

ent story about their treatment of unhoused people on the city's website.

In a section called "How We Respond," the city's website described how it handles prohibited camping in parks: "Staff provide a 72-hour warning and will return no sooner than 72 hours to clean the site."

The city belatedly changed the website in March 2022 to say tents pitched in city parks had to be taken down immediately. By then, city officials had evicted more than 200 campsites with two-hour notices.

Sielicki was on the Eugene Human Rights Commission at the time the two-hour notices began. "I don't remember anything like this ever coming up for discussion," she says. "And I think that we had established a lot of trust at that time, and I wish we could have had a real open conversation about it."

Mayor Vinis isn't the only member of the City Council who didn't know about the changed treatment of unhoused campers.

City Councilor Emily Semple says she had never heard of the "non-established" camp notices. "I don't know anything about these two-hour notices," she says. "That's news to me."

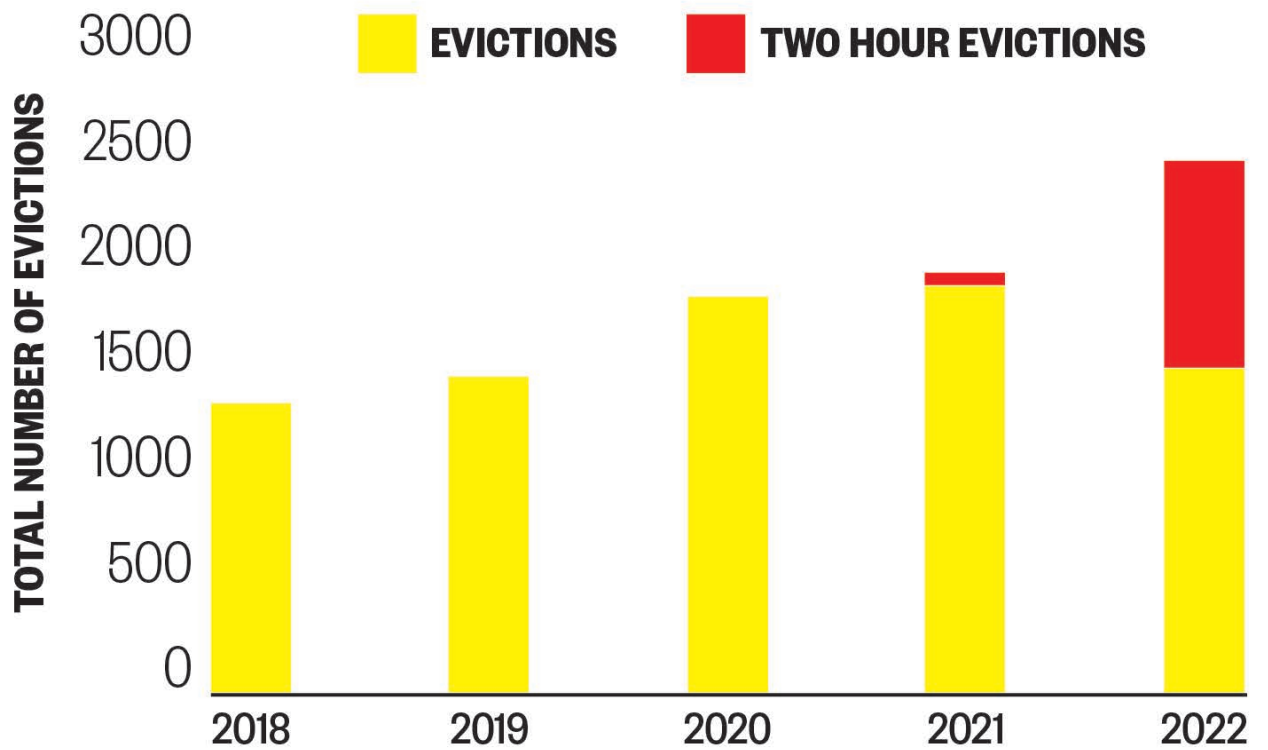
On the night of April 10, the City Council heard a plea for mercy from an unhoused person, whose letter was read aloud by a community member during the council's public forum. The unhoused person wrote that he and other people camping in Eugene over the last 18 months have seen city workers provide little or no notice before clearing people's camps.

