SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL
CENTRAL STAFF

September 9, 2026

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Public Safety Committee
From: Amanda Allen and Jennifer LaBrecque, Legislative Analysts
Subject: Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit Program Legislative Package

Introduction and Overview

On August 11, 2026, the Public Safety Committee discussed six different pieces of legislation developed at the request of Councilmember Strauss, all on the agenda as informational items, that would address issues relating to vehicle residents. All six pieces of legislation were introduced on August 18, 2026, and will be further discussed at a special meeting of the Public Safety Committee on September 15, 2026.

Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit Program Legislative Package (six pieces of legislation):

1. Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit Program Resolution (RES 32216)
2. Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit Program Ordinance (CB 121283)
3. Outdoor Storage Definition Update Ordinance (CB 121281)
4. Facilities and Administrative Services (FAS) Signature Authority Ordinance (CB 121279)
5. Junk Vehicle Definition Update Ordinance (CB 121280)
6. Program Appropriations ORD (CB 121282)

Background

The King County Regional Homelessness Authority's 2024 Point in-Time (PIT) Count identified 16,868 individuals experiencing homelessness countywide on one night. Of those, 57 percent or 9,810 were experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness, 27 percent or 2,569 people were living and sleeping in a vehicle such as a car, truck, van, trailer, small board or recreational vehicle[1]. The number of unsheltered homelessness rose by 26 percent from the 2022 to 2024 PIT count and by nine percent from the 2024 to 2026 PIT count.

Current Laws Impacting Vehicle Residents

Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) bans the parking of commercial and large-size vehicles (vans, motor homes, travel trailers, buses, trucks, and delivery vehicles) wider than 80 inches between 12 a.m. and 6 a.m., except in an Industrial Zone (SMC 11.72.070) where they are allowed to park overnight. These vehicles may park in other zoning types during all other hours of the day in accordance with local parking restrictions. All other vehicle types are allowed to park on-

[1] Initial results from the 2026 Point in Time Count have been published. However, the detailed report with information on the number of vehicle residents is not yet available. Therefore, this memo utilizes the 2024 Point in Time Count data.

street for up to 72 hours, subject to signed parking restrictions. The code also prohibits parking of detached trailers and campers, except for vending or in response to a collision (SMC 11.72.430). These rules are enforced by the Seattle Police Department's (SPD) Parking Enforcement Officers (PEOs).

Whether or not a vehicle, including a motor home or travel trailer, is considered a commercial or large-size vehicle depends on its width. There are five types of motorhomes and trailers: Class A, Class B, Class C, Travel Trailers, and Fifth Wheels (a type of trailer). Class A, B, and C motorhomes all have their own motor. Travel Trailers are hitched behind a vehicle, and Fifth Wheels rest on top of the back of a truck.

Some motor homes and trailers are narrower than 80 inches wide and would not be affected by this legislation. These would most likely include conventional travel trailers, micro travel trailers, or "r-pod" trailers, designed to be under 80 inches wide to conform with U.S. Road regulations and not require special permits. Some Class B motorhomes, which are also called camper vans, and other small motorhomes are built on a van chassis (Mercedes Sprinter, Ford Transit, Fiat Ducato) and range from approximately 79 inches to 88.7 inches wide. Class A and Class C motorhomes are always over 80 inches wide.

For more information on the types of motorhomes and trailers and their dimensions, see Attachment A to this memo.

Current City Programs Addressing Recreational Vehicles

The City currently has several different strategies to address recreational vehicles with residents.

- **Safe Lots** – The City's only existing RV specific safe lot closed in 2025, due to the site being redeveloped for another use. City funding is being used to establish another RV safe lot, Glassyard Commons, which is anticipated to open in late fall 2026. It will have 72 RV parking spaces along with 20 tiny homes.
- **Contracted Outreach** – The Human Services Department (HSD) contracts with two providers - University Heights and the Salvation Army - to provide outreach to support people who live in their vehicles, including but not limited to RVs.
- **Geoclean, pump out and purple bag programs** – Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) offers light cleaning around RV encampments, free wastewater collection and collection of trash bags through the purple bag program.
- **RV Remediation** – HSD's Unified Care Team (UCT) engages in RV remediations, which they define as "all work associated with resolving encampments where RVs/vehicles are present, including assisting working vehicles so they can comply with parking rules and move away from the area, post-removal cleanup, and towing of inoperable/abandoned vehicles. While not required, offers of shelter are made to all individuals when available." Remediations include HSD, SPU and SPD. SPD's presence includes both PEOs as well as police offers to address overall security concerns, especially in cases where vehicles are being impounded. In 2025, the UCT completed remediations at 156 sites.

