



MEMORANDUM

To: Kurt Triplett, City Manager

From: Lynn Zwaagstra, Director
Jen Boone, Human Services Manager
Amanda Judd, Human Services Coordinator
Hillary De La Cruz, Management Analyst

Date: October 10, 2024

Subject: **Overview of Vehicle and RV Residency Program Models**

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council reviews the following memorandum with an overview of vehicle and recreational vehicle (RV) residency program models. This information is provided as background for future Council policy conversations and direction related to the City’s response to homelessness.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This memorandum responds to the Council’s adopted Resolution R-5631 Declaring the City’s Commitment to Addressing Homelessness and Authorizing the City Manager to Develop a Homelessness Continuum of Care Action Plan.
- As part of the development of the Homeless Continuum of Care Action Plan, staff is presenting Council with information on efforts and collaborations of other municipalities and non-profit organizations in the region to respond to homelessness.
- Through the information provided in this memorandum, City Council will learn about RV and Vehicle Residency Programs, including how they are operated, what services are provided, and program outcomes.
- If Council desires, staff can provide additional insight about these programs and policy questions for Council to consider when discussing the City’s specific response to vehicle and RV residency.

BACKGROUND:

Figure 1: Kirkland Homelessness Continuum of Care

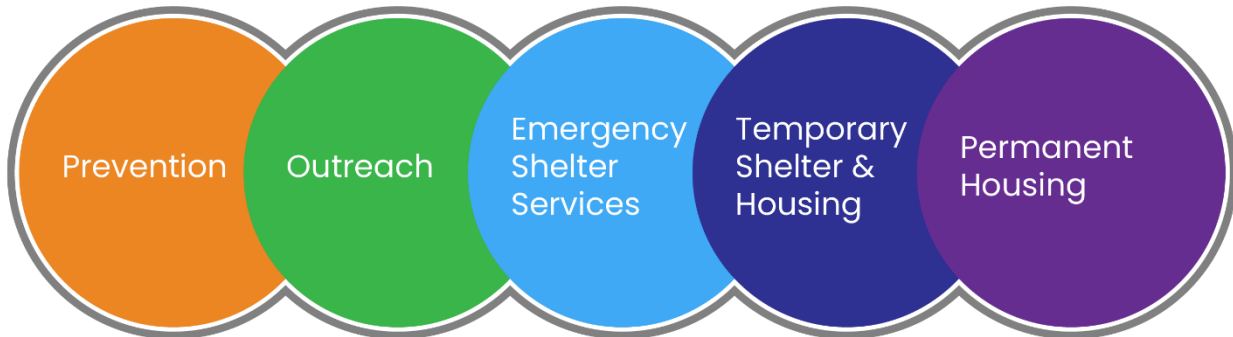


Figure 1 demonstrates the five overarching stages of Kirkland's Homelessness Continuum of Care. Responding to people living in vehicles and RVs touches both Outreach and Temporary Shelter and Housing when considering safe parking lots or other program models.

Vehicle residency, referring to the act of living in one's vehicle or recreational vehicle, has become a more frequent and visible interim option for households experiencing homelessness where other programs and/or services are not available or viable. Common areas for vehicle residency include parking lots, streets located in commercial areas, and City owned lots, like the Kirkland Police Department. Through Homeless Outreach Coordinator (HOC) engagement, the City has learned what types of barriers are in place that make programs or services not available or viable. The most common reasons are emergency shelter or safe parking programs being at capacity and program criteria limiting access to the program (e.g., population specific, restricting vehicle type, no pet policy). Such barriers lead to limited options for vehicle residents to move along the Continuum of Care, limiting the City's role to support vehicle residents with current resources and the services landscape in the interim. Subsequently, there has been increased community concern about resources available to support vehicle residents transitioning into stable housing, and the impacts that vehicle residency has on the surrounding community, including enforcement of long-term parking violations and waste management and disposal.

