



Photo by Alexis Weisend

Fast and Furious

THE CITY OF EUGENE HAS QUIETLY GIVEN MORE THAN 1,300 UNHOUSED CAMPERS ONLY TWO HOURS' NOTICE TO MOVE INSTEAD OF 72 HOURS *by Alexis Weisend*

Kyrrie Ackley leans out of her tent, six feet off the Fern Ridge Trail, not far from where Bailey Hill Road crosses Amazon Creek. The night before, she'd pitched the tent — green, shrouded with a black tarp and pressed against a corrugated metal wall and barbed wire fence.

Now, just before noon, Ackley has been told to leave.

Ten minutes earlier, a city worker handed Ackley a notice declaring that her tent was prohibited and that she must take it down. Immediately.

Ackley points to the green paper, which she had folded neatly into quarters and placed on the grass next to her dog, Golly.

She's been forced to move many times. Two hours from now, city workers will haul away her belongings if she doesn't clear out. When she speaks about what she's lost before — clothes, a backpack and medications for epilepsy — she cries.

"It's just really hard. I'm out here by myself," she says, her voice fading. "I always get like this after having to move all the time."

Ackley recalls when the city gave her and other unhoused people ample time to take down their tents and move. But no longer.

Since October 2021, city workers have issued nearly 1,400 notices to unhoused campers that they had only two hours to dismantle their shelters or have city work-

ers haul away their possessions, according to an analysis of city documents by *Eugene Weekly* and the Catalyst Journalism Project.

More than half the notices city workers now serve are rapid evictions, city documents show.

Eugene officials are exploiting a loophole in a 2021 state law requiring cities give a 72-hour notice to unhoused campers before forcing them to move.

Oregon law doesn't require cities to give a notice if people are camping in public parks. But Eugene's actions have reversed a long-standing city policy allowing people camping in parks to have a 24-hour or 72-hour notice before being evicted.

The city's changed strategy helped drive the number of evictions of unhoused campers in 2022 to a seemingly all time high: 2,473, a 36 percent increase in just one year, *EW* and Catalyst's analysis shows.

Meanwhile, city officials hid the dramatic change in the way it treated unhoused people. City officials acknowledge they made no public announcement of the change, nor did they bring the matter before city council.

Even Mayor Lucy Vinis says she didn't know about it.

Vinis told *EW* after a Monday, April 10 City Council meeting, that she was unaware that since 2021 the city had been ordering unhoused campers to pick up and move within two hours or face losing their possessions. She says she's also unaware of the increased use of the two-hour notices.

"I don't know the level of criteria, what bumps something into a shorter term notice versus a longer term notice because I'm not at that operational level," Vinis says.

Eugene City Manager Sarah Medary did not respond to requests from *EW* to explain why the city made such a dramatic change in its treatment of unhoused people and did not inform the City Council or the public.

Cambra Ward Jacobson, communications director for the city, says in an email the city doesn't typically announce changes to procedure in how staff address existing rules and code and that there was no legal requirement to inform the City Council about the two-hour notices.

Heather Sielicki, a homeless advocate on the city's Human Rights Commission Homelessness and Poverty Workgroup, worked to help pass the change in Oregon law requiring a 72-hour notice before forcing unhoused campers to move. Sielicki says advocates argued — and state legislators agreed — that the previous 24-hour notice often denied people time to move their belongings or gain access to shelter, health care or other necessities.

Sielicki says she's shocked to find out the city had moved in the opposite direction — slashing the warning time from 72 hours to only two — and that city officials had hidden this from advocates and the public.

"This really stands to violate a lot of the principles of human rights, rather than trying to come up with concrete and productive ways to get people back into somewhere safe," Sielicki says. "It's just plain cruel."