



DATE: February 23, 2016

CATEGORY: New Business

DEPT.: City Manager's Office

TITLE: **Safe Parking Program**

RECOMMENDATION

Consider the feasibility of implementing a pilot safe parking program for homeless individuals and families that are living in RVs and cars in Mountain View and provide direction on alternative options.

BACKGROUND

On October 19, 2015, the City Council held a Study Session to discuss a range of potential rent relief options and hear from housing experts and the public. The Study Session was held in response to residents attending Council meetings and requesting action in response to large rent increases and evictions. High rent increases are being reported throughout the Bay Area, along with reports of lower-income households having to work multiple jobs, doubling up in overcrowded apartments, moving to other communities, or living in their vehicles. Fifty-eight (58) percent of Mountain View residents rent their homes, and between 2011 and 2015, average monthly asking rents have increased almost 53 percent.

At the November 10, 2015 Council meeting, the Council directed staff to return with an agenda item providing a brief description of safe parking programs in response to an increasing number of cars and RVs parking on City streets that are being used for dwelling purposes.

On December 1, 2015, staff presented a variety of rent relief options for Council consideration, which included a brief overview of safe parking programs that have been established in other localities across the State. The Council directed staff to continue to review aspects of a safe parking program and return with more information.

ANALYSIS

The City of Mountain View is facing a growing number of people living in their vehicles, a problem exacerbated by the high cost of living and increasing rents in the region. This issue is not exclusive to Mountain View and is occurring in many cities throughout the Bay Area and across California.

The objective of a safe parking program is to provide individuals living in their RVs and cars with a safe and legal place to park overnight. In addition to parking, services are provided to address basic needs associated with other forms of housing (such as electricity, waste removal, and hygiene) and also to assist with the transition into permanent housing. A successful safe parking program requires careful planning, collaboration among providers and key stakeholders, and consistent monitoring and evaluation. In addition, any effort to provide a safe parking program must balance the interests of the vehicularly housed population with the local community at large.

It is also important to note the community impact of implementing a safe parking program. All existing safe parking programs across California operate in the evening hours; none operate during the day. Accordingly, if Mountain View were to implement a safe parking program, the number of people living in their vehicles on City streets during the day would most likely stay the same or increase, as individuals would still need a place to park their RV or car during daytime hours. Moreover, establishing a safe parking program could attract other vehicularly homeless to Mountain View because there are no existing safe parking programs in north Santa Clara County. Individuals cannot be compelled to participate in a safe parking program, nor is there capacity to serve everyone living in an RV or car. As a result, neighborhood concerns would likely remain unless the City enforces no overnight parking.

Safe Parking Programs in California

Safe parking programs have been implemented in several areas across the State. Program details are provided below and a summary is in Attachment 1. Review of these models shows that cities usually play a limited role in the development and operation of safe parking programs, with county and nonprofit agencies typically in the lead.

Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara's safe parking program began operations in 2005 in one public commuter lot. It is operated by the New Beginnings Counseling Center (NBCC). The program has since expanded to a total of 19 sites across the county, including at churches, nonprofit

organizations, and city and county parking lots. NBCC provides participant screening and selection, vehicle inspection, issuance and review of permits, daily RV check-in and check-out, case management for the participants, monitoring of the RV parking areas, and liaison with city staff on a regular basis. There is currently a wait list for the 120 available spaces. NBCC receives funding from Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants, the cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta, and the County of Santa Barbara. The parking lots are open seven days a week from approximately 9:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.

Monterey

One Starfish currently operates five sites with 25 spaces in Monterey. There is a maximum of six vehicles per site. The lots are open seven days a week between 7:00 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. A social worker screens applicants, monitors the site, and conducts criminal background checks as part of the screening process for qualified participants. Applicants must work on obtaining a secure source of income, must be willing to address health issues, and must work towards attaining permanent housing. This month, the city council approved a new city-owned lot by the public library to be used for safe parking. In addition to the city lot, One Starfish hopes to bring on additional parking lots in Carmel Valley, Carmel, and in the unincorporated area of the County.

Sonoma

Catholic Charities is a faith-based nonprofit who operates a safe parking program in Sonoma County. The program was initially located at the County's fairgrounds, but has since expanded to seven church and government locations across the county. Laundry and shower services are available at the nonprofit's central location. Clients must be enrolled in the case management system and actively work towards securing traditional housing. Currently, there are 65 participating vehicles with an additional 20 waitlisted, and 11 spaces are maintained specifically for families. Approximately 20 new spaces are anticipated to become available at the county's administrative building. The parking lots are open seven days a week from approximately 8:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.

