

EW and the Catalyst Journalism Project examined more than 8,800 work orders from Eugene Public Works that document each time city workers force unhoused people to take down their camps and move. The city released the records in response to a request by EW under the Oregon public records law.

Dan Bryant, executive director at SquareOne Villages, which provides cost-effective housing to those in need, says he had not been aware of the two-hour eviction notices before being asked about them by EW. Bryant says such a short warning time is unreasonable, given that many unhoused people leave their camps for the day and might not see the notices before city workers take away their possessions.

“If they’re putting that notice with no confirmation that the person has received it, that’s a problem and should be stopped,” Bryant says. “It’s one of the biggest issues that unhoused people face — losing their belongings.”

The revelations come as the Eugene City Council considers changes to city camping policies in light of a 2021 state law that requires local ordinances to be “objectively reasonable as to time, place and manner with regards to persons experiencing homelessness.”

At Nightingale Hosted Shelters, Conestoga-style huts for unhoused people located near East 34th and Hilyard, Nathan Showers says he’s been hearing about the two-hour notices for several months. Showers, a camp manager at the site, says the city’s ramped-up evictions are inhumane.

“The whole issue here,” Showers says, “is our city policies and our government need to figure out a solution not just move us around and try to hide us in deeper spots.”

BREAKING A PRECEDENT

Former state Sen. Frank Shields, D-Portland, says giving unhoused people only two hours is unreasonable. “Government has to inject a certain amount of human-



DANIEL FISHER
Photo by Caleb Barber

ity into its decision-making,” he says. “And sometimes bureaucrats don’t understand that.”

Shields should know. In 1995, he introduced the first law requiring that cities provide a 24-hour notice before forcing unhoused people to move from their encampments on public property. At the time, police and city officials were not required to give any warning before confiscating unhoused people’s tents, sleeping bags and other belongings.

“Generally, my feeling was anytime you’re going to

disrupt somebody’s life, whether there’s an individual family or a whole community, you need to give them a heads up, you know, like a 24-hour notice,” Shields says.

The 1995 law exempted cities from issuing 24-hour notices if the prohibited camping was taking place in a “day use recreational area,” such as parks or open spaces. The law also said the 24-hour notice applied only to “established camping sites,” even though lawmakers never defined what “established” meant.

Nonetheless, documents show, the city of Eugene for years routinely extended the 24-hour notices to unhoused people camping in city parks.

In 2021, lawmakers extended the notice time to 72 hours after concerns about how some cities swept large homeless encampments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Homeless advocates said 24 hours didn’t give many unhoused people enough time to find a place to stay or attend to their health needs. At the time, Eugene’s forced clearance of large homeless encampments drew protests.

State Rep. John Lively, D-Springfield, introduced House Bill 3124, which made the change.

“Part of the goal of this was to give time for the non-profits to go out and work with these people to help find another location to protect their belongings, to set up a process to help them,” Lively says now. “And they thought that the 72 hours provided enough time to do that.”

The bill made no change in the law when it came to established camping sites.

Kelly Shadwick, a spokesperson for Eugene Parks and Open Space, said city officials in 2021 looked more closely at the law.

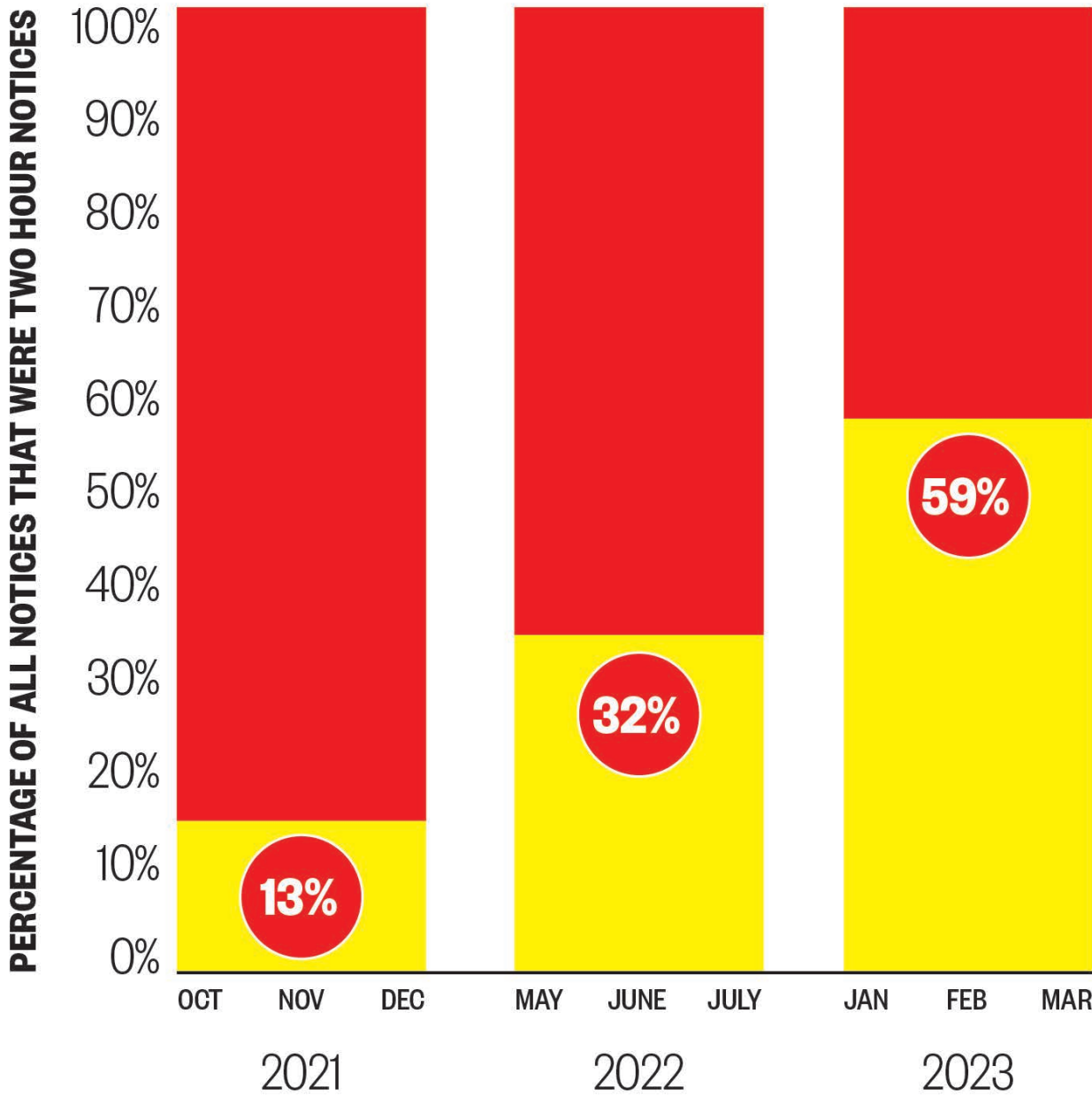
“It does not define the word ‘established,’” Shadwick says in a prepared statement in response to EW’s questions. “The city of Eugene’s interpretation is [that] a site set up for less than 24 hours is not established.”

Without public discussion, city officials invented a new kind of eviction for unhoused people: a “non-established camp” notice. The notices ordered that people take down tents or other structures immediately and that they remove their possessions within two hours.

Shadwick did not answer EW’s question about when the decision to start using two-hour notices was made. City Manager Medary declined to answer questions about how the decision was made, or why city officials came up with a two-hour notice after having allowed 24-hour notices in parks for years.

Documents show the first “non-established camp” two-hour notice was delivered on Oct. 28, 2021, to the owner of a camouflaged tent and shopping cart in Washington Jefferson Park. After that, the number of two-hour notices grew rapidly.

Meanwhile, Eugene officials were telling a very differ-



SOURCE: RECORDS FROM CITY OF EUGENE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS