

VEHICULAR LIVING WORKGROUP



April 2017

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NOTE: The data used in the Vehicular Living Workgroup and information included in this document reflect figures from King County's 2016 Point in Time Count. The Workgroup and this document were completed prior to the June 2017 release date of the King County Point in Time Count. The Point in Time Count is the count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January, which is required by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development to receive funding under the McKinney-Vento Act. Data from other sources will be indicated.

City of Seattle City Council
Councilmember Mike O'Brien - Vehicular Living Workgroup Memorandums
April 2017

Background

Since 2010, the number of people living without shelter in Seattle has risen dramatically despite increased homelessness investments. City investments have been part of 6,700 peoples' exits from homelessness into permanent housing in 2015¹ throughout King County. Yet, homelessness increased by 19%² that very next year. This common theme of an annual increase illustrates that efforts of addressing homelessness are outpaced the by factors the City cannot resolve alone. Structural injustices, including racism, gender disparity, heterosexism, ableism, economic inequity, and cultural barriers extensively intersect and exacerbate the crisis of homelessness. Even more specifically, income inequality, lack of mental health care access, unaffordable rents, and the substance use disorder crisis have created enormous macro pressures, contributing to the homelessness crisis.

In 2015, Seattle's Human Service Department (HSD) contracted with Focus Strategies and Barb Poppe and Associates to evaluate the City's homelessness investments. The analysis reports that were produced informed the City's recent homelessness investments framework called the *Pathways Home Initiative*. The City's *Pathways Home Initiative* makes substantial recommendations – including major investment shifts from short-term emergency interventions to long-term solutions and prioritizing person-centered approaches³. However, each of the reports and action plans used to build this investment framework did not specifically address unique challenges of people residing in vehicles while data from 2016 shows that population amounts to 30% of Seattle's unsheltered population².

Additionally in 2015, safe parking programs, referred to as *safe lots* and *safe zones*, were established to reduce the number of vehicle residences inside neighborhoods and intensely support transitions to housing⁴. The Executive analyzed the programs to be ineffective allocations of funding and have disbanded all but one safe lot in SODO. Councilmember Mike O'Brien championed the Road to Housing Program previously in 2012. The program is currently a \$300,000 contract through HSD that provides funding for case management, outreach, and safe parking site locating at congregations. In addition to the remaining safe lot, this is currently the only City investment that is specific to vehicular residences. This calls for a real need in funding, programming, and policy direction to specifically address vehicular living and associated challenges.

¹ "A Message from the Mayor." "Seattle's Person-Centered Plan to Support People Experiencing Homelessness." City of Seattle Homelessness Response. 2016, <http://www.seattle.gov/pathwayshome>.

² "2016 Count Results." Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness, 29 January 2016, http://www.homelessinfo.org/what_we_do/one_night_count/2016_results.php.

³ "Pathways Home." City of Seattle Human Services Department. <http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/pathwayshome/ActionPlan.pdf>

⁴ "State of Emergency Implementation Plan." <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/pathwayshome/SOEImplementationPlan.pdf>

Workgroup

To inform policy direction, Councilmember O'Brien convened the Vehicular Living Workgroup in March 2017. The workgroup was given the charge: "provide recommendations to Councilmember O'Brien and other policy makers on solutions that meet the needs of vulnerable populations living in vehicles due to inaccessible housing and address neighborhood impacts of vehicular living."

The workgroup members included: Hilary Carr, Road to Housing; Reverend Bill Kirlin-Hackett, Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness; Jean Darsie, Ballard Task Force on Homelessness and Hunger; Jennifer Adams, Women's Housing, Equality and Enhancement League; Erin Goodman, SODO BIA; Tom Paine, Ballard Alliance Ratepayers Advisory Board; Yuriy Rudensky, Columbia Legal Services; Sara Rankin, Seattle University School of Law, Homeless Rights Advocacy Project; Kelly Welker, Georgetown Community Council; Mike Stewart, Ballard Alliance; and Steven Long, Community Member.