The HOC has established trusting relationships with individuals and families living unhoused through engagement and rapport-building and has gained insight into the additional needs of those residing in RVs and passenger vehicles. A major need for people living in RVs and passenger vehicles is a safe, clean space to use the restroom and shower. People living in RVs often need access to a way to pump out blackwater from the RV holding tank. From a health and safety perspective for all community members, including those who are living in vehicles and those spending time nearby, it is important to minimize and prevent potential blackwater waste spillage into streets, sidewalks, and the stormwater system.

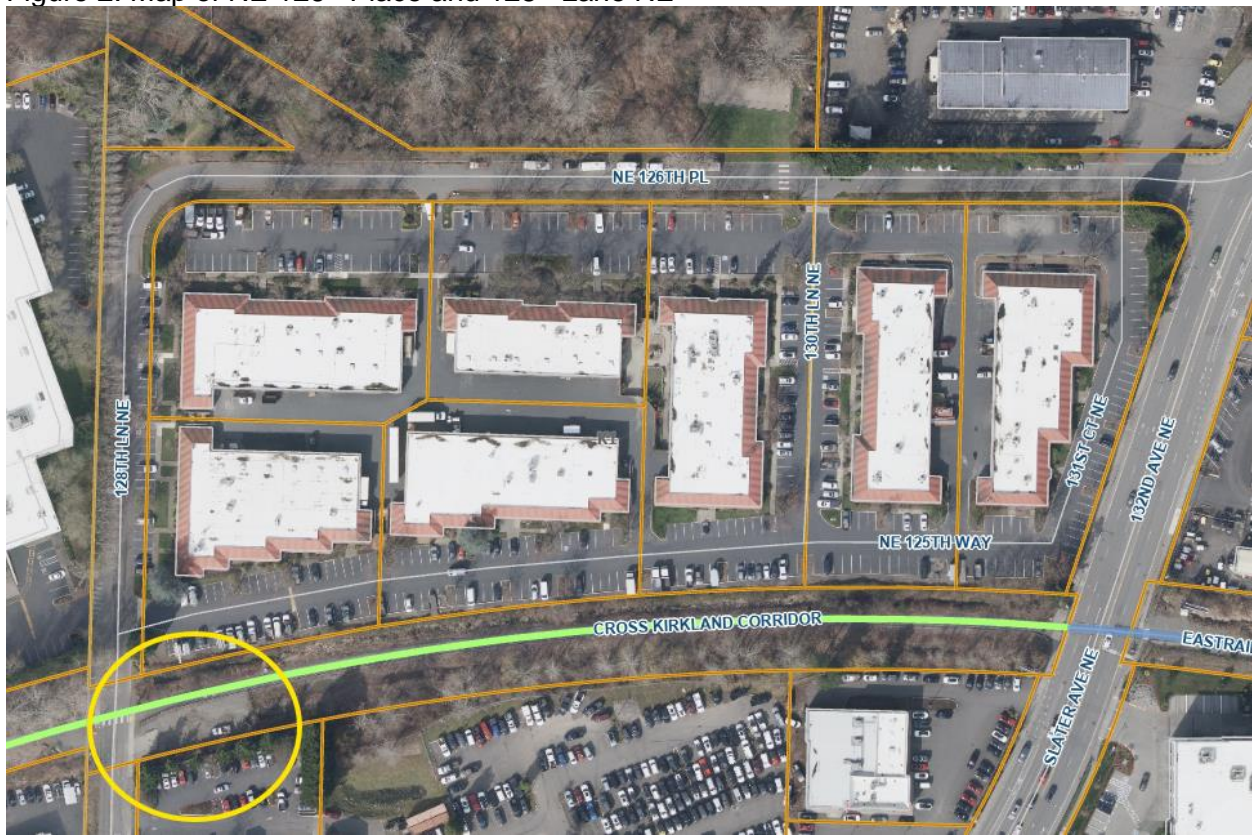
To address some of the more pressing needs and concerns, the following pilot resources have been made available:

- 24/7 open restroom at Marina Park.
- Sanitation Services at Cross Kirkland Corridor & 128th Lane: Accessible portable toilet, hand washing station, and garbage container. Services are intended for anyone who uses the CKC as well as for people who are living in vehicles nearby to mitigate potential waste disposal in other areas. The estimated cost for these services is \$6,000 per year and the portable toilet and hand washing station are serviced weekly and garbage is picked up weekly.