"On four occasions in the last year," he said in the letter, "a parks department vehicle has stopped at my tent site and removed my belongings, moved them to presumed storage sites. On each of these occasions, I've been left with nothing — no bedding, no tent, no private amenities — including toiletries, no clothing, and none of my personal records and papers. All four times I have had to start gathering once again the supplies and necessities for bare survival."

"The many others who have been through these ordeals as I have are joining together with me in strongly asking [for] at least 72 hours' notice while being given the dignity, empathy and respect we expect as citizens."

'THEY'RE GONNA FIND ME'

EW interviewed people living along the Fern Ridge Creek Trail in February and March who have also been forced to pack up and move their camps within two hours.



SOURCE: RECORDS FROM CITY OF EUGENE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

In February, Daniel Fisher, who has been homeless for several months, was pushing his shopping cart along the Fern Ridge Trail filled with his possessions when one of the wheels broke. He says it was so frigid out, he just couldn't keep moving. He camped for the night and woke up to a city of Eugene worker telling him he had to collect his things and get moving — now.

Fisher, who says he became homeless after losing his job as a taxi driver, was confused because he thought people camping had 72 hours to move their belongings.

"When I got the two-hour notice, I thought it was a 72-hour notice," he says. "But when I saw two hours, it did stress me out. It made my anxiety shoot up because pretty much all my stuff — in two hours, if I don't have it moved, I don't know what they're gonna do with it."

He's since heard about the two-hour notices elsewhere. "I see the shift happening," Fisher says. "They're putting two-hour notices up. This is all in the last month I've seen this."

Fisher says he typically sleeps in parks during the day and keeps moving all night so he doesn't have to pitch a tent. "I'm afraid everywhere I set it up," Fisher says. "I'm

considered trespassing or I'm basically exposing myself to a legal consequence. "I'm getting two-hour notices because I'm walking until I cannot walk anymore."

Bonnie "Rae" Steiner says she was camping in February underneath a footbridge along the Fern Ridge Trail with friends when city workers in a truck arrived and told them they had two hours to move their things.

Steiner says she has lived on the Eugene streets since the mobile home she lived in burned down in the 2020 Holiday Farm Fire. She's 64 years old and has lupus, which makes moving her belongings difficult.

She says she didn't know where city officials wanted to move her things to in that short time. "They stood there while you tried to pack what you could," she says of the city workers. "It's very embarrassing."

Steiner adds that she tried moving her things far away enough from underneath the bridge, but, after the two hours passed, the workers took her items.

The city stores the personal property it takes from unhoused people for 30 days. People can reclaim their items by visiting the retrieval site, which was about two miles from Steiner's campsite that day.

Steiner says she's lost all her belongings to two-hour notices many times, but she never retrieves her items from storage since it's difficult for her to walk the roughly two miles to the storage center and carry all her items back.

"Well, once you get there, how the heck are you gonna pack it?" Steiner asks.

Some of these notices are handed out in the early evenings and on weekends. But the personal property retrieval site at 115 N. Garfield Street, where items deemed valuable are stored and available for pick-up within 30 days, is closed on weekends and after 2:30 pm on weekdays, leaving some people without tents or sleeping bags for a night or weekend.

Kyrie Ackley, who wept after receiving her two-hour notice, says she has been unhoused and living in parks for several years. She says she's lost her belongings six times to two-hour notices. One of the hardest items for her to lose was food for her dog. "My dog eats before I do," she says.

She says she has felt the full weight of the two-hour eviction notices. "They go by here, like, every day, or every other day, and I get lucky if they don't see my tent," she says. "They only give you two hours. They used to give you 72 hours."

"Every time I get a notice, I'm like, 'Fuck, they found me.' But I already know that they're gonna find me," she says. "Why can't they just let me be here for at least more than one day?" ■

This story was developed as part of the Catalyst Journalism Project at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication. Catalyst brings together investigative reporting and solutions journalism to spark action and response to Oregon's most perplexing issues. To learn more visit CatalystJournalism.uoregon.edu or follow on Twitter @uo_catalyst.