San Luis Obispo

Community Action Partnership San Luis Obispo launched a six-month initial pilot program for five cars in one lot. Once the program proved successful, the city council voted to make the program permanent and increased the lot capacity from five to seven cars. Participants are required to enroll in the nonprofit's case management system to end homelessness. The program also requires that clients pay a monthly fee for the services it receives, between 50 percent and 70 percent of their income, most of whom

only receive income from government transfers. The program hours are from 4:45 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.

San Diego

Dreams for Change, a nonprofit services provider, established San Diego County's Safe Parking Program with seed funding from the county's Health and Human Services Agency, as well as private donations and foundation grants. The program's 72 spaces are open on a first-come, first-served basis at two church locations. Individuals seeking a parking spot must call in advance, although families with minors will always receive a space to park in. Dreams for Change ensures that each participant regularly works with a case manager to receive assistance with employment. It also helps participants secure government documents such as car registration and a government identification card if they do not have one already. Dreams for Change partnered with both San Diego State University and Cal State San Marcos's School of Social Work to secure student interns in order to augment the part-time case managers.

Regional Developments

Last year, the Santa Clara County Housing Task Force recommended piloting safe parking programs at two sites in Central County and one site each in North County and South County. The Board of Supervisors ultimately approved piloting a program in San Jose and provided funding of \$50,000 to help offset implementation costs.

In June 2015, the City of San Jose issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for qualified organizations to oversee and operate a pilot "Essential Services Program" at one or more locations in San Jose, incorporating both a safe parking program and a mobile hygiene program. There were no responses to the RFP at that time. The City reissued the RFP in November 2015 with a total operating amount of \$750,000, and a target implementation date of March 2016. The goal was 30 parking spaces.

The RFP included a question as to whether the potential vendor(s) would be willing to operate these programs in Mountain View. In January 2016, San Jose received one proposal for a safe parking program, and one proposal for the mobile hygiene program. Mountain View staff participated in the RFP selection review panel.

San Jose is awarding \$300,000 to Amigos De Guadalupe Center for Justice and Empowerment, a partner of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, to operate a pilot safe parking program for 16 months. San Jose staff is currently in the process of discussing program components and logistics with the vendor, and has not yet decided on an implementation date. The vendor indicated that it does not have the capacity or interest

to operate a safe parking program in Mountain View, as the program will likely be located on the church premises in San Jose.

San Jose is also awarding \$350,000 to Project WeHOPE to operate a mobile hygiene and laundry service, Dignity on Wheels (DOW). It is anticipated that this program will be launched in March 2016, prior to the start of the safe parking program. It will be located on-site at the Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish. Project WeHOPE indicated that it would be interested in operating DOW in Mountain View.

Safe Parking Program Framework

There are several considerations for implementing a safe parking program: understanding the target population to be served; determining suitable parking lot locations; identifying a program operator; deciding on and arranging for additional services; providing for waste disposal; addressing the need for hygiene services such as toilets, showers, laundry, and fresh water; addressing liability issues; determining the level of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review; and securing program funding.

Target Population

One of the first steps in operating a successful safe parking program is to have a thorough understanding of the target population. This is necessary in order to inform the overall program goals and implement the program design.

The 2015 Santa Clara County Point-In-Time Homeless Census and Survey indicated that there are 271 unsheltered individuals in Mountain View (living on streets, or in parks, encampments, or vehicles) and 5 that are sheltered (living in County shelters), for a total of 276 (Attachment 2). This is a marked increase from a total of 139 homeless persons in Mountain View in 2013. The survey indicated that a total of 6,556 persons are homeless throughout Santa Clara County, of which 8 percent are currently living in their vehicles across the County.

The City does not have specific data on how many families, children, or single individuals are living in RVs, motorhomes, or cars in Mountain View. Moreover, staff is unaware of whether these individuals were Mountain View residents prior to being homeless, whether they have family living in Mountain View, or whether they currently work or have previously worked in Mountain View.

What is known, however, is that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of RVs, cars, and motorhomes being parked overnight in residential and mixed residential

areas, particularly on Crisanto Avenue, Latham Street near Showers Drive, Dale Avenue, Continental Circle, and the Shoreline Boulevard corridor.