RV and Vehicle Residency on 126th Place and 128th Lane

As of the writing of this memorandum on October 10, 2024, there are approximately 13 households living in RVs/camper trailers parked along NE 126th Place and 128th Lane NE in Kirkland's Totem Lake neighborhood which is located close to the intersection of 132nd Avenue East and the Cross Kirkland Corridor as displayed in Figure 2. Most of these households have a car in addition to their RV/trailer which many use to get to work.

Figure 2: Map of NE 126th Place and 128th Lane NE



City staff across all departments – including Police, Human Services, and the City Manager’s Office – have been actively engaged with those living in the RVs since at least 2019. Staff have communicated frequently to the RV residents over the years, and again recently, that they must comply with Kirkland’s laws (other than parking for long periods on 126th and 128th), and that the situation must be both sanitary and safe for everyone. The Police Neighborhood Resource Officer Tiffany Trombley and Homelessness Outreach Coordinator Meli Paulo routinely visit to connect the vehicular residents with resources and stable housing opportunities. Other members of both the Homelessness Assistance and Response Team (HART) and Police Department also visit the area regularly.

Using a person-centered approach, the City is working to end overnight RV parking in this area by the end of the year with a focus on supporting them in finding permanent housing.

There are a number of factors that led to this decision, including the recent United States Supreme Court ruling in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* in June of 2024. While parking time limits have not been enforced in this area for the past few years, there has been a noticeable increase in RVs and other cars and trailers, and instances of vehicles being parked in non-designated spaces. The City has also invested in a Homeless Outreach Coordinator position to successfully connect vehicle residents with resources to secure long-term housing. Finally, with new Permanent Supportive Housing units now available in Bellevue and Redmond, and more opening soon in Kirkland, there are greater housing resources available than in previous years, making this transition more likely to succeed.

The City wants to keep all community members, including those living unsheltered and in RVs, safe and wants to help transition RV residents to more permanent solutions. The City’s HOC has been doing outreach at 126th and 128th since April 2023 and will continue to be available to

any RV resident who wants to discuss alternative options. Between now and December 13, the City will work with each of the individual RV residents to find solutions for their individual situation. Staff are actively working to find alternative temporary parking options in partnership with faith-based organizations. RV residents who are actively working with the HOC to find housing will be prioritized for temporary parking options at other locations if they become available. This approach maximizes the chance that RV residents can continue making progress toward their housing goals while receiving the support they need. The HOC delivered letters to RV residents and had conversations about these changes beginning on October 14. The City also delivered a letter about the changes to businesses in the immediate area.

While staff are acting on RVs in this area in advance of the development of the Homelessness Continuum of Care Action Plan in 2025, the City still plans to engage with community members on related topics as part of the action plan development.

The remainder of this memorandum includes details about the efforts and actions of other municipalities and non-profit organizations in the region. This information will be helpful to Council and staff as they continue to determine how to address the ongoing needs of vehicle residents.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

Safe Parking Programs Operated by Local Churches

Two examples of well-established safe parking programs are Lake Washington United Methodist Church (LWUMC) in Kirkland and Overlake Christian Church (OCC) in Redmond. Each program prioritizes different populations providing complementary and collaborative regional support for vehicle residents in the community. Each program has one full-time staff person, several part-time office staff people, and a significant pool of volunteers that support the program with a variety of tasks including preparing weekly community meals. Both programs accept self-referrals and also collaborate with regional homeless outreach staff. An operational overview for both programs is provided below. Details are applicable to both programs unless otherwise noted.

Facilities and Services Provided

- Safe parking in the church parking lot. Set hours are available for the church buildings to be open for access to meals, a food pantry, WIFI, mail service, phone use, and a resource closet.
- Access to toilets and showers. LWUMC also has laundry services.
- Financial assistance program to assist with vehicle repairs to ensure vehicles remain operational.
- Weekly onsite case management from local service providers to assist participants with stability goals and access to resources.
 - OCC is served by the Redmond Homeless Outreach Coordinator.
 - LWUMC is served by a Vehicle Residents Outreach Case Manager from The Sophia Way and funded through King County.

Rules and Guidelines

- An intake application is required prior to participants being welcomed onto the safe parking lot. This includes a mandatory background check. Screening criteria for each site is case by case and involves an interview between program staff and applicant.
- Alcohol, drugs, and weapons are not allowed in common areas of the property.
- Participants are expected to keep vehicles operable.
- Only passenger vehicles are allowed in the lot. RVs, trailers, or campers are not served.

- Participants are allowed to have pets if they assume responsibility and ensure no other participants are negatively impacted by the pet's behavior.

Utilization and Outcomes

- LWUMC operates up to 60 parking spaces for women-identifying adults and families.
 - There is no length of stay limitation for participants who do not have alternative places to go.
 - In 2023, approximately 140 households were served through LWUMC safe parking with most staying less than six months. Families averaged a one month stay and single adult women averaged a stay between three to six months.
 - Of the 140 households served in 2023, 43 moved into shelter and 37 moved into stable housing.
- OCC operates up to 15 parking spaces for men-identifying adults and couples.
 - The intended length of stay is three months; however, participants can extend up to one year if they are actively working on housing stability goals.
 - In 2023, 35 participants were served by and transitioned out of the OCC safe parking program; 24 of those moved into a more stable living arrangement.

RV Safe Parking Operated by Regional Homeless Service Providers

Salmon Bay Village opened in December 2023 in Seattle's Interbay neighborhood and is the only safe lot currently serving RVs in the county. The Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), a non-profit organization that develops and operates housing and programs for individuals and families exiting homelessness, was awarded a \$1,900,000 contract by the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) to start the program and manage daily operations.

Facilities and Services Provided

- 35,000 square feet lot that is leased from a private owner.
- On-site 24/7 staffing including case management to support stable housing goals.
- Community kitchen and a hygiene trailer with toilets, shower, and laundry facilities.

RV Guidelines

- Each RV must be drained of fuel and pumped of wastewater to ensure a safe environment for the vehicle residents. Participants are expected to use on-site toilet facilities once enrolled.
- To reduce fire hazards, each RV is outfitted with an electrical conduit to accommodate electric heaters to replace propane tanks for heating.

Utilization and Outcomes

- Up to 26 RVs can be accommodated on the lot along with nine tiny houses that are located on the property. Altogether between 45 and 50 individuals can be served.
- Prioritization is given to medically vulnerable and elderly RV residents living in the Interbay neighborhood.
- RV residents are offered the opportunity to transition into a tiny house located on-site when they become available. If accepted, the participant signs over ownership of the RV to LIHI who then ensures the RV is decommissioned and removed from any future use. This most often occurs with participants whose RVs are determined unfit to live in. Within the first six months of program operation, 35 RVs were removed from the streets and permanently demolished. Significant interest in this process has warranted LIHI to begin the process of adding three additional tiny houses to the site.
- Neither RV parking nor tiny house accommodations are intended for long-term residence and participants are required to accept stable housing opportunities when it becomes available, if the housing opportunity is appropriate for their needs.

City of Bellevue Safe Parking Pilot Program

The Bellevue City Council invested up to \$450,000 per year for a two-year safe parking pilot program located on City-owned property. The program opened in May 2024 and is operated by 4 Tomorrow, a non-profit organization serving the Eastside by providing culturally significant resources and assistance in navigating systems and overcoming barriers.

Facilities and Services Provided

- The program offers day center hours with access to family restrooms, showers, a community kitchen, laundry services, a family room, computers, and a community closet.
- Case management is available to support participants in signing up for childcare and stability resources.
- Limited financial assistance is available to support stability goals, including housing application fees and obtaining documentation of identity.
- On-site security is provided overnight when program staff are not present.

