

Emergence and Homeless Encampments

Final Report
October 2019

Watershed Protection Department



Background and Timeline

Council Item Update Response (CIUR) #2107 FY19 City Council Direction to Budget Rider

The outside vendor that will be contracted (by WPD) to supplement in-house resources for encampment clean-up shall work in coordination with social service providers. The vendor shall be required to provide regular memorandums to the Health and Human Services Committee. It is the intention of the City Council that before an RFP is put out that the City Manager shall give notice and an update to Council on how the City will work to protect the property rights of residents, especially people experiencing homelessness, with the intention of not seizing property of residents. Budget Rider FY19_Rider F.

City Council-Health and Human Services Committee-
Feb 13, 2019

Upcoming Request for Council Action (RCA) Watershed
Protection Department (WPD) Encampment Cleanup
Contract (Expanded)- Dec. 5, 2019

Emergence

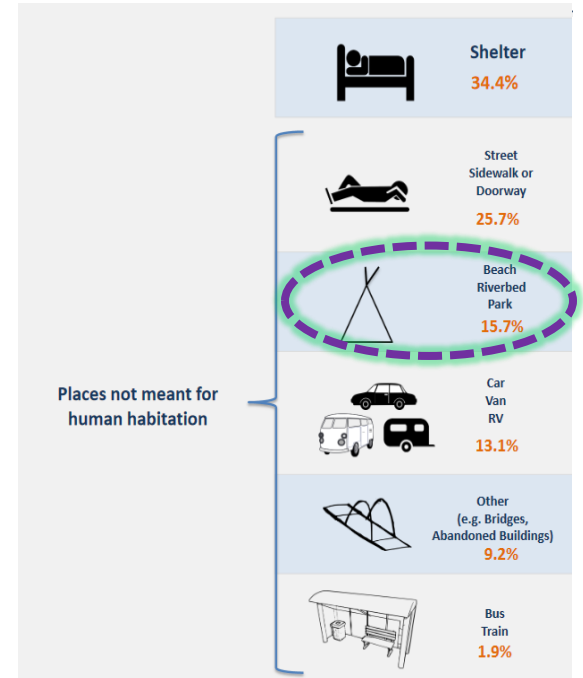
1. The process of coming into view or becoming exposed after being concealed.

2. The process of coming into being or becoming important or prominent.

The growing population of unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness has environmental health impacts on the City of Austin.

For many, the only immediate option is to reside in public spaces, often near creeks and stormwater infrastructure.

HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTIN WHERE ARE PEOPLE SLEEPING?



Statistics source: Austin Echo. <http://austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Austin-Homelessness-Needs-and-Gaps3.pdf>

The Question

Can we define a new process to
*addresses **human waste** and **litter** in creeks & ponds*
generated by homeless encampments that is
safer and more cost effective
while meeting WPD ***pollution prevention goals***
in a manner that is **respectful** of both
the homeless community and surrounding neighborhoods?

How might we support our WPD mission areas while minimizing harm to people experiencing homelessness?

Good ideas come together across disciplines to identify innovative solutions:

- Human centered design with the Office of Design and Delivery (ODD)
- Leave No Trace (LNT) with Parks and Recreation Department (PARD)
- Public safety with Austin Police Department (APD).
- Meeting people and their needs where they are with the Integral Care Programs for Assistance in the Transition from Homelessness (PATH) Team

Encampment Management: Design and test a standardized process for managing encampments on WPD managed lands.

Assessment and Prioritization

1. Develop and test a method for prioritizing sites needing clean-up or removal, and to identify alternate locations where people can be safely provided services in place.
2. Reduce safety risks to homeless individuals living near creeks or in storm drain infrastructure.

Contract

1. Learn more about contract requirements and coordination efforts by contracting for ongoing maintenance at a select group of historically cleaned watershed protection sites.
2. Reduce additional burden on WPD field crews.

Site Prioritization for Clean-Up

Prioritized

Risks to human safety and environmental quality

Deprioritized

Low-risk to human safety and environmental quality

Strategy	PATH - Connect to services plan to relocate	PATH and Integral Care Case Management
Supplies	To meet immediate needs and support move	To support Leave No Trace principles
Removal Timeline	72-hour to 30-Day Notice	Self-sort garbage for regular pick-up at designated spot
Goal	Mitigate moderate environmental health and safety risks and connect resident to services.	Provide services in-place and connect to permanent housing while improving environmental quality.



Performance Indicators: Cleanups

From March through September:
37 cleanups across 11 sites; removed over **24 tons** of material from WPD land, creeks, and infrastructure.

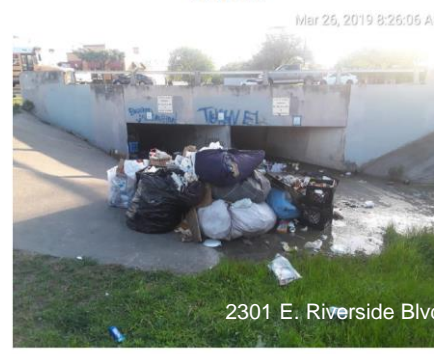
Before



After



Before



After



Performance Indicators: Engagement

Total Persons Engaged: 400 (approx.)