In late October 2015, Police Officers conducted patrol checks on both Latham Street and Crisanto Avenue. In the early morning hours of October 27, 2015, a total of 21 vehicles were parked on Crisanto Avenue, 14 of which were RVs or campers and 7 vans/cars that appeared to be lived in. On Latham Street, there were 14 RVs and 4 cars that were being lived in. More recently, on January 8, 2016, at approximately 3:30 p.m., City staff counted 37 RVs and vans/cars parked along Crisanto Avenue that appeared to be lived in, and 12 along Latham Street.

The Police Department enforces a 72-hour parking limit on City streets, as well as expired vehicle registration and nuisance violations. In 2015, officers issued approximately 47 citations to vehicles classified as an RV or motorhome, with the most citations on Crisanto Avenue and Space Park Way.

The Mountain View Whisman School District currently has approximately 30 students who meet the criteria of being homeless. The school district requires that a parent sign an affidavit stating that they are homeless. The school district is not allowed to ask any questions; therefore, it is unknown how many of these children and youth are living in RVs or cars with their parents.

Staff has worked closely with the Community Services Agency (CSA) in discussing a possible safe parking program in Mountain View. CSA arranged for City staff to meet with several homeless individuals who are living in their vehicles. The conversation centered on each individual's current living situation and whether a safe parking program would be beneficial. Staff also met with representatives from the Day Worker Center and Hope's Corner in order to understand the needs of the vehicularly based homeless individuals they serve.

During these meetings, staff was provided with the following anecdotal accounts of people who are living in RVs and cars on City streets:

- Some individuals have housing in other California cities, particularly in the Central Valley, and drive to Mountain View to work. They live in their RVs or cars during the work week, and then return home on the weekends.
- Some individuals used to live in Mountain View, moved away, and returned only to face increased rents they now cannot afford. They are choosing to live in their vehicles rather than move somewhere else.

- Some individuals parking along Crisanto Avenue are not interested in a safe parking program because they have close access to Rengstorff Park, water and restroom facilities, and other retail outlets. They do not want to move their RVs or vehicles at night.
- Some individuals are long-time Mountain View residents that can no longer afford asking rents and have taken to their vehicles to live.
- Some individuals living in RVs are paying rents of approximately \$400 per month to the RV owners.
- Some individuals living in RVs and cars are already receiving services from CSA, and are only interested in a parking program if it is operated 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.
- Some families have three generations of family members living together in an RV.

If Council is interested in more information about vehicle dwellers in Mountain View, it would be possible to conduct a census. Staff consulted with the nonprofit organization, LifeMoves, formerly known as InnVision Shelter Network, about its work with homeless individuals. LifeMoves has experience conducting surveys of the vehicularly homeless, including conducting a survey in Palo Alto of families and individuals living in their RVs and cars. Flyers were placed on vehicles that appeared to be inhabited giving notice to the owner that a survey would be conducted the following day at a specific time, along with offering a gift card of either \$10 or \$20 as an incentive for answering survey questions. LifeMoves staff returned the next day and asked 8 to 10 questions of the vehicle inhabitants. This process occurred over 120 days, and a report was provided upon completion detailing the findings and data. The cost of contracting for this type of service is approximately \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Parking Lot Location(s)

A primary consideration of implementing a safe parking program is identifying possible parking lot locations. Safe parking programs in other communities use both private and public parking lots, often located at churches, nonprofits, and government buildings.

The most common option is to utilize church parking lots. Staff met with a few local churches about the possibility of hosting safe parking sites. Although the churches that were contacted are supportive of the safe parking program in concept, most will not allow a safe parking program to operate on their premises. The cited reasons include:

parking lots being used for evening classes and events; concern about noise complaints from neighbors; unwilling congregation; proximity to schools; safety considerations; and concern about legal liability. One church is open to the idea of hosting three families on its lot, but cannot accommodate additional RVs or cars.

Staff also spoke with the nonprofit, Faith In Action Bay Area, formerly known as Peninsula Interfaith Action. While supportive of safe parking programs, they have experienced significant neighborhood opposition to creating similar programs in other cities in the region. They also indicated that many churches in their network are not open to hosting a safe parking site for the same reasons cited above.

Further outreach would be required in order to assess whether there are other churches in Mountain View or the region that may be amenable to hosting a safe parking program on-site.

Staff reviewed 14 available City-owned properties that could be considered for a safe parking program in Mountain View, although there are challenges with each option (Attachment 3). Most safe parking programs have a perimeter requirement to regulate distances between vehicles parked in a safe parking lot and neighboring residential properties. Using that guideline, there are very few City lots that are suitable for operating a safe parking program on an ongoing basis.