Eligibility and Utilization

- Up to 20 vehicles can be accommodated with prioritization going to families with children. During the initial phase of opening, utilization was intentionally kept under capacity to better successfully ramp up the program while additional staff were hired and some components of the program were still being finalized.
- Within the first month of opening, from May to June of 2024, 15 vehicles were accommodated serving 21 adults and 33 children, the majority of which were under age five.
- While the initial program plan included serving RV residents, the program has not yet expanded to include that population.
- The intended length of stay is no longer than 90 days. However, additional time is granted if participants are actively working on stability goals.

Permitting Considerations

- Permits are in place for the location of the safe parking pilot program through 2026. If the Bellevue City Council extends the program with additional funding beyond the two-year pilot, a property land extension and/or new site would be required.
- The City of Bellevue has not made any permanent changes to the Bellevue City Code to support safe parking to date. The Bellevue City Manager made a declaration of emergency and designated the City-owned lot as a “temporary public safety space.”

City of Olympia Temporary Parking Permit Program

In 2022, approximately 90 RVs and vehicles were parked in Olympia along a stretch of roadway that was the only thoroughfare to the hospital, making it difficult for emergency personnel who were trying to transport people to the hospital. The City decided to make an effort to clear the stretch of road of vehicles parked long-term, but also wanted to have alternative places for vehicle residents to go into shelter, a safe parking lot, or temporary housing. While awaiting the opening of a Tiny House Village, City outreach staff worked with vehicle residents in phases. Initial outreach efforts were able to clear 20 vehicles from the most concerning section of roadway through creative measures that included offering to buy the RVs from people living in them and connecting them with shelter and housing resources. With the remaining RV and vehicle residents, the City created a temporary permit program that was time limited until the new Tiny House Village was available to refer residents.

Program Timeline and Initiatives

- The program operated from March 2022 until August 2022, when the City opened a Tiny House Village.

- The City's Homeless Outreach Team staff gave temporary parking permits to participants who were parked in the area at the beginning of the program after initial efforts were made to connect vehicle residents to resources and clear the area. No new permits were distributed later.
- Thirty-three RV permits were distributed. Each permit allowed an additional passenger car if using for reasonable needs. Stall lines were painted on the ground to attempt to keep to the permitted number of vehicles, though others parked there at various times.
- The City's Homeless Outreach Team, comprised of 3 full-time staff trained in de-escalation, provided the primary onsite support and monitoring of the program.
- Monthly mobile pump out services were paid for through an Interlocal Agreement with LOTT Clean Water Alliance for Public Health Emergency Support Funding.
- No code changes were necessary for the temporary program. However, Code Enforcement provided collaboration and guidance on what items were allowed or not allowed outside of the vehicles.
- Police were not utilized during regular outreach due to concerns of presence triggering an escalation of distrust and disruption.

Program Guidelines

- To remain located in the area, participants were required to opt-in to a future tiny house or move from the location at the end of the temporary program.
- A Code of Conduct was developed and included:
 - Expectations of cleanliness standards
 - Expectations of keeping the roadway clear
 - No acts of violence

Outcomes

- The Tiny House Village opened in August 2022 with 100 units; 55 units were occupied by participants of the temporary permit program.
- RVs of those who moved to Tiny House Village were disposed of using tow companies and the Washington State Department of Licensing Abandoned RV Reimbursement Program at minimal to the City.
- The City implemented a new requirement that RVs move every 24 hours, move at least 1,000 feet, and have a 500-foot separation from any other RV.
- The street of initial concern no longer has RVs parked on it and the City reports significantly less RVs parked anywhere in city limits.

NEXT STEPS

The background information about vehicle and RV residency program models in this memorandum provides Council with details about how some entities in the region are responding to unsheltered homelessness. Staff can return to a future Council meeting with additional lessons learned from these programs and policy questions for Council to consider when discussing the City's specific response to vehicle and RV residency.