The group participated in four working meetings and contributed virtually through March and April 2017 to formalize the recommendations. Because it was the goal of the workgroup to develop all possible policy solutions, consensus was not required and thus the recommendations lay the groundwork for potential policy and programming advancements. The recommended proposals were created by identifying the specific problems associated with vehicular residences. The final list was drafted by Legislative staff and will be used to engage the Executive, relevant departments, and regional partners for potential advancements. Organizations with issue-specific expertise that were not able to participate in the four working meetings and all workgroup members had the opportunity to present additional recommendations, which are included as addendums in this document.

City of Seattle City Council
Councilmember Mike O'Brien - Vehicular Living Workgroup Recommendations
April 2017

Summary List:

1. Fund community needs assessment.
2. Adapt 'boot view' or use new technology to indicate vehicle residency; analyze disproportionate impacts on enforcement.
3. Formalize parking enforcement process to determine vehicle residency and divert harmful penalties.
4. Fund fee mitigation services.
5. Expand outreach and supportive services.
6. Increase mobile healthcare services.
7. Create a robust safe parking program.
8. Develop recreational vehicle campgrounds.
9. Invest in an auto-mechanic skills training program for vehicular residents.

PROBLEM STATEMENT	<p>Incomplete data: Data collection is key in helping determine effective policy decisions. The City has completed two large scale survey projects for people who were living outside within the past decade, which provided important insights into the lives and experiences of people living without shelter. While the latest needs assessment accounted for a majority of the people experiencing homelessness, the City has not conducted similar research into identifying the needs and strengths of people living inside vehicles. Having this type of data allows for policies to be better informed from the communities most impacted.</p>
SOLUTION RECOMMENDATION	<p>Fund research: Prioritize resources for a large-scale needs assessment on issues and experiences of vehicular living, similar to the City’s assessment of the needs of individuals living in unsanctioned encampments.</p>

PROBLEM STATEMENT	<p>Unidentifiable vehicular residences: Seattle Police Department’s Parking Enforcement Division uses a technology referred to as an ‘automatic license plate reader’, which views license plates and registers relevant information. Parking Enforcement Officers use these readers to identify which vehicles are on the Scofflaw List and therefore eligible for impoundment. This has resulted in people’s vehicles that are used as residences being impounded, destabilizing those individuals, incurring further fines and fees, and making it more difficult for them to get into housing. There is not a technological indicator to inform an officer whether a vehicle is being lived in. Additionally, without an indication of residency, there is currently no data specific to vehicular residences and associated criminal or civil infractions.</p>
SOLUTION RECOMMENDATION	<p>Build informative database: Explore the Seattle Police Department’s capability to adapt the ‘automatic license plate reader’ program or build a new database to record vehicles used as residences to reduce impoundments and other punitive measures, and to divert them instead to services and outreach and less problematic parking options. The indicator of a residential vehicle will also provide the necessary data to analyze enforcement practices and other issues to further inform policy and programming options.</p>

PROBLEM STATEMENT	<p>Informal parking enforcement: The Seattle Police Department and its Parking Enforcement Division sometimes informally determine if a vehicle is used as a residence when enforcing parking regulations and other laws. These discretionary practices have been supportive of people living in a vehicle in certain situations, but does not totally prevent harmful penalties. Without an official process of determining necessary enforcement and services, people lose their only form of a residence. Additionally, the lack of formalized parking enforcement regulations has caused divides between traditionally housed and vehicle residents. Clarifying and enforcing the regulations transparently would help create a clear path to resolve the situation for both vehicular residents and the housed neighbors.</p>
SOLUTION RECOMMENDATION	<p>Ensure more formal parking enforcement: Explore options for a formal Seattle Police Department process to determine if a vehicle is being used as a residence. The formal determination should also serve as an entry point to connect vehicular residences with social services, mitigation support, as well as limit impoundments of residential vehicles. One option for this process could potentially be the indicator described in ‘automatic license plate reader’ technology application or other process that uses social work principles and harm reduction strategies.</p>

