

'SECURITY FENCING' UNDER BRIDGES TO COST TAXPAYERS \$67,000 PLUS

Eugene Parks and Open Space has begun installing a series of fences — called under bridge security fencing — beneath the Washington-Jefferson Street Bridge in the park of the same name. Advocates for the unhoused say the funds could better be used aiding the homeless, not barring them from shelter.

The rod-iron panel fences are being placed in three areas under the bridge after several concerns of hazardous materials were reported to Parks and Open Spaces, according to Park Operations Supervisor Kevin Foerstler. The project will cost \$67,000, and a second phase of the project, tentatively scheduled for 2017, could amount to an additional \$20,000.

"All sites have public sidewalks, and the main reason the areas are being fenced is concern expressed from park visitors and pedestrians about not feeling safe with groups of people under bridges," Foerstler says.

The second reason for the fencing is staff having to clean up and call in outside hazardous materials teams for needles, human feces, urine and trash. Foerstler says the city spends \$250,000 annually cleaning up biohazard waste from illegal camping sites. A public restroom and needle drop site are located within the park, he adds.

In 2012, Lane County used allegations of human feces to shut down a protest at the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza in front of the county building downtown. No feces were ever found.

'The bars going up are going to further allow the city to criminalize them — it puts fear into people and there will just be more hatred towards the homeless.'

— CRYSTAL WEBB, NIGHTINGALE PUBLIC ADVOCACY COLLECTIVE

Crystal Webb, a board member of the Nightingale Public Advocacy Collective, says the price tag for the fencing project has been a shock. "They could have put \$67,000 into more sanctioned camps or anything to do with housing, and their problem would be eliminated," she says. "Nobody knows what's going on and this is just another step to criminalize homelessness."

The park operations manager approved the fencing project, and the funding will be derived from the capital improvements budget, which is used for facility repairs, and not out of the direct operating fund, according to Foerstler.

Webb says addressing homelessness is key because she continues to

see more and more people on the street. "I myself have been there. I know what it feels like to be shoved from one corner to another."

In December 2015, the Eugene City Council voted to endorse Housing First as the primary strategy to end homelessness in the city. Housing First seeks to shelter the unhoused before helping them seek treatment for drug addiction, alcoholism or other issues that may have led to their homelessness.

The specific locations of the fencing include the flyover from West 6th Avenue onto I-105, the main deck of Washington-Jefferson Street Bridge behind the skate park and the area north of West 1st Avenue along the sidewalk, Foerstler says.

Although Foerstler says no other fencing projects are currently under way, a potential area being monitored is under a section of Coburg Road where needles, debris and feces accumulate.

The Oregon Department of Transportation says it fenced overpasses along I-105 at Coburg Road, Garden Way and [Country] Club Road.

Webb says she doesn't believe building fences is a solution. "It also adds a fear factor to the general public," she says. "The bars going up are going to further allow the city to criminalize them — it puts fear into people and there will just be more hatred towards the homeless."

At 5 pm Friday, March 18, Humanity First and Badass Freedom Fighter will have a rally and march against the fences and the criminalization of homelessness. For more information, find "Homes Not Fences Rally and March" on Facebook. ■

SLANT

• As online comments, personal conversations and the letters in this issue tell us, some of the **leaders and residents of Springfield** are upset with our illustrated tour of Springfield nightlife in the back of the Swizzle section March 10. We like the suggestion from Fey Egan to send an EW staffer to "hang with the cool kids in Springfield, don't be an ass, and we'll show you the city, the real city. The one that is creative, alive and unpretentious." Good idea! We also want to point out the "Mad-Hot MEDGE" story on page 30 of the same issue about a dance show at the Wildish Theater in downtown Springfield, an example of the countless Springfield stories we run. And one last point: This alternative newspaper jabs the city of Eugene every week, and we love all our readers for your support of our drive to shake things up and make people think. Thanks for your feedback and for making us think as well, we need that. Long live Springfield and its neighbor, Eugene!



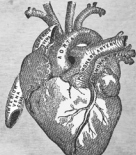
• **Some shocking numbers** have come out of the Lane County Poverty and Homeless Board recently. More than 47,700 households in Lane County qualify for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and among those households, 14,550 report zero income. Lane County has about 146,000 households so we're looking at one out of 10 households in dire poverty, surviving as best they can on charity, family and friends. Most local residents, if asked, can't quote these disturbing numbers, but they are aware of the huge problem. Political candidates going door-to-door tell us voters they talk to list solutions to homelessness as a top concern, followed by climate. Any candidate who ignores or sidesteps these issues is at a disadvantage. Any politician with a bad voting record on these issues is vulnerable.

• We're saving the dates April 2 and 4 to see the **Oregon Ducks play in Houston** in the final four and national championship of the big dance. It could happen. First Oregon game is Friday, March 17, at 4:27 pm. Second round is March 20, followed by March 24, March 26 and on to April. *The New York Times* sports writers belittle Oregon's chances, predicting an early loss, but that's because we're so far away from New York City.

• Thanks to the hard work of community members and the Eugene Human Rights Commission, Eugene will now celebrate **Indigenous Peoples' Day** on the second Monday in October rather than the fraught-with-colonial-oppression Columbus Day that falls on that date. The Eugene City Council, which voted unanimously on the resolution March 14, is also encouraging businesses, organizations and public institutions to recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day as well. See our blog, bit.ly/1xvpnFC, for a full story and photos.

• **Gov. Kate Brown** has less than four weeks to sign or veto the bills that passed both chambers of the Legislature's short session. The pressure is on the gov to kill some bad bills, but we haven't heard any noises in that regard. Too bad. She has signed the troublesome bill that ratifies the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's delisting of gray wolves as a state endangered species. The delisting makes it harder for enviros to sue ODFW based on the merits (or lack thereof) of the ruling. Another flawed package of four bills deals with "affordable" housing and fast-tracking annexation (see Slant last week). Developers and land speculators are constantly trying to weaken and sidetrack our land-use laws, and they will be celebrating — unless Brown dusts off her veto pen.

• The Obama administration has touted **drone strikes** that reportedly killed 150 terrorists in Somalia, but such military actions have also been likened to drive-by shootings where collateral damage is only revealed after the fact, if at all. Will such actions bring peace and stability to Somalia? We've been bombing from drones for 15 years now and we're not convinced the hundreds of millions spent on high-tech assassinations are a better investment than building schools and hospitals, and feeding and caring for refugees.

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