- **Vehicle Support Pilot Program** – Since 2023, SPU has operated a Vehicle Support Pilot Program for RVs at remediation sites focused on offering minor assistance like gas, tire repairs and jump starts to help RVs be able to move from the remediation site and avoid being impounded.

Other Cities

Other cities, both in Washington and other states, have adopted parking restrictions impacting RVs. For example, in Lacey, Washington, a 2019 ordinance made it unlawful for people living in RVs to camp or store personal property in "any park," "any street," or "any publicly owned parking lot or publicly owned area, improved or unimproved" between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. or in residential zones at any time. The ordinance bans parking of large vehicles and trailers on public lots and streets for more than four hours per day. In California, San Francisco and San Jose both have restrictions. In San Jose, there is a ban on oversized vehicle parking in posted areas, including 150 feet from schools. In San Francisco there is now a two-hour max parking for RVs and overnight parking is banned without permit. Towing enforcement and supportive services are included in the San Francisco's model.

Details on Legislative Package

The following are descriptions of the six pieces of legislation proposed by Councilmember Strauss to address vehicle residents. The Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit Program, Outdoor Storage Definition Update Ordinance, and Junk Vehicle Definition Update Ordinance are all subject to State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). On September 8, the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection issued a Determination of Non-significance for the package. The SEPA determination has a 21-day comment and appeal period which will end September 29. A public hearing on Outdoor Storage Definition Update is scheduled for the Committee's September 22 meeting.

1. Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit Program Resolution

This Resolution states the goals for this legislative package, which include:

- Create a structured pathway out of vehicle residency to shelter and housing.
- Provide legal stability for eligible residents in motor homes and travel trailers to remain parked within designated areas in industrial zones.
- Encourage coordination between the Human Services Department (HSD), Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and Seattle Police Department (SPD) on parking enforcement, service referrals and permit compliance.
- Support the development of safe lots and shelter storage through additional tools to handle vehicle residency.
- Set clear expectations for engagement with service providers and behavior in the City's right of way.
- Removal of eco blocks currently placed on City right-of-way within six months of full implementation of the Vehicle Resident Assistance Program.

2. Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit Program Ordinance

Effective April 30, 2027, the legislation would establish a permit program specifically for large lived in vehicles (motor homes, travel trailers, and converted vehicles over 80 inches wide) based on certain criteria. The legislation would distinguish motor homes, travel trailers, and vehicles converted to accommodate living quarters and cooking or sewage disposal over 80 inches wide from other commercial and large vehicles over 80 inches wide. The legislation would restrict parking for motor homes and travel trailers over 80 inches wide to a maximum of two hours anywhere in the City and totally prohibit parking anywhere in the city between the hours of midnight and 6PM, except if the vehicle had a Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit (VRAP). Permitted motor homes and travel trailers would be allowed to park anywhere in the City subject to posted signs, except that between midnight to 6am permitted vehicles must park specifically within Geographic Service Areas as determined by HSD, which must be in Industrial Zones. See Attachment B for a map of Industrial Zones. Unpermitted motor homes and travel trailers in violation of the new parking requirements could be towed without notice, although the whereas section of the legislation does state that the intention is to allow three infraction notices before towing.

The existing code limits parking between midnight and six a.m. of commercial and large-size vehicles if the vehicle is wider than 80 inches, except in an Industrial Zone (SMC 11.72.070). During other hours, these vehicles are allowed to park in any zoning type and are only subject to posted parking time limits. The existing code does not distinguish motor homes and travel trailers from other large vehicles over 80 inches wide when establishing where they can park. See Table 1 below for a description of the difference in parking requirements between current law and the proposed legislation.

