**Where Can People Go? *City of Eugene Homeless Services Immediate Policy Recommendations***

*“For those of us working on policies that intersect with re-opening and law enforcement, we can make public our commitment to establishing policies that don’t create more harm.” - Oregon Public Health Association*

In the past three months, social distancing measures have left us with only 250 shelter beds for the thousands of people experiencing homelessness in Lane County, 45% fewer spaces than we had at this same time last year. On Friday, the temporary respite sites that provided overflow capacity for people to shelter-in-place will close, leaving those who sought refuge there to join with the flood of newly unhoused people as residential evictions resume.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Federal advisor on the COVID-19 pandemic, along with top epidemiologists, have stated that without a vaccine this virus will likely be with us for the next six to twelve months or more. The CDC clearly recommends that the unhoused need sanctioned places to shelter in small social distancing groups. Lane County has a population of 4,100 unhoused people. Research estimates that up to 40% of people experiencing homelessness could be infected during the peak of the COVID-19 epidemic without efforts to prevent the spread of this disease.

The City and County have expended significant time and money responding to unhoused complaints: citing, arresting, adjudicating, and jailing the unhoused because they do not have the resources to maintain shelter, sanitation, or garbage disposal. Penalizing people for having nowhere to go has tremendous costs, both to the unhoused individuals and the community at large. Whether intentional or not, punitive measures against people who are unhoused create additional, often insurmountable barriers for people to access housing and employment. The accumulation of debt from unpaid fines, which adversely impacts credit scores, along with outstanding warrants and/or jail time traps people in a cycle of homelessness that becomes increasingly difficult to overcome.

The mere threat of a citation takes a significant toll as well. This fear, along with frequent move-along orders force people into more remote, less secure settings where the risk of being a victim of a crime increases, and the constant fear of being a victim poses detrimental health risks. In addition, maintaining the current system is very expensive, it is far less costly on communities for people to have housing. Policing the homeless for their mere status of being unhoused overcrowds our court system and our jails and diverts much-needed resources away from addressing crime that is a real threat to public safety. With limited resources, preventing noncriminal interactions with the police should be a priority.

The immediate recommendations below are proposed short-term policy changes to minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19 and until additional temporary sheltering locations have been established. This is in the best interests of all citizens of Eugene, housed and unhoused.

**Recommendation 1**.

Define places where sheltering in place, including sheltering in a vehicle, is prohibited at all times, such as residential areas, within 15 feet of building entrances and the Downtown Activity Zone (other cities have enacted similar measures).

**Recommendation 2**.

City Council should direct law enforcement to follow CDC guidance and not disperse existing temporary shelters to other locations as long as there are no violations such as private property trespass or other criminal behavior, and the site does not pose a significant health and safety risk that outweighs the need for individuals to shelter in place. It is important to note that there are several examples around the country of cities that modified their enforcement practices in the past few years with respect to laws that disproportionately impact the unhoused, including practices to minimize closure of encampments until viable shelter or housing becomes available.

Establish [guidelines for people in unsanctioned sites](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ERINCrwfzCLsu87H1-ZBhZb3sEOf0ACydjPkYAon9TA/edit?usp=sharing) to protect health and safety and to reduce the need for law enforcement to shut down a temporary shelter site. It must be clearly communicated that unsanctioned camping is a violation of Eugene Code 4.815, Prohibited Camping, and therefore the site could be closed by EPD at any time. The purpose of these guidelines is to give individuals concrete information to help them maintain a healthy, safe living situation that does not interfere with surrounding residents and businesses.

**Recommendation 3**.

Establish an alternative dispatch system to using law enforcement when a complaint only involves prohibited camping and there is no threat to public safety or crisis response necessary. Instead of directing callers to the Eugene Police Department’s non-emergency line or Public Works, create a “[One Point of Contact](https://youtu.be/SXSc6cr4WuY)” type reporting system available online or by phone staffed by trained information and referral specialists (possibly managed by designated nonprofit) to assess resource needs, track interactions, and provide follow up communication.

Supporting groups might include adequately trained service-based nonprofits, faith organizations, businesses, or neighborhood associations.

**Recommendation 4**.

Require non-EPD sworn officers as the first responders when a complaint only involves prohibited camping and there is no threat to public safety (in addition to the City’s outreach team, this could involve CSO’s and possibly designated nonprofits). This would reduce EPD’s expenses and is more likely to result in a positive outcome with the unhoused.