All of the City-owned lots are located near residential areas or the downtown business district with the exception of Shoreline Amphitheatre Lots A and B, which are only available for a limited time period because they are used for concert parking during the months of April through October. The downtown parking lots along Hope Street are adjacent to restaurants and other retail establishments, and are used by patrons into the late evening hours. Other lots are located in community parks. The best option among City lots may be to use the Rengstorff Park or Community Center lots, or use the Shoreline lots in the winter months.

Staff approached the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) about the use of its lots for a safe parking program. The VTA has a two-acre parking lot at the corner of East Evelyn Avenue and Pioneer Way. This lot was once used primarily for parking for patrons of the Evelyn Avenue light rail station, which was closed for service about a year ago. Since then, VTA has used the majority of the lot for construction staging for their double track project. VTA staff stated that they are currently developing a strategic analysis of VTA real property, which is expected to be completed within the next couple of months, and are unwilling to commit their parking lot at this time.

Staff also reached out to LinkedIn and Google to receive feedback on using any available parking lots on their properties. LinkedIn indicated that there does not appear to be any suitable lots that could be used for a community safe parking program. Many employees often work late and park in various lots into the evening hours. They are also concerned about liability and security of the employees and buildings. Staff does not yet have any indication whether Google lots may be viable for use, but similar issues are likely.

A dialogue was started between City staff and NASA Ames on the possibility of using Federal land to address the growing number of people living in their RVs and cars. NASA Ames has indicated it is not possible to use Federal land for this program.

Should Council wish to implement a safe parking program, it may be a challenge to find a suitable space unless a City-owned lot is used, or unless a nonprofit or faith-based organization is willing to house the program on its premises. Additional research and outreach would be required to investigate alternative options.

Program Operator and Service Provider

The most comprehensive safe parking programs go beyond simply providing parking spaces, but also provide services to assist participants in moving from their vehicles into permanent housing.

Therefore, an important factor in developing a safe parking program is identifying an agency to operate the program and provide services to the participants. One or more agencies should possess the institutional and management knowledge to administer the safe parking program's responsibilities. It is preferable that the organization has expertise in serving the homeless population and managing grant funding.

An operator would likely oversee components such as the following for an effective safe parking program:

- Referrals to the program.
- Centralized intake and client screening.
- Length of stay.
- Hours of operation.
- Provide hygiene services such as toilets, waste disposal, and fresh water.

- Determine whether pets are allowed.
- Verify vehicle registration, insurance, and a valid driver's license.
- Monitor the parking lot and perform security checks.
- Determine method of allocating space if demand increases the supply.
- Interact with neighbors and the City regarding complaints.
- Implement a code of conduct and other rules that govern those participating in the program.
- Provide connections to social services, including case management, referral coordination, housing assistance, mental health and substance abuse treatment options, food, counseling services, and child care

Another consideration of operating a safe parking program is establishing the demographic components of the parking site. The site could be available for anyone who is referred to the program and passes screening, or separate lots could be established for families, individuals with children, or single women.

Staff has been unable to identify a nonprofit organization or church that is interested in operating a safe parking program in Mountain View. The CSA is open to partnering with the City on this issue, but is not able to commit at this time to operate a program or provide safety net services. However, the CSA, as well as the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, is willing to convene a meeting of regional stakeholders to discuss this issue.

Should Council wish to implement a safe parking program, an RFP could be issued to determine the level of interest of possible qualified operators.

Waste Disposal

One of the environmental impacts related to RV dwellings is accidental and intentional discharges from the RV waste tanks to City streets, gutters, and storm drains. These releases pose health and safety risks and are strictly prohibited. Enforcement of these violations and cleanup of the releases require significant staff time and resources from the Police Department, Fire Department, and the Public Services Division. Staff

responded to 2 incidents in Fiscal Year 2012-13, 1 incident in Fiscal Year 2013-14, and 10 incidents in Fiscal Year 2014-15.

The only RV waste dumping stations in the region are located in Redwood City and Morgan Hill. Costs are approximately \$20 per disposal. The lack of a convenient local disposal option complicates staff's ability to provide guidance and assistance to the RV owners.

To minimize the potential for ongoing waste tank discharges to the storm drain, staff has discussed possible options to provide a local RV waste disposal site, which typically would be a constructed pad with a waste drain connection to the sanitary sewer. The Municipal Operations Center and Rengstorff Park could be potential locations for a disposal site, but further investigation is required to evaluate all possible options and the cost. Alternatively, a private facility operator would be able to provide this service, if a local business could be identified to install and operate the system.