Table 1. Comparison of Current and Proposed Parking Restrictions for Commercial and Large-sized Vehicles

	Vehicle Type	Has a Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit	Overnight Parking (12 a.m. – 6 a.m.)	Daytime Parking (6 a.m. – 12 a.m.)
Current Law[2]	Commercial and large-sized vehicles over 80 inches. Applies to motor homes and travel trailers that are over 80 inches wide, depending on their width.[3]	N/A	Industrial zones only	Anywhere, subject to posted signs
Proposed Permit Legislation	Motor homes, travel trailers, and vehicles converted to accommodate living quarters and cooking or sewage disposal over 80 inches wide	Yes	Geographic Service Areas within Industrial Zones	Anywhere, subject to posted signs
Proposed Permit Legislation	Motor homes, travel trailers, and vehicles converted to accommodate living quarters and cooking or sewage disposal over 80 inches wide	No	Cannot park for any length of time in any location	2 hours maximum, and subject to posted signs

[2] If this legislation is adopted, parking regulations would not change for commercial and large sized vehicles over 80 inches that are not motor homes or travel trailers.

[3] SMC 11.72.430 prohibits detached trailers and campers to be parked in the right of way, except for vending or because of collision.

The Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit Program would include the following components:

a. Program Structure and Administration

The ordinance would authorize the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), in consultation with the HSD and the SPD, to develop rules governing eligibility, permit conditions, establishment geographic service areas in Industrial Zones, and enforcement procedures. These rules would form the operational framework for the permit program. The legislation would direct City departments to establish the process for taking permit applications by April 30, 2027.

b. Eligibility Requirements

Permit eligibility would be limited to individuals who own the vehicles identified through a one-time citywide census conducted by HSD. Only registered owners of a vehicle may receive a permit and may receive only one permit. No late entrants would be added after the census is complete. HSD and affiliated service providers would support applications on behalf of eligible individuals.

c. Permit Conditions

The legislation would require participants to park their permitted vehicle only within designated geographic service areas overnight, which will be in Industrial zones. Vehicles would be required to be operational and maintained, registered and display valid license plates, and a visible vehicle identification number (VIN). As well, permit holders would be required to comply with existing laws, including sidewalk clearance, noise regulations, waste disposal rules, pet supervision, and limits on large gatherings around the vehicle. A permit provision is that the permit holder would be required to eventually accept appropriate shelter when offered; such that declining offers of shelter six times would result in permit revocation. To this end, HSD would be expected to maintain a certification list and document offers of appropriate shelter in support of administering the permit.

d. Enforcement and Revocation

SDOT, SPD, and HSD would be expected to jointly develop enforcement procedures to establish collaboration, handoffs, and roles to establish the permit program's operations, including how to handle violations of permit terms which may result in permanent loss of eligibility. SDOT would need to create a permit system to issue the permits, which allows for transparency of these permits to SPD and HSD. SPD would need to create a process for enforcing permit terms. HSD would need to outline their role in documenting violations, initiating revocations, and supporting appeal reviews.

The legislation would begin enforcement of parking restrictions by July 31, 2027. Warnings would be issued for the first 90 days of implementation. Any revocation of a permit would require that participants receive written notice at least 15 calendar days before a revocation takes effect.

3. Outdoor Storage Definition Update Ordinance

This legislation, impacting the Land Use Code, would do three things. First, it would adjust the definition of a 'Recreational Vehicle' to add that such vehicles may either contain their own motor or may be towed behind a motorized vehicle. Second, it would adjust the definition of 'outdoor storage' to include outdoor storage areas for certain unoccupied vehicles, including recreational vehicles. Lastly, it would adjust the definition of flexible-use parking to exclude storage of recreational vehicles. This legislation is intended to clarify interpretation of the Land Use Code as it relates to stored vehicles.

4. Facilities and Administrative Services (FAS) Signature Authority Ordinance

This legislation would expand the authority of the Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) Director to execute leases for outdoor storage for vehicles and overnight respite areas for drivers, including truck drivers. In March 2026, the City Council passed Ordinance 127423, which allows the FAS Director to execute leases up to 65,000 without needing Council approval, if the site were to be used for transitional encampments (which includes safe lots). The proposed legislation would increase the FAS Director's authority to execute leases for sites being used for transitional encampments, outdoor storage of vehicles and overnight respite areas for drivers from 65,000 square feet to 100,000 square feet.

5. Junk Vehicle Definition Update Ordinance

Under the current SMC, to be considered a junk vehicle a vehicle must meet at least three of the following requirements:

a. Left on private property without the permission of the person having right to the possession of the property;
b. Left on a street, alley way open to the public, or on municipal or other public property for 24 hours or longer;
c. Extensively damaged, such as a broken window or windshield, missing wheels, tires, motor, or transmission.
d. Apparently inoperable;
e. Having a fair market value of $500 or less;
f. Without a current certificate of registration or a current and proper vehicle license.

This legislation would clarify and update the definition of 'junk motor vehicle' to provide more information as to what is meant by 'extensively damaged' and by 'apparently inoperable'. It would also add criterion to what would be considered a 'junk vehicle' having 'current certificate of registration' to also require easily visible vehicle identification number, current license tabs, or a current license plate.

6. Program Appropriations Ordinance

Within HSD's 2026 Adopted budget, there exists $3.5 million in on-going funding to support vehicle residents' transition to shelter and $1.5 million one-time funding for vehicle residents carried forward from the 2025 Adopted Budget for a total of $5 million available in 2026. None of this funding has been spent, awarded or contracted. Also, there is an existing proviso restricting a portion of these funds. This legislation would:

a. Would modify an existing HSD proviso on $2 million in funding, to allow funding to be spent on outreach and expand population that can be served to all vehicle residents.

b. Impose a new proviso of $2 million, restricting funds for service providers engaged in outreach to people living in vehicles, including capacity building and increased staffing to reduce case management ratios; and

c. Add 1.0 Permit Technician to SDOT and $216,000 to support updates to Accela, their permitting software, and add 1.0 Permit Technician.

d. Add 7.0 Counselor FTE to HSD to expand outreach and services to individuals without homes. The new staff would work with vehicle residents to address their needs, create pathways to shelter and housing, and help administer the Vehicle Assistance Permit program.

Issue Identification

This section identifies potential issues with the Vehicle Resident Permit Program. No issues have been identified for the other pieces of legislation.

<u>Enforcement Challenges Currently Exist</u>

The effectiveness of the Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit will depend, in part, upon effective enforcement – namely the City's ability to impound vehicles that do not have a permit. However, impounding motor homes and travel trailers presents unique challenges.

- Impounding lived-in vehicles can cause safety concern from City staff who are involved in the process. As a result, SPD presence is often necessary when RVs are likely to be impounded. However, SPD currently has limited capacity to provide officers during these types of situations.
- Vehicles can only be towed when they are vacant. In some cases, vehicle residents may intentionally refuse to leave to prevent their vehicle from being towed. Under that scenario, the only options are to involve SPD to forcibly remove the resident or to have PEO and Lincoln Tow Truck Operator try and wait the person out.
- The City currently has a 20% vacancy rate within its PEO team (about 20 vacant positions), making it challenging to enforce even the City's existing parking laws. The introduction of a the permit program would create new enforcement responsibilities for a new class of vehicle (permitted motor home and travel trailers) with special rules for compliance.

Additionally, there are specific challenges once a vehicle is impounded. The Washington State Supreme Court has ruled that a lived-in vehicle may be considered a homestead. As a result, while a lived-in vehicle can be impounded, it cannot always be sold to pay for the impound. The proposed permit program does not change this dynamic. There may not be sufficient storage if there is a large increase in impounded motor homes and travel trailers, especially if some owners challenge the impound and the vehicles cannot be auctioned in a timely manner. This may impede further impoundments.

The Vehicle Resident legislative package would make two changes that could potentially help facilitate enforcement. The Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit legislation would allow motor homes and travel trailers without a permit to be impounded without notice, helping to avoid a situation where a motor home or travel trailer continually avoids being towed by getting 24-hour notice and then moving their vehicle and then starting the cycle over again. Additionally, changes to the junk vehicle criterion may support the PEOs in identifying vehicles that are not roadworthy and that therefore can be impounded. However, these changes do not fully address the current challenges to enforcement.

Operational Complexity

Successful implementation of the Vehicle Resident Assistant Permit program would require the creation of a new permitting program that requires extensive coordination across SDOT, HSD, and SPD. These departments would have to work closely together to develop new shared systems, roles, and enforcement practices, while managing existing responsibilities. This level of interdepartmental collaboration may be difficult. Strong Executive sponsorship and sustained operational leadership would be key to the program's launch and implementation. The legislation only provides until April 30, 2027, to create the process for receiving, processing and maintaining a Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit application, with enforcement to begin by July 31, 2027. Given the operational complexity, that timeline may need to be adjusted via future legislative action.