PROBLEM STATEMENT	<p>Inability to meet vehicular costs: The inability to afford certain vehicular costs ranging from tabs to parking violations is usually met with civil penalties. One parking ticket from the City of Seattle is a \$42 penalty, which surpasses the daily average of Social Security Disability benefits⁵. This points to financial barriers – placing monetary penalties for economic challenges is not readily beneficial to a pathway towards housing. Currently, when an individual is identified as “indigent” by Seattle’s Parking Enforcement discretion or the Municipal Court, the individual is referred to the ‘Scofflaw Mitigation Team’. This entity is an informal makeup of community advocates, receives no funding, yet meets many of these types of financial needs. Without this type of support, vehicular residents would face even more economic hardship.</p>
SOLUTION RECOMMENDATION	<p>Fund fee mitigation services: Investigate funding opportunities for fee mitigation services, such as the Scofflaw Mitigation Team, to provide financial resources for vehicular residents with parking violations, licensing, titles, insurance, tabs, and emissions testing. Programming should also be developed to streamline availability of these services.</p>

⁵ Social Security Administration. Research, Statistics, & Policy Analysis. Monthly Statistical Snapshot. June 2017. https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat_snapshot/

PROBLEM STATEMENT	Insufficient outreach: Outreach and case management are necessary tools to support people and families experiencing homeless in achieving their own economic, social, and health goals. The City has contracted with Compass Housing Alliance since 2012 to fund the Road to Housing Program that provides vehicle residents outreach, case management, and safe parking locations at various congregations ⁶ . The contract funding allows for one program manager, one outreach worker, and two case managers. This staffing combination is effective but doesn't have the capacity to meet the needs of hundreds of vehicle residents. In comparison with four staff, the One Night Count recorded 914 vehicles being used as residences ² . The City has evolved its outreach practices to people living in encampments through forming the Navigation Team but that entity does not traditionally outreach to vehicle residences.
SOLUTION RECOMMENDATION	Expand outreach and supportive services: Explore outreach expansion models such as increasing funding for Road To Housing program, increasing funding to restructure Navigation Team to include specific vehicular living team, and/or incorporating the Road To Housing program into a Navigation Team expansion to be specific to vehicular living. Outreach teams should also be more exhaustive than only providing referrals and should include flexibility of providing case management and other types of support such as intense housing transitions. Evaluations of outcomes from these services should also be included.

PROBLEM STATEMENT	Inadequate healthcare access: Providing medical services to people where they are, both physically and emotionally, is necessary in meeting healthcare needs. The City partially funds King County's Medical Mobile program that builds relationships with people experiencing homelessness by providing patient-led health and social services. In 2015, the program provided medical services to 890,283 individuals, ranging from referrals to important diagnoses such as diabetes ⁷ . This program certainly proves success, yet the City of Seattle 2016 Homeless Needs Assessment showed that 30% of participants did not receive medical care while homeless; one individual even requested the very type of program that Mobile Medical provides ⁸ .
SOLUTION RECOMMENDATION	Increase healthcare services: Expand Mobile Medical services and determine other options for increasing healthcare services for individuals and families living in vehicles including funding healthcare workers as part of the City's outreach continuum.

⁶ Seattle City Council. Mike O'Brien. Road to Housing. <http://www.seattle.gov/council/meet-the-council/mike-obrien/road-to-housing>

⁷ Public Health – King County and Seattle. Mobile medical care for people living homeless. 2017. <http://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/locations/homeless-health/mobile-medical-care.aspx>

⁸ Applied Survey Research. City of Seattle 2016 Homeless Needs Assessment. 2017. <http://coshumaninterests.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/City-of-Seattle-Report-FINAL-with-4.11.17-additions.pdf>

PROBLEM STATEMENT	Inadequate safe parking: A continual relocation of one’s personal space can create significant negative impacts and barriers to achieving many goals. The 2016 region’s Point in Time Count documented 914 people in Seattle living in vehicles ² because of inaccessible and unaffordable housing. This number represents 30% of Seattle’s homeless population and is without parking options or access to stable, personal space. The City currently has only one active safe lot, which is scheduled to close, and lacks any other substantial parking options. Vehicular residents are forced to navigate potentially harmful parking laws, which also results in negative neighborhood impacts including discarded waste and problematic parking.
SOLUTION RECOMMENDATION	Create a safe parking program: Explore incentives and available land to develop City-wide safe parking program. An adequate portion of the safe parking program should be designated to individuals with different needs, including substance use challenges. Sites should limit capacity to 5-6 vehicles. The program should be directly managed by a social service provider and include several staff supervising multiple sites to manage operations, while business and other property engagement should be led by a real-estate entity. Additionally, programming should include community building events and provide access to water, laundry, showers, electricity, and waste removal onsite, in immediate proximity, or through frequent mobile services.

PROBLEM STATEMENT	Lack of recreational vehicle parking: Having access to personal space is critical for one’s own health and stability. Many of the 914 vehicle residents counted during the 2016 One Night Count were those residing inside RVs ² . And while many municipalities include RV campgrounds, Seattle is without. RVs offer greater residential needs compared to other types of vehicles, which potentially impedes exits to permanent housing. RVs are also required to park only in areas zoned as manufacturing and industrial and are required to move every 72 hours which hinders stability. Without necessary access to utilities, disproportionate waste and garbage disposal in neighborhoods can be prevalent. The size of RVs also presents significant spatial parking challenges.
SOLUTION RECOMMENDATION	Develop recreational vehicular living campgrounds: Explore incentives and available land to develop City and/or County-wide RV and mobile-home campgrounds for safer parking options for vehicular residencies with housing needs or no traditionally permanent housing desires. These residential sites should be available for individuals and families who desire to reside in their vehicle long-term and those who wish to transition into housing more quickly. Management models could include a private business and homeless provider partnership or business only model. Additionally, opportunities for increasing stationary sites for waste dump or providing mobile pickup services should be researched.

PROBLEM STATEMENT	Missing skills-based programming: One of the greatest challenges with vehicular residences is maintenance challenges. Not having the monetary means to remedy a maintenance issue can also be an impediment to following City parking laws. While the immediate response to situations such as not being able to move a vehicle can be financial penalties, the reality is one financial penalty can have quite catastrophic, rippling impacts. With the unfunded Scofflaw Mitigation Team and limited flexible funding from the Road to Housing program, there is not ample opportunity for addressing vehicular repairs. A separate challenge also shared by vehicle residences is lack of opportunities to invest in new skills training.
SOLUTION RECOMMENDATION	Provide educational opportunities: Explore funding and programming options to educate vehicular residents through auto maintenance skills training by partnering with vocational colleges or using an assets mapping strategy in collaboration with a non-profit entity.

City of Seattle City Council
Councilmember Mike O'Brien - Vehicular Living Workgroup Addendum One
April 2017

PARTICIPANT	Anita Khandelwal, Twyla Carter King County Department of Public Defense
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- For safe parking program and vehicular living campgrounds, police should be directed to take a harm reduction approach to their involvement with these spaces. If individuals occupying them are active users, and the goal is meet their needs for a safe and stable parking, officers should not prioritize enforcement of laws prohibiting the use of controlled substances unless that use is threatening individual safety and safety of others.
- While the primary objective of expanding outreach appears to be to get people into housing, many of the individuals living in vehicles have convictions that disqualify them from most housing (e.g. sex offense). The City should have an idea of where it is willing to house individuals with such types of histories.
- Full support for increasing healthcare services.
- Funding mitigation services is important and there is also an upstream version of this, which is impounding vehicles that serve as homes. Individuals living in their vehicles are clearly not going to be able to pay these financial penalties. Helping them with their tabs/emissions testing/etc. will be of great support.
- Clarity of what precise information SPD would be collecting in any type of database, which is an important distinction in data gathering, is necessary to ensure safety and privacy.
- It would be useful to train officers in determining if a vehicle is being used as a residence so that even if the database is not created, or if a vehicle is not in the database, SPD knows not to ticket or impound the vehicle.
- The City should also reconsider laws restricting parking at particular hours. Forcing people living in vehicles to move for the sake of moving seems counter-productive to stabilization and increased opportunities for pathways to housing.

