rules are adopted administratively and include provisions that establish the hours that parks and open spaces are closed and prohibits the setting up or constructing of temporary structures or enclosures.
- Parks and Open Space Division Procedure for Illegal Campsite Posting and Clean-Up – This procedure was developed subsequent to the Ninth Circuit Court decision and is consistent with the decision and with Oregon Revised Statutes. The procedures guide Parks and Open Space Division staff and contractors on the posting and clean-up of campsites and the storage and retrieval of personal property collected during clean-up operations.
- Contract with Lane County Sheriff's Work Crew – The Sheriff's work crew is the primary resource used to dismantle and clean up camps found within parks and open spaces.
- Partnership with Eugene Police Department – The Police Department provides support to Parks and Open Space staff during clean-up operations when there is a risk to the personal safety of staff from hostile individuals or aggressive dogs occupying camps scheduled for clean-up.

RELATED CITY POLICIES

Eugene Code 4.815 Prohibited Camping

(2) It is found and declared that:

- (a) From time to time persons establish campsites on sidewalks, public rights-of way, under bridges, and so forth;
- (b) Such persons, by such actions create unsafe and unsanitary living conditions which pose a threat to the peace, health and safety of themselves and the community; and,
- (c) The enactment of this provision is necessary to protect the peace, health and safety of the city and its inhabitants.

(3) No person shall camp in or upon any sidewalk, street, alley, lane, public right-of-way, park or any other publicly-owned property or under any bridge or viaduct, unless otherwise specifically authorized by this code or by declaration of the Mayor in emergency circumstances.

COUNCIL OPTIONS

Staff is presenting information requested by the council.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Alternatives and recommendations will be provided next week and during the work session.

SUGGESTED MOTION

There is no suggested motion.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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