An alternative to a waste disposal site that is plumbed to the sanitary sewer may be to install a waste collection tank, which would need to be routinely pumped and disposed by a septic hauling company. Additional research would be needed to determine not only the design and construction requirements, but also the long-term operational requirements for any type of facility. Administrative and engineered controls would be required to reduce the risk associated with potential hazardous waste discharges to the sanitary sewer through waste disposal station. Administrative controls may include permitting, monitoring, reporting, signage, and staffing during the hours of operation, in addition to pretreatment devices and a lockable cover for the drain.

Hygiene Services

It is recommended that a safe parking host site would need to provide access to basic needs such as showers, toilets, fresh water, and waste disposal. Additional services to consider include laundry, access to electricity, storage, and food.

When staff met with individuals currently living in their vehicles, the primary concern was sanitation, hygiene, and access to toilets. These services were more important to them than the prospect of a safe parking program.

To address this issue, Council could consider working with the CSA or another group to bring a mobile hygiene and laundry service to Mountain View. In addition to the CSA, one local church has expressed willingness to locate this service on-site once per week.

DOW is a mobile hygiene and laundry service operated by Project WeHOPE. It features a customized shower and laundry trailer, with two shower/toilet rooms, and two washer/dryer machines. One of the rooms is ADA compliant and has a ramp and the ability to lower the trailer for wheelchair access.

DOW operates in 4-hour sessions. It can provide up to 30 showers and 14 to 16 loads of laundry per session. There are two to three staff on-site per session: one driver (who also cleans the rooms after each use) and one intake coordinator. A third person may be present from the organization hosting the DOW on-site. The cost to operate DOW is approximately \$300 to \$500 per session. It would cost approximately \$52,000 per year if DOW were to come to Mountain View for two sessions per week.

DOW currently works with nonprofits and local agencies throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties.

Liability

As mentioned above, the use of City-owned property is being reviewed as a potential option for the safe parking program. The City must maintain public property using due care and consistent with the property's use. This applies to any City-owned property used for the safe parking program as the City would be inviting members of the public onto City property. If a third-party provider manages the program, the City could require this provider to hold the City harmless from any liability related to the administration of the program.

CEQA Analysis

Council's decision regarding the location and scope of a potential program would inform the CEQA analysis.

FISCAL IMPACT

Depending on the size and scale of the safe parking program, operating costs vary greatly between \$24,000 and \$750,000. Most safe parking operators receive funding from grants, foundations, private donations, or city and county funds. Council could choose to fund all or part of a pilot safe parking program in Mountain View. The Silicon Valley Community Foundation has indicated an interest in partnering with the City on a program, and may be able to secure some funding from private donors. County staff has also expressed an interest in partnering with the City and providing funding of approximately \$50,000 toward a program. Council could also provide all or some funding to bring DOW to Mountain View. One session per week could cost

around \$500, for an annual total of \$26,000. Two sessions per week would cost approximately \$52,000 annually.

CONCLUSION

Staff has made considerable efforts in working with numerous stakeholders to discuss a pilot safe parking program, including nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, community leaders, local government agencies, and homeless individuals. Council should discuss the feasibility of implementing a safe parking program in Mountain View and provide direction on alternative options. Starting a safe parking program will take a significant amount of time and coordination with one or more nonprofits and/or the faith community. A measured and deliberate approach would be necessary to ensure program success. The biggest challenges are identifying an appropriate location and securing a qualified operator. No easy solutions were found for either. Another possibility is to initiate a mobile hygiene service and/or a waste disposal service.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Council could convene a meeting of regional stakeholders, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations to discuss implementing a safe parking program in north Santa Clara County.
2. Council could raise the issue at a meeting of the Cities Association of Santa Clara County and advocate for a regional safe parking program.
3. Council could release an RFP for applicants to operate a safe parking program in Mountain View.
4. Council could provide funding to bring DOW or a similar service to Mountain View.
5. Council could contract with a nonprofit agency to conduct a census of homeless individuals residing in RVs and cars in Mountain View.
6. Council could explore creation of a waste disposal site or service in Mountain View.
7. Council could decide not to consider a safe parking program at this time.
8. Council could provide other direction to staff.

PUBLIC NOTICING

The meeting agenda and Council report have been posted on the City's website and announced on Channel 26 cable television. Notices have been provided to stakeholder groups, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, neighborhood associations, and other interested parties.

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- Attachments:
1. Safe Parking Programs in California
 2. Santa Clara County Point-In-Time Homeless Census
 3. City-Owned Properties