City of Seattle City Council
Councilmember Mike O'Brien - Vehicular Living Workgroup Addendum Two
April 2017

PARTICIPANT	Bill Kirlin-Hackett, Jean Darsie Seattle Scofflaw Mitigation Project, Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness
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Tools requiring further discussion and possible legislative action to implement:

1. Modify Seattle Scofflaw Ordinance to allow for indigency/inability to pay.
2. Safety Lots, in Seattle and around King County, providing off-street parking and access to a bathroom or portable toilet. These will enable VRs the safety and stability to be able to focus on future plans.
3. Change the requirements for having to move a vehicle/RV every 24-72 hours in select zones (e.g., keep some consistent countywide requirement in residential and retail neighborhoods)
4. Do more outreach to VRs, include in Coordinated Entry for All; i.e., vulnerability assessment, intake to HMIS, immediate enrollment where needed (i.e. SSDI, Medicaid).
5. Advocate for legislative changes to laws governing tabs for the indigent, and in the meantime, foster a harm reduction program countywide to avoid having tabs remain the prime reason for ticketing.
6. Open publicly-sponsored (or privately-operated through public RFPs) KOA-style lots, with RV utilities, for those seeking to remain in their RVs
7. Open opportunities for private business to host 2-3 vehicles in business parking on site, providing security for the business
8. Allow 3-5 vehicles be proximate on-street in non-retail, non-residential neighborhoods, forming an interim authorized parking option, with trash, porta-potties, and outreach to include to HMIS system.
9. Enter vehicle plates of verified VRs into electronic system, if available

Tools requiring public or private funding:

- A. Payment of tickets and/or deposits toward community service agreements beyond what the VR is able to do for themselves.
* Will require private funding as fines cannot be paid with City \$\$.
- B. Form new agreements with debt collection agencies where tickets are referred, when other mitigation is impossible, that are only used after a hearing with a Magistrate to assure that the VR is not pushed into indigency.
- C. Vehicle repair funds/volunteer services to keep vehicle running in order to avoid further ticketing
- D. Vehicle repair necessary to be eligible to apply for Road to Housing and/or other Safe Lot programs
- E. Vehicle repair necessary for basic 24 hour safety (fix broken windows, locks, lights)

- F. License tab renewal program that helps VRs keep their vehicle street-legal
- G. Basic Auto insurance coverage
- H. Drivers license renewal funds, with a tandem program to defer immediate ticketing as meeting-the-obligation grace period ensues
- I. Fuel (necessary to avoid ticketing, to get to appointments/work where bus is not practical)
- J. Bus tickets (for maintaining a safe parking place and going to work, medical appointments, and so on)
- K. Phone and/or phone minutes (necessary to communicate with service providers, etc.)
- L. Food cards where food bank not accessible

Trained outreach worker (as mentioned in 5. Above):

- i. Able to do intake/immediate referrals for Road to Housing, other programs
- ii. Able to screen and refer to a Safety Lot (assumes lots are available, public and private)
- iii. Able to refer to social services, via Coordinated Entry for All, All Home
- iv. Able to refer to a volunteer advocate for assistance** in accessing services if requested

** Accompany to Court for tickets, magistrate hearing, financial counseling

** Accompany to social service agencies, healthcare appointments, job interviews

Volunteer advocate pool:

- i. Retired social worker or someone who has taken companionship training
- ii. Have insured vehicle and current license, and can transport VR if needed to access services, healthcare appointments, etc.
- iii. Have a cell phone (to maintain contact with VR, make social service appointments if needed)
- iv. Able to accompany VR if requested where advocacy may be needed (to Court, etc.)