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Council changes camping options

*Car campers must now
obtain invitations or permits
to park in church lots and
industrial areas*

By Felicity Ayles
Oregon Daily Emerald

With the last day of Eugene's overnight camping ordinance rapidly approaching, the Neighborhood Leaders Council is concerned about the future of overnight car campers in the city.

Council members gathered Sept. 22 for an update on Eugene's new homeless camping ordinance, beginning Oct. 1.

According to the original ordinance that began last November, people could sleep in their vehicles in industrial areas or church parking lots with permission. This law was a result of Eugene City Council committee discussions after an increasing number of people began living in residential streets, said Richie Weinman, Eugene housing and development manager.

"The ordinance worked rather well," Weinman said. However, he added, business owners in industrial areas did not particularly like the approved car camping locations.

"There were a lot of claims that crime had increased, and the people who worked there didn't feel safe," Weinman said. The number of vehicles in these areas was usually as little as 30 or 40 but reached close to 80 at times, he said.

The committee decided to change the ordinance, then joined the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Eugene in hiring someone to provide facilitation services for the new ordinance, Weinman said.

Enter Mac McFadden, program coordinator for the overnight parking program through the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

McFadden has spent six years trying to find safe places for homeless car campers. He helped develop a contract with car campers through St. Vincent de

Paul in accordance with the new ordinance.

According to the new ordinance, car campers may park in various Eugene specified parking lots, provided they have the owner's permission and there are sanitation services available, McFadden said.

The new and old ordinances differ in that although campers can still park in church parking lots and industrial areas, they must be invited or have a permit to park. As long as campers obey the site's rules, they can keep their invitation, McFadden said.

Although the new ordinance specifies camping areas, space is still limited. Industrial areas can only have as many as three vehicles, McFadden said. The city offered 15 sites for people to camp overnight, but there are 75 units on the street.

Weinman also attested to Eugene's housing problem. "We have more households in the city than we have units, so we are confronted with a homeless situation," he said.

In an agreement with public safety, enforcement will be solely based on complaints. McFadden said he will respond to all complaints, even if the only thing he can do is just talk with campers. Weinman, who is also working with McFadden on the overnight camping program, said, "We don't want a lot of bad confrontation if we can avoid it."

With the law in place, McFadden and Weinman said they will continue to search for more Eugene areas available for vehicle campers to stay overnight.

"Some people will be helped," McFadden said. "For the rest of them, there's nothing there."

Felicity Ayles covers city development, the West University neighborhood and this fall's ballot measures for the Emerald. She can be reached via email at fizzer@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

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