





## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council Members

**THRU:** Stephanie Hayden, Assistant City Manager

**FROM:** Dianna Grey, Homeless Strategy Officer   
Kimberly McNeeley, Director, Parks and Recreation Department 

**DATE:** May 14, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Sanctioned Encampments, Resolution No. 20210506-070

---

On May 6, 2021, Austin City Council adopted Resolution No. 20210506-070, directing the City Manager to provide information and analysis regarding possible sanctioned encampments for people experiencing homelessness in the City of Austin. This resolution establishes a three-part reporting process, as described below. This memo is intended to fulfill the first requested report.

By May 14<sup>th</sup>, staff will report on the following:

1. Best practices related to sanctioned encampments
2. A description of, and budget for, basic operating infrastructure such as lighting, water, restrooms, showers, storage, mail service, laundry, and security, as well as relocation services
3. Criteria for selection of potential encampment sites, including sites for individuals residing in their vehicles
4. At least ten locations identified as likely meeting those criteria, including at least one in each City Council district, and
5. A recommended process for convening public and Council conversations related to possible designated campsite locations

By June 1<sup>st</sup>, information will be provided regarding:

1. A proposed implementation schedule
2. Estimated total costs
3. Potential financial resources
4. Possible community partners for cost-sharing and/or service provision

By July 1<sup>st</sup>, staff will identify:

1. Land within the city limits owned by the City of Austin, other governmental entities, or willing community partners that could accommodate 'tiny home' structures to serve as temporary housing
2. Estimated costs associated with individual structures and supportive infrastructure

### **Background**

On June 20, 2019, City Council adopted an ordinance to revise previous policies regarding panhandling, sitting or lying in public places, and camping on public property. The changes were intended to reduce the number of citations and arrests of individuals so that City resources could instead be focused on housing people experiencing homelessness. On that date, City Council also adopted a resolution seeking options, in consultation with national experts, that would allow for temporary designated encampments in each Council District, to be demobilized after one year.

After conducting research and consulting with subject matter experts who argued against the use of sanctioned encampments, staff recommended against the creation of sanctioned encampments. The recommendation was based on the significant costs and labor associated with their operation and the fact that occupants would continue to live in an unsheltered environment, with attendant risks to health, safety, and well-being. Additionally, at the time, the likelihood of people experiencing homelessness being cited or arrested for sitting, lying, or camping was diminished due to the lifting of the previous restrictions on those activities.

The recent voter approval of 'Proposition B' on May 1, 2021 reinstates criminal offenses and penalties for sitting/lying/camping in non-designated areas. Consequently, in the face of insufficient shelter capacity, sanctioned encampments may be viewed as an alternative to illegal public camping, the imposition of criminal charges on the unsheltered, and the unintended consequence of increased numbers of encampments relocating into less visible, wooded areas that present high wildfire and flood risks. The previous staff recommendation is being reviewed in concert with Council's May 6th request to analyze possible designated encampments.

### **Sanctioned Encampment Design and Operational Considerations**

Should Council elect to create temporary, legal, camping alternatives for people experiencing homelessness, a review of the experience of other communities yields a number of generally agreed-upon approaches, lessons learned, and questions for further consideration, which may guide the City toward the most effective implementation possible.

Sanctioned encampment sites should be equipped with basic infrastructure including electricity and water service, restrooms, hygiene stations, and showers (mobile, if necessary), adequate lighting, and perimeter fencing where appropriate. Health and sanitation practices should be taken into consideration including regular trash collection, hazardous waste removal, vector control measures. Additional services offered by successful sites include laundry facilities, storage for personal belongings, and transportation supports.

Staffing of sanctioned encampments needs including general operational staff, 24/7 security personnel and service providers as well as additional demands on contract management, program, and communications staff should be taken into consideration. Services offered on-site should address basic needs, while maintaining a housing focus, prioritizing connection to permanent housing resources. Staffing patterns should allow for case management, diversion, financial assistance, and housing navigation. In addition, behavioral health crisis intervention services should be available on-site, or on a facilitated on-call basis.

Among the challenges most often noted by operators of sanctioned encampments is that, though typically established as temporary sites, in practice they can be very difficult to decommission once established. Balancing more manageable encampment size with economies of scale is difficult; and exposure to the elements may argue for the use of more robust structures, further increasing costs. Staff will continue to explore these and other emerging operational and policy considerations.

### **Costs Associated with Sanctioned Encampments**

Staff from the Parks and Recreation Department, Office of Real Estate Services, Austin Fire Department, Public Works Department, Watershed Protection Department, Austin Energy, Austin Water, and members of the Austin Housing Finance Corporation have developed an initial list of encampment location options and associated cost estimates for sites with capacity to accommodate 50 to 100 individuals each. Cost projections are preliminary, and staff will continue to identify other likely expense categories, validate assumptions, and identify key cost drivers or possible economies of scale.