Partnerships with security agencies could provide support when problems occur to assist support teams and divert the need for police involvement. Supporting groups to serve as responders could include service-based nonprofits, faith organizations, businesses, and neighborhood associations.

**Additional Actionable Ideas**

* Work with neighborhood associations, nonprofits and faith communities to establish Temporary Managed Shelters throughout the County as part of COVID-19 recovery.
* Create a resource distribution hub to connect people to services such as housing assistance, work readiness, mentoring, benefits assistance, and hygiene services.
* In partnership with key civic, faith and business entities, launch a community challenge to house 1,000 individuals within 2 years not dependent on building new structures.
* Promote a home-sharing program where homeowners could rent a room to a vetted, low income, unhoused individual, and receive some rent and property tax abatement.
* Eliminate barriers to exiting homelessness by streamlining the complicated and expensive process to clear eligible records for expungement.
* Work with Municipal Court to reduce or eliminate outstanding court debt for individuals whose citations have been based on their unhoused status. In other words, debt incurred for quality of life violations such as prohibited camping, park violations, criminal trespass II and/or open container.
* Expand the capacity of the rest stop and car camping programs by investing in operational costs, infrastructure, and land acquisition.
* Create year-round, low-barrier campgrounds for people who are homeless that allow pets, partners and possessions, with 24-hour security, bathrooms, and storage.
* Establish a temporary hardship camping permit program in partnership with a human services provider.
* Direct the City Manager and City Attorney to review the findings and recommendations in the [Persecution of the Unhoused](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t4kBuNcoWC0Xv0xnUgwimLWmXhZ9Ivko/view?usp=sharing) report and address the constitutionality and effectiveness of Eugene laws that criminalize the status of homelessness.

**In Support:**

**Service Providers**

Heather Sielicki, White Bird Clinic Operations Coordinator

Alex Farmer, White Bird Clinic Front Rooms Program Coordinator

Benjamin Brubaker, White Bird Clinic Executive Director

Chris Hecht, White Bird Clinic Executive Director

Laurie Hauber, Staff Attorney, Oregon Law Center/Lane County Legal Aid

Priscilla Gould, Chair PacificSource Foundation for Community Health and Retired United Way of Lane County Executive Director

Dan Bryant, SquareOne Villages

Kirstin London, Human Rights Commission

Wayne Martin, House Everyone and pastor

Amanda Hampton, Looking Glass Rural Program Supervisor

Carrie Copeland, Community Supported Shelters Board Secretary

Terry McDonald, Executive Director, St. Vincent De Paul

**Businesses**

Nick Ciufo, President, Tao Gardens

Dan Issacson, CEO, Nakd Farms

**Neighborhood Associations**

Jefferson Westside Neighbors

Friendly Area Neighbors

Southeast Neighbors

South University Neighbors Association

**Neighborhood Association Board Members**

Anne Millhollen, Chair, Neighborhood Leaders Council Committee on Housing and Homelessness and North East Neighbors, East Area (1) Representative

John Faville, Northeast Neighbors, Board Member

David Saul, South Eugene Neighbors, Board member

Ian Winbrock, Co-Chair, Neighborhood Leaders Council, At-large board member, Whitaker Community Council

Kara Steffensen, Chair of Amazon Neighbors Association

Melissa Takush, Board Member and Social Media Manager, Amazon Neighbors Association

Rachael Latimer, Board Member, Amazon Neighbors Association

Tom Peck, Board Member, Friendly Area Neighbors

**Residents**

Steve Piercy, Co-Chair, Friendly Area Neighbors Transportation Committee

Branden B. Johnson, resident of Eugene, JWN, and Ward 1 for the past 7 years

Richard Self aka Sam Broadway KEPW Newsday, Eugene

Debbie Hebert, South Eugene Neighbors

Jay Mosely, JWN and Westside Shelter Search Team

David Huffman, Jefferson Westside Neighbors

Stephanie J. Coopman, Jefferson Westside Neighbors

Nancy Hafner, Jefferson Westside Neighbors

Chris O’Neil, Jefferson Westside Neighbors

Paul and Peggy Boudin, Jefferson Westside Neighbors

Vanessa Wheeler, Jefferson Westside Neighbors

**With Caveats**

Lane Independent Living Alliance: LILA supports the recommendations, but we ask for specific wording "accessible sites" as this is essential for people who experience disability.