

Program

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Russell said some people come into the program and remain for just a few weeks until they find better arrangements. Others may take a couple of months to find housing. The average stay is about 60-90 days, he said, for participants get back on their feet.

According to Russell, the program is purposefully small. Usually, there are only between two and four participants at a time. This ensures workers keep a controlled safe and clean environment.

LOCATION & SAFETY

Safety was one of the main driving factors behind the packed council hall. Many voiced concerns that expanding the location to the north end of Dry Canyon would increase the risk of criminal activity and lower property values.

But, according to Russell, there hasn't been any criminal activity and there have been no complaints from neighbors since starