



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

## Community Development Division

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Child Care  
Community Resources  
Community Development Block Grant  
Madison Senior Center

# Memo

To: All Alders

From: Jim O'Keefe

Date: August 31, 2021

Re: Resolution File #67137 – Dairy Drive – 1<sup>st</sup> Alternative to Reindahl Encampment

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Resolution File #67137 is on the Council's August 31<sup>st</sup> agenda. The Council is asked to suspend its rules to act on the measure immediately. The resolution authorizes work to prepare a City-owned property at 3202 Dairy Drive for use as a temporary campsite – a first alternative to persons currently at the Reindahl Park encampment. The following discusses the need for the resolution, and plans for the Dairy Drive site.

## Background

On May 6, 2020, Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway issued, and the Common Council later approved, Emergency Order #2 authorizing, under certain conditions, the use of City-owned properties as temporary permissible encampments (TPEs). It was intended to support persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Three locations were designated as TPEs, one of them a portion of Reindahl Park, on Madison's east side. Anticipating this summer's resumption of Parks' programming at Reindahl, staff recommended the Mayor revoke its TPE designation and close the small encampment in early May. In response, the Council temporarily halted enforcement actions at the park and directed City staff to seek alternative locations.

During the summer, the number of people camping at Reindahl grew ten-fold, from a half dozen in early May to fifty or sixty. That growth, in a setting not equipped to support camping, has led to deteriorating conditions that pose increasing health and safety risks for campers, as well as for other park users. The situation has brought tension and conflict to the area, and greatly increased calls for city services and demands for the City to resolve the situation. This resolution authorizes tangible steps to do so.

## Discussion

The City's response to homelessness involves multiple strategies:

- Expanding the supply of affordable housing. To date, 20-30% of the nearly 1500 rental housing units built with City financial aid since 2014 are set aside for very low-income households (earning not more than 30% of county median income).
- Promoting non-traditional housing options like tiny house villages.
- Upgrading congregant shelter facilities for single men, single women and families. The City is pursuing a new men's shelter and supporting the Salvation Army's plans to upgrade its facilities for families and

single women. New shelters will offer safer and more accessible spaces and include resources to help guests regain housing stability.

- As the current public health crisis and shortage of available housing persist, providing safer, temporary alternatives for those unable, or unwilling, to access shelter.

There are legal and logistical challenges to supporting unsheltered homelessness in Madison. For instance, the City's current zoning ordinances do not permit camping anywhere in Madison. That could change if proposed ordinance changes are adopted. In addition, State law requires any campsite with four or more units be licensed, and meet State regulatory standards. More generally, a lack of available camping locations, harsh weather conditions and accessibility challenges all make safe year round camping here very difficult.

The delay in closing the Reindahl Park TPE prompted City staff to resume the search for alternative sites – evaluating both non-park, City-owned properties and any privately-held parcels that might be available. The goal was to identify properties of sufficient size to temporarily accommodate up to 30 campsites (roughly 1.5 acres), that were within a reasonable distance (one-quarter to one-half mile) from public transit and food outlets and whose use as a campground, if properly supported, could be compatible with surrounding uses. It was thought City-owned sites could be readied most quickly.

The search proved difficult. It encompassed all non-park, City-owned properties, a list of nearly 1200 parcels. Most were unsuitable as campsites. They were dog parks and former landfills, parcels adjacent to active City operations, lots acquired for specific uses (like storm water collection), and narrow strips of land along transportation corridors. Many were too small, or too remote, or they were situated in the midst of residential or commercial centers.

One of the few options to emerge is a parcel located at 3202 Dairy Drive, across the street from Fire Station 14. As it is City owned, the site is immediately available. It offers ample space for 30 campsites and has ready access to public water and sanitary sewer systems, features that will facilitate site improvements needed to meet State campground standards and enable better and safer living conditions than those found at Reindahl. The location offers on-street parking. It is a 6-minute walk from a bus stop, though travel to downtown takes 45 minutes to an hour. A convenience store is the nearest food outlet; a grocery store is more distant. In short, the site offers both advantages and some deficiencies, the latter which make necessary additional support to users or influence who can use the site successfully. It is important to understand, therefore, the Dairy Drive site is not, by itself, a suitable replacement for the Reindahl Park encampment, but is one part of the answer.

The Dairy Drive site will only be useful if campers are willing to use it. City staff have discussed the location with service providers who work closely with campers at Reindahl Park. They suggest the site may be part of the solution and have begun discussing it with Reindahl Park campers.

### **Project Description**

The proposal for Dairy Drive is to prepare the property to accommodate up to 30 campsites. The Council is currently considering zoning ordinance changes to allow such use. If adopted, the property will need to be rezoned, a process that will take months to complete. Moreover, to meet State campground regulations, the site must provide potable water and bathroom facilities, and meet other requirements. City staff envision purchasing and assembling 30 modular, climate-controlled, tiny house-like structures. A separate building will house 6 toilet, sink and shower units and a small meeting space. The site will be fenced. It will deliver electric power to each campsite and common area lighting, and provide trash receptacles, picnic tables and a grilling area. The site plan and amenities are subject to building code standards. Though plans are not yet finalized, the estimated one-time capital expense for improvements is between \$900,000 and \$1 million. About half of that cost is for items that could be transferred and

re-used at a different location.

Ongoing operating costs include those associated with utilities and staffing. City staff anticipate the campground site will be managed and supported through a contract with one or more service providers. Desired services include general property management as well as help to conduct housing searches, address behavioral health issues, and meet transportation and other daily living needs. Final details for management and support services are not yet finalized but preliminary estimates put those costs at about \$70,000 per month.

Funding for both capital and operating expenses would be drawn, under oversight by the City Finance Director, from the \$2 million of American Rescue Plan Act funds previously allocated by the Common Council to provide unsheltered homeless support.

### **Summary of the Resolution**

Proposed ordinance changes, to be considered by the Council on August 31, would create a framework in which campgrounds are permitted. Those changes, if approved, will require the property at 3202 Dairy Drive, or any prospective encampment site, to be rezoned. Typically, work to undertake site improvements awaits rezoning approvals. However, as that process won't be completed until the end of November, the property would not be ready for its intended use before winter.

The situation at Reindahl Park needs a more timely response. This resolution provides the means to move more quickly. It prevents delays that would otherwise occur while waiting for zoning approvals by authorizing staff to begin site preparation ahead of those approvals. Importantly, it does not waive the required rezoning, but would allow work to begin while that approval is sought. Adopting the resolution will hasten preparation of the property at 3202 Dairy Drive and its use as a first alternative for campers at Reindahl Park. More specifically, the resolution:

1. Declares that existing conditions at Reindahl Park, along with the continued threat of COVID-19 infection, pose sufficient danger to warrant special consideration in preparing an alternative temporary campsite, before a rezoning process is completed.
2. Limits this special consideration to the 3202 Dairy Drive location, and a second site, if one is identified prior to the measure's December 31, 2021 expiration.
3. Exempts development of the Dairy Drive site from Urban Design Commission review.
4. Requires the temporary campsite at Dairy Drive, and any improvements to it, meet relevant local and state standards, including zoning requirements.
5. Authorizes use of ARPA funds already designated for unsheltered homeless support, subject to approval by the City's Finance Director.
6. Acknowledges that establishing temporary campsite settings, including the one at Dairy Drive, is intended to bring about closure of the Reindahl Park encampment.
7. Directs staff to work with campers and service providers to implement measures to improve the safety and well-being of campers at Reindahl, and help bring that encampment to an end.