The legislation requires that the Director of SDOT, following consultation with the Director of HSD and the Chief of the SPD, publish a Director's Rule to establish standards for, at a minimum, permit eligibility, permit conditions, and permit enforcement, including the minimum standards discussed above. The requirement for a Director's Rule – rather than laying out such standards in the legislation itself – is intended to give departments discretion in how to best implement the permit program. However, it also carries risk that unclear roles and responsibilities will hinder implementation, especially around enforcement. For example, in the case of non-compliance (e.g., blocked sidewalk) it would need to be determined who is responsible for identifying the issue, contacting the RV permit holder about the non-compliance, working with the permit holder to achieve compliance and/or taking steps to revoke the permit.

Uncertain Budget Implications

The fiscal note for the Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit bill attempts to capture the cost of implementing the new permit program, based on the best information available at this time. However, given the complexity of this program is possible that actual costs may be higher. For example:

- A One-time IT cost could be higher than anticipated to build the necessary systems to share data across multiple departments and platforms.
- Towing and storage costs may increase due to increased impounds. Those costs would largely depend on the number of vehicles impounded, which is difficult to estimate without an accurate census of motor homes and travel trailers. These increased costs would likely be temporary in nature, given that the permit program is limited only to those motor homes and travel trailers captured during a one-time census.

As noted, in 2026 there is $3.5 million ongoing and $1.5 million in HSD for activities related to supporting vehicle residents. CB 121282 only covers 2026 appropriations, which proposes to use the funding for permit program costs, increased outreach staff at HSD, increased contracted outreach and other programs to support vehicle residents. If the $5 million were also used to pay for higher than anticipated permit implementation costs, it is likely that would come at the expense, at least in the short term, of services like shelter or safe lots unless additional funding is identified. Other program costs will need to be identified and addressed through future budget legislation.

Eligibility Criteria, Including One-Time Permit Window

Because eligibility is based solely on a one-time census developed by HSD, individuals whose motor home or travel trailer were not in the census or who begin living in their motor home or travel trailer after the census was taken will not have access to the permit program. This could leave these specific vehicle residents without a legal parking option on the right of way for more than two hours during the day or anytime overnight. Residents of unpermitted motor homes and travel trailers would still be eligible for other services, such as shelter, housing and vehicle storage. However, as is currently true today, demand for those services would likely exceed supply, and people living in these unpermitted vehicles may not be able to obtain other assistance.

Additionally, only registered owners of a motor home or travel trailer can receive a Vehicle Resident Assistance Permit. This requirement may potentially leave out a sizable share of people currently living in motor homes or travel trailers. People living in motor homes and travel trailers who are not the registered owners would still be eligible for other services. However, as noted above, the reality is that they may not be able to assess those resources due to scarcity.

There could be some unintended consequences of these eligibility restrictions. For example, people living in an unpermitted motor home or travel trailer may lose their vehicle if

impounded and start using a tent as shelter. Or people may start to seek vehicles under 80 inches that do not need a permit, causing a new market to develop for those vehicle types.

Impact to Motor Homes and Travel Trailers Not Used as Residences

There are motor homes and travel trailers parked on the right of way that are not used as residences. For example, Seattle residents may live in a house or apartment and own a motor home or travel trailer or they may have guests that come and visit them who need to park their motor homes or travel trailers. Under the proposed legislation, these motor homes and travel trailers could only be parked for a maximum of two hours during the day and nowhere overnight. Given that the proposed legislation also allows for immediate impoundment without notice for an unpermitted motor home or travel trailer, this could mean that a non-residential vehicle could be towed without notice, although a whereas clause of the legislation states that the intention is to allow three infraction notices before towing.

Timeline & Next Steps

- September 11– Amendment concepts due by noon to Amanda Allen, Central Staff
- September 15 – Special Public Safety Committee Meeting – Discussion, including high level amendment concepts
- September 22 – Public Hearing for Outdoor Storage Definition Update Ordinance (CB 121281), discussion and possible vote.
- October 20 – earliest possible Full Council vote

Attachments

1. Types of Motorhomes and Trailers - Visual examples of vehicles impacted and not impacted by legislation
2. Map of Industrial Zones