152 residents been outreached **with engagement**
(Mental Health, medication, CareCo Clinic, Street Medicine, Community Care)
21 linked up with The Other Ones Foundation
7 residents housed

Over **250 residents** been outreached **without engagement**

Three **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training to 75-80 people

The total contracted cost through this period has been approx. **\$60,000**

Deprioritized Encampment Management

Leave No Trace Principles

Apply the LNT principles to a deprioritized encampment to see if and how these guidelines can protect environmental and human health and safety at encampments.

Engagement and “Dry Bags”

Effectively engage residents at the prioritized sites in eligible services, minimize the harmful impacts of relocating, and provide supplies that support LNT principles.

Trash Collection

Minimize complaints about encampments and reduce impact on public property by providing trash bags and collection for participating residents.

Insights about Prioritized Sites

- **Encampment Location and Frequency:** **regular clean-ups** are needed in some areas but locations are not static and **flexibility** is needed as well.
- **Capacity:** Adding capacity through the contract meant that **staff could maintain focus** on the needed maintenance of the City's water protection infrastructure.
- **Communication Strategy :** WPD developed and enhanced a **coordination and communications strategy** between the contractor, the social services providers, and APD.
- Need a tool to **communicate to persons experiencing homelessness at Encampment Sites.**
- **Notification:** Official notification postings were one of the most beneficial additions to WPD's clean-up approach.

City staff involved in the pilot saw a high-level of compliance with LNT requests and significant improvements especially in garbage management.

A number of participants **self-resolved** during the pilot program.



Insights about Deprioritized Sites

- **Engagement:** Consistently visiting sites at a **designated time every week** helped build a rapport, deliver LNT education and tools, and help with problem solving and immediate needs.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Site residents expressed a desire to **protect the land** and natural resources around them.
- **Site Management and Monitoring:** Regular visits and **engagement with residents** help staff respond to questions from the general public and address concerns.
- **Diversion and Self-Resolution:** **Stability** provided by the deprioritized sites helped people work toward resolving their homelessness **independent of Austin's homeless services system**.

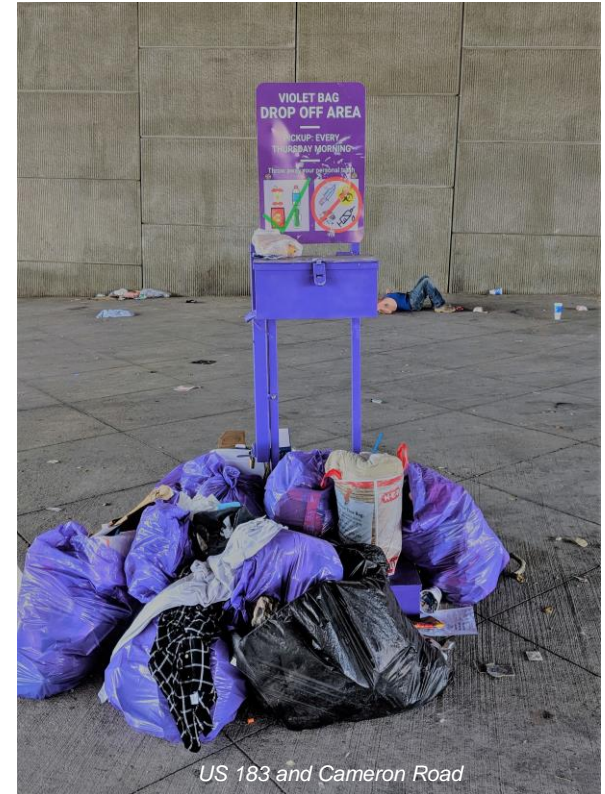
WPD's Encampment Strategy Recommendations

Scale Up

- **Capacity:** The WPD contract will need to expand to citywide. **\$250K Contract, Dec 5 RCA**
- **Staffing:** Create a **full time staff position** at WPD to coordinate activity at deprioritized sites and manage the clean-up contract.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** WPD needs to review inherently unsafe sites for possible **infrastructure changes** that will prevent camping in extremely dangerous conditions. (example 2301 E Riverside Culvert design and construction estimated \$250,000)
- **Wraparound Services:** Expand **budget and resources for Integral Care PATH** team and other providers needed to support the cleanup efforts citywide (i.e. **Violet Bag Program**).

Citywide Solutions

- **Cleanup Contract Coordination:** Collaborate and coordinate citywide encampment cleanups.
- **Trash Collection:** Expand the highly successful **Violet Bag** trash collection program citywide.
- **Non-Profit Agency Collaboration:** Increase capacity to provide meaningful employment for persons experiencing homelessness with the non-profit agencies: **The Other Ones Foundation**.
- **Decentralized storage:** Provide a **place to store** their belongings.



What the near future looks like



Waterloo Greenway

A Restored Creek



Questions