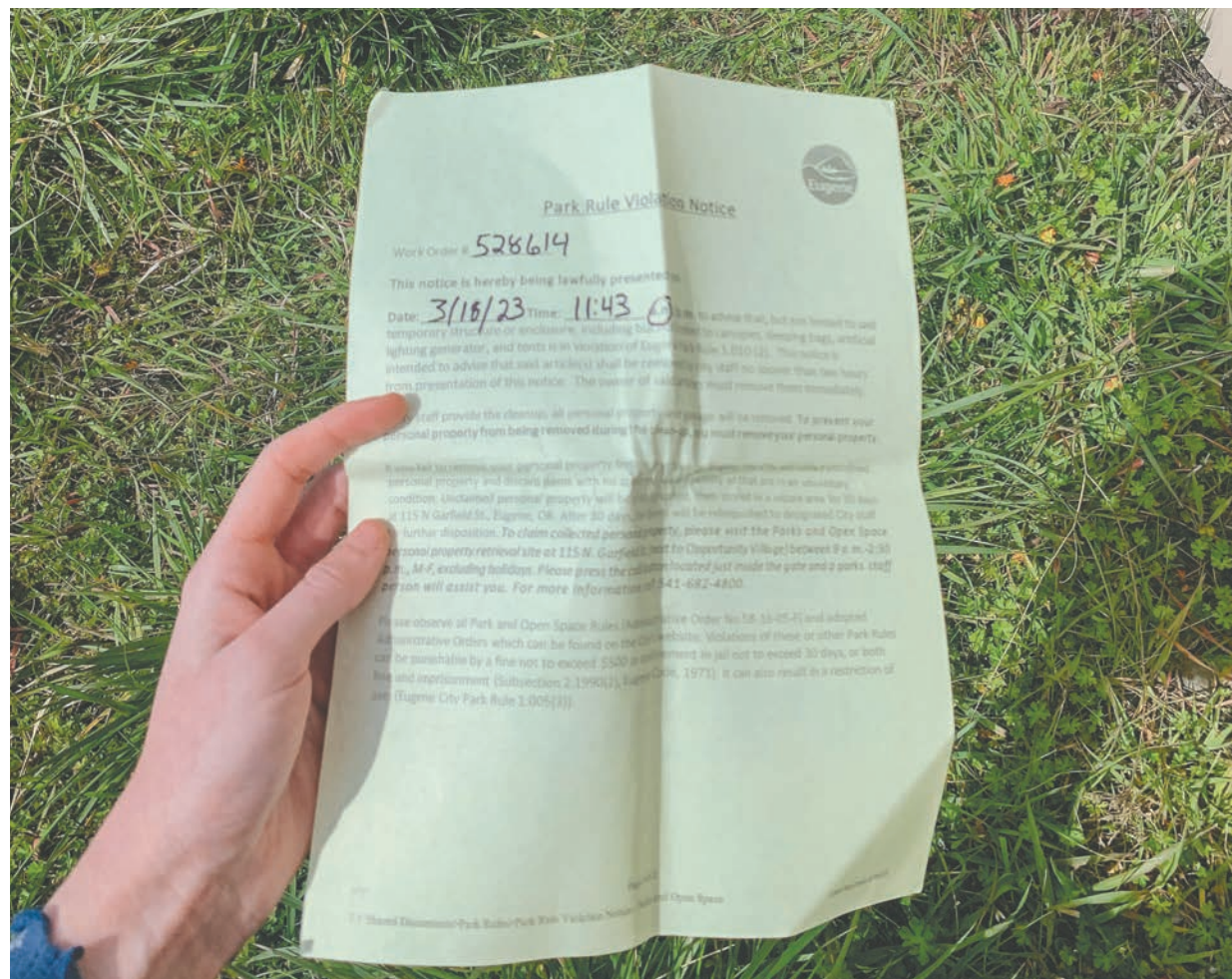


Photo by Alexis Weisend