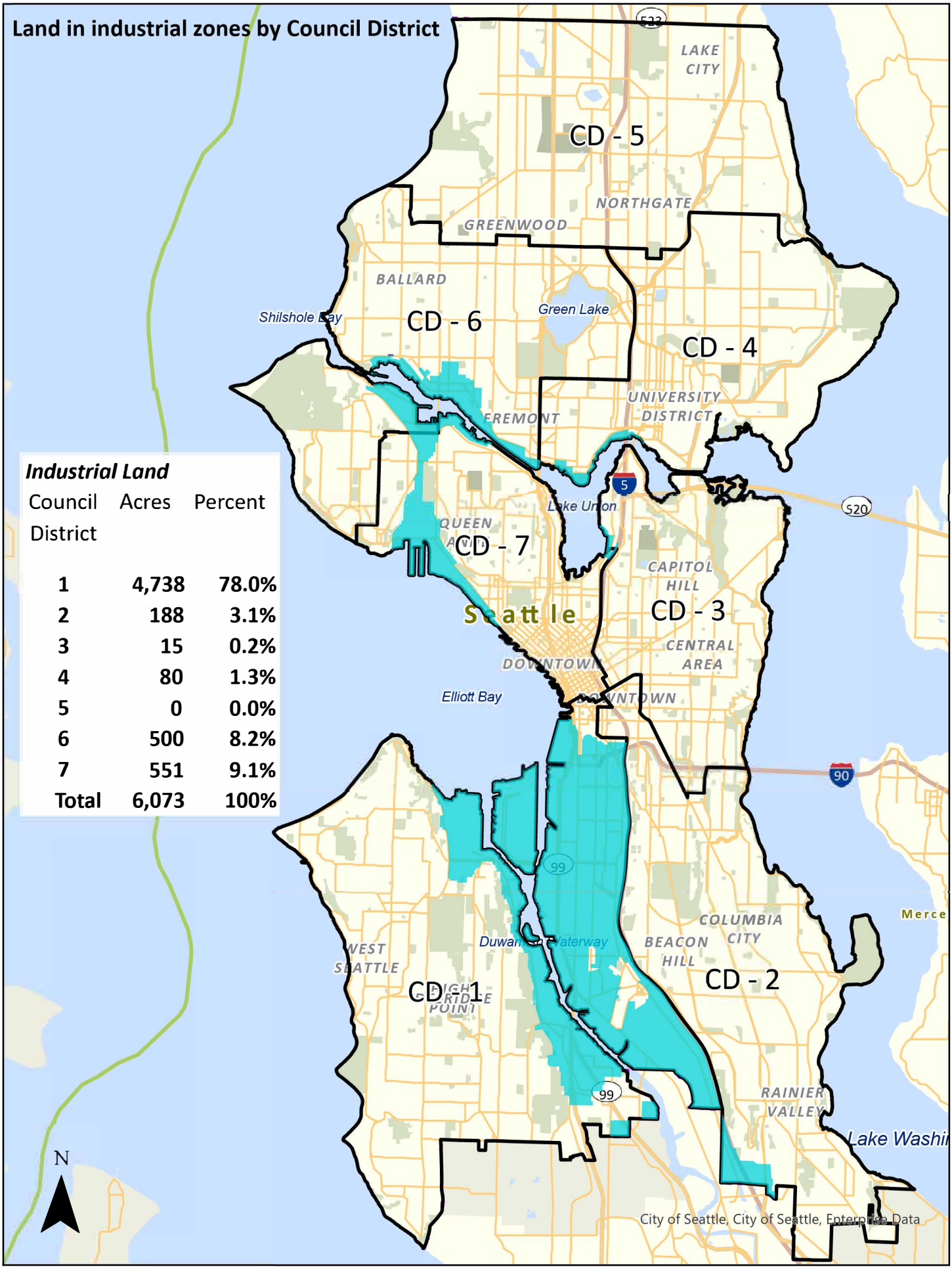
cc: Lish Whitson, Central Staff Director
Calvin Chow, Deputy Director

Attachment A - Types of Motorhomes and Trailers

Types of Motorhomes and Trailers

There are five types of motorhomes and trailers: Class A, Class B, Class C, Travel Trailers and Fifth Wheels. Class A, B, and C all have their own motor. Travel Trailers are hitched behind a vehicle while Fifth Wheels rest on top of the back of a truck.

Attachment B - Map of Industrial Zones



Industrial Land

Council District	Acres	Percent
1	4,738	78.0%
2	188	3.1%
3	15	0.2%
4	80	1.3%
5	0	0.0%
6	500	8.2%
7	551	9.1%
Total	6,073	100%