One-time costs to establish encampment sites may include, but are not limited to, extending access to electricity and water lines, site grading, installation of perimeter fencing, creating or improving vehicular access, and mitigation of wildfire and/or flood risk. More detailed analysis will be necessary for each location, but an initial survey suggests that while some urban infill properties or parks may need only modest preparation (potentially under \$200,000), others lack access to basic utility infrastructure or access, and would require the investment of several million dollars.

Estimated annual costs for operating a sanctioned encampment are shown in the table below. Please note that the totals shown are for *known costs only*; actual total costs are likely to exceed these amounts. In particular, costs for utility and relocation services still need to be determined. While these estimates are preliminary, they are in alignment with the costs associated with the current state-owned sanctioned encampment. It is important to note that the operation of smaller encampments, which may be necessary or desirable in some cases, significantly increases the cost per 'bed', since there are minimum costs for certain operational elements.

<b>PRELIMINARY ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS FOR SANCTIONED ENCAMPMENTS BY CAPACITY</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Encampment Capacity: 50</b>	<b>Encampment Capacity: 100</b>
Lighting (Rental cost & servicing)	\$35,200	\$70,400
General Operational Staffing	\$150,000	\$150,000
Security Staffing (2 individuals 24/7)	\$390,000	\$390,000
Social Services	\$171,100	\$335,500
Restrooms (Rental cost & servicing)	\$10,000	\$10,000
Shower Trailer (Rental cost & servicing)	\$100,000	\$100,000
Trash & Maintenance	\$35,000	\$35,000
Meals	\$300,000	\$600,000
Laundry	\$175,500	\$175,500
Storage Costs	\$2,000	\$4,000
<b>ESTIMATED *MINIMUM* COSTS</b>	<b>\$1,368,800.00</b>	<b>\$1,870,400.00</b>
<b>ADDITIONAL COSTS TBD</b>		
Utilities	TBD	TBD
Relocation Services	TBD	TBD

**Identification of Potential City of Austin Sites**

Staff has reviewed over 70 city-owned properties for suitability as a sanctioned encampment location. These sites are managed by an array of city departments for a variety of purposes. Preliminary prospects include locations managed by Parks and Recreation, Austin Housing Finance Corporation, Public Works, Austin Resource Recovery, and Austin Water Utility.

The initial round of site analysis has been completed using the following criteria:

1. Minimum size: 2 acres to serve 50 people, or 4 acres for 100 people
2. Access to water and electricity service (and/or cost to establish, if known)
3. Existing lighting
4. Terrain suitability
5. Flood risk
6. Wildfire risk
7. Proximity to a fire hydrant
8. Environmental sensitivity of land (i.e. habitat or preserve)
9. Expansion capacity
10. Availability for two-year temporary use
11. Presence of shaded areas
12. Access to public transportation
13. Proximity to critical retail and services
14. Proximity to schools
15. Potential disruption to existing public services or development plans

The review included city assets in all Council Districts, with the aim of designating at least one candidate encampment site in each district consistent with Council’s resolution. Staff has also

initiated the process of screening multiple locations for safe overnight parking. Additional research related to safe overnight parking locations continues.

### **Community and City Council Engagement**

In addition to existing mechanisms to gather and receive public comment (e.g. SpeakUp Austin, email, etc), the Homeless Strategy Division proposes coordinating at least one public meeting in each Council District where a site is being considered. Staff will coordinate with other relevant departments and Council Member offices to provide information and respond to formal inquiries made by residents and stakeholders. For any selected sites, staff will remain available to provide ongoing updates and address any community concerns as the process moves forward.

### **Next Steps**

In addition to meeting the need for crisis resources, the City of Austin is committed to pursuing long-term solutions to homelessness and will remain focused on existing initiatives and ambitious efforts to expand permanent housing options in our community.

During the May 18 Council Work Session, staff will present an overview of this strategy including potential land options for encampments and safe overnight parking. Should you have any questions, require additional information, or can offer suggestions for additional non-city-owned sites to consider, please contact Dianna Grey, Homeless Strategy Officer, at [dianna.grey@austintexas.gov](mailto:dianna.grey@austintexas.gov).

cc: CMO Executive Team  
Alex Gale, Real Estate Officer, Office of Real Estate Services  
Joel Baker, Chief, Austin Fire Department  
Richard Mendoza, Director, Austin Public Works Department  
Jorge Morales, Director, Watershed Protection Department  
Rosie Truelove, Director, Housing and Planning Department  
Adrienne Stirrup, Interim Director, Austin Public Health  
Ken Snipes, Director, Austin Resource Recovery