

CAMPING, from page 1

a good night's sleep, they can't stay healthy, their ability to help themselves is severely compromised."

On Sept. 16, the Alternatives Workgroup presented its 13 recommendations to the Coordinating Committee.

Those include working with the police to develop guidelines and not enforce the anti-camping ordinance against campers following the guidelines, creating a program allowing campers to camp on private property with the permission of the property owner, creating a second tent city, increasing rent assistance funding, increasing shelter space and motel rooms used as shelter, and providing storage space for people to keep their belongings during the day.

"You're really talking about an alternative to people breaking the law," Jolin says. "The goal is to say while folks are working on that process (of ending their homelessness), how can they lawfully exist? Where do they stay? How do they stay healthy?"

The Alternatives Workgroup hopes to implement all of its recommendations in the next three to six months and at low cost. The projected cost of implementation ranged from zero to \$1,191,250.

Each member of the Coordinating Committee voted to determine the top four recommendations. According to Erickson, the recommendations that received the highest number of votes were creating camping guidelines, creating a program to allow camping on private property with owner permission, increasing shelter space and rent assistance funds.

Erickson says that in the last two weeks, City Commissioners Nick Fish and Amanda Fritz were briefed on the work group's recommendations and the Coordinating

parties to seek discovery, or exchange evidence, which is expected to take until Dec. 15.

"I think the lawsuit has focused attention specifically on the camping ordinance ... and refocused the conversation on what does it

The recommendation is based on a program that the city of Eugene has used for the past 10 years.

According to Richie Weinman, a senior development analyst for the city of Eugene, the Eugene City Council passed an



Campers converge outside City Hall Sept. 28 to protest the lack of shelter and legal places for the homeless to camp.

PHOTO BY AMANDA WALDRUP

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— MARC JOLIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOIN

Committee's vote. Multnomah County Commissioner Deborah Kafoury also was briefed.

Jolin says that there is an expectation that the Alternatives Workgroup will make another presentation to the Coordinating Committee in October and then will begin implementation. "This needs to happen fast," he says.

The discussion to create safe places for people to sleep is being driven by a number of factors. The recession has increased the numbers of homeless people, and the memory of last year's snowy, cold winter and the city's response of opening more shelter space is still fresh in the minds of people providing services to homeless people.

A class-action lawsuit against the city challenging the constitutionality of the anti-camping ordinance continues to put pressure and attention on the city and the way it enforces camping in public places.

In August, District Judge Ann Aiken denied the city's motion to dismiss the case. The next step of the process is for both

mean to have a law that says you can't lawfully sleep on public property when you have 1,500 people who don't have a choice but to do that?" Jolin says.

But no one thinks that the current discussion, being called the "10-Minute Plan" by some, is taking time, attention or resources away from the city's efforts to provide permanent housing to people under the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

"It is the first time the Coordinating Committee has really spent a significant amount of time and attention to these short-term expansions of our emergency strategies," Jolin says. "I don't think it's a policy shift."

"We are continuing to move ahead on the 10-Year Plan," Erickson says. "But what do we do in the meantime?"

When asked whether the city and the Housing Bureau were beginning to adopt a policy of creating more short-term options for homeless individuals who did not readily have access to shelter or permanent housing, Erickson refused to answer, saying that City Commissioner Nick Fish, the commissioner overseeing the Housing Bureau would be the best person to answer.

Fish did not return a call for comment by press time.

Rios says he is aware of the work the Alternatives Workgroup is doing but says, "they are not doing any action right now. This is action right now," he says, alluding to a feeling shared by many homeless people — that they want a safe place to sleep immediately.

"Sometimes they're dragging their feet," says Shields. "There are plenty of abandoned buildings in the city to turn into shelters and stuff like that."

One of the recommendations that will be looked into more closely involves establishing a program that will allow homeless people to camp in business and church parking lots, as well as private property.

ordinance 10 years ago that allowed as many as three homeless people to camp on the property of a business or church. Private-property owners can allow one person to sleep on their property at night. Rent cannot be charged and sanitation has to be provided.

Currently, there are 50 slots in the program, 15 of which are provided by the city of Eugene. But, Weinman says, it is difficult for the city to track individual property owners consenting to have a homeless individual sleep on their property.

There are 2,673 homeless people living in Eugene, according to the city's one-night count taken earlier this year.

Weinman says Eugene also revised its camping ordinance, although it is still illegal to sleep in public spaces. Weinman says that it is only addressed when a complaint about a camper is received. And instead of the police responding, an outreach worker visits the camp to resolve the situation.

"They are much more likely to be responsive to him," Weinman says. "I would say that the vast majority of cases are resolved without the police ever getting involved."

And, he says, it's a vast improvement on the previous model of dealing with camping, which was police enforcement.

"It was awful. It was a cat-and-mouse game," Weinman says. "The police hated it, the campers hated it, everybody hated it."

Weinman says that 15 to 20 complaints are received each week, and the police may get involved in two to three of them in a month. "It doesn't happen very often."

Weinman says that "there's been some really positive things" that have come out of the program, including eased relationships between homeless people and members of the business community and the police.

"I think people feel a little bit less stressed. They have a place where they can be and they're legal," Weinman says. "That takes the pressure off."

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