



Interim Report of Dane County Staff Team Findings on Car Camping/Safe Parking

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Health and Human Needs Committee – 3/17/2022

Introduction

- Resolution directing County staff to report on potential car camping options for people experiencing homelessness approved by the Dane County Board in November of 2021.
- Deadline for interim recommendations in March of 2021, with a final report due for presentation no later than June 1st.
- Staff team consisted of representatives from:
 - Dane County Human Services
 - Dane County Land and Water Resources
 - Dane County Planning and Development
 - Tamara D. Grigsby Office of Equity and Inclusion
 - Dane County Corporation Counsel
 - Dane County Risk Management
 - Alliant Energy Center
 - Public Health Madison Dane County

Before a program is implemented, legal requirements will need to be met, most notably the State of Wisconsin's laws for campground licensing.

- State law is umbrella over other local ordinances for overnight parking or camping.
- State law directs that a campground license is required when:
 - A person offers or intends to offer 3 or fewer campsites and advertises to the public an offer to camp OR Four or more campsites exist regardless of advertising or outreach to the public.
- Also sets limits for:
 - Length of time is allowed (8 continuous months in a 12 month period).
 - Distance between sites (10 feet).
 - How many people per site (6 people or one family unit).
 - Site amenities: Safe drinking water, hand washing stations, toilet building (or approved alternative) with safe walkways to facilities, garbage disposal and pick up, 24-7 emergency phone, pest control.
 - Sites larger than 400 square feet need to be fully plumbed.

Safe parking programs studied provide similar components.

- Staff reviewed programs in several west coast communities based on guidance from the 2012 Madison Urban Ministries (MUM) report.
- Majority of programs offered hygiene services (portable toilets, showers, handwashing/hygiene stations, garbage removal) and security measures (fencing, cameras, staff).
- Many programs were operated by supportive services agencies with service hours exclusively overnight.
- Services included case management, housing resource connection, resources to keep vehicle registration and licensing up to day.
- Programs focused on cars, SUVs, and trucks. RV/Camper style vehicles included in some program expansions.

Dane County's Climate Provides Unique Challenges/Considerations.

- Staff were not able to find safe parking program models for communities with a climate like Dane County's.
- Idling cars for warmth provide safety concerns for guests, need to address provision of safe heat sources for program participants.
- Viability of shower trailers or hand washing stations in the winter is a concern.
- Providing snow removal on the safe parking site could cause disruption for guests.
- Climate-controlled storage options for program participants would be needed.
- Vehicles may require service due to impact extreme cold can have on automobiles.

Comparative Size of Programs Studied to Known Data in Dane County

- Dane County, WI: 16 people sheltering in vehicles (2022 Point-In-Time: Preliminary)
- Los Angeles, CA: 16,000 people sheltering in vehicles (2021 Point-In-Time)
- Santa Barbara, CA: approximately 600 sheltering in vehicles (Independent.com)
- San Diego, CA: program has 300 parking spots for participants (10news.com)
- Eugene, OR: program offers 60 sites over 40 locations (Eugene-or.gov)

Additional considerations would need to be addressed programmatically for guest health, safety, and resource connection.

- Emergency planning for excessive heat/cold, flooding, tornadoes, etc.
- Prevention of carbon monoxide poisoning if cars are run for warmth/electricity.
- Connections to food, mail, gas cards, other accessible transportation.
- What supportive services are most needed and how to locate/ensure connection to them?
- Eligibility for the spaces, including development of an referral/intake process, additional program policies, grievance/service termination procedures.
- Equity and inclusion considerations to access the resource.
- Safety: What kind of security or safety planning is needed at the site?

No Dane County-owned properties suitable for safe parking were located in the City of Madison.

- Non-recreational, long-term camping, which can involve individuals experiencing homelessness, is increasing on public lands.
 - Campers currently pay reservations fees and either request a waiver for the County's 14 consecutive night limit, or made reservations under different names/accounts to bypass the limit.
- Staff capacity on County-owned campgrounds and lands is limited and County campgrounds do not operate during the winter months.
- Other county-owned lands are environmentally sensitive and contain areas that are not open to camping.
- Facility upgrades would be needed to make any parkland suitable for safe-parking.
- AEC hosts large, multi-day events several times annually which consumes all on-site space and would regularly displace any safe parking.

New Zoning in City of Madison Offers Local Models for Safe Parking-style programs more suitable for the elements.

- Two significant amendments were made to the City of Madison zoning code in August of 2021 to create a Mission Camp District.
- Created a regulatory framework for campgrounds in the City of Madison, defined as: “a facility owned, operated, or funded by a non-profit organization, religious institution, or governmental entity that provides a campground area where individuals may live temporarily or permanently in tents or other portable shelter units.”
- Dairy Drive mission camp on Madison’s southeast side contains 30 pallet shelters with heat and electricity. Central building provides access to potable water, toilets, and showers and is connected to municipal water and sewer.
- Owner or operator must obtain a campground permit pursuant to Wisconsin State Law.
- Minimum lot area is 15,000 sq. ft.
- Management plan required.

Next Steps require additional research and conversation.

- Conversations with people with lived experience of car camping due to homelessness (why was sheltering in vehicles preferred to shelter, what program might best fit their needs, etc.).
- City of Madison has conducted similar data collection in partnership with outreach service providers that helped connected with people with lived experience to fill out surveys.

Staff capacity to conduct information gathering is extremely limited given the timeline for the next report.

- Lead staff are responsible for the program wind down for hotel sheltering and the process to identify a vendor for street outreach services.
- Processes above will occur during the same time as information gathering would for the June report to HHN.
- Another report in September is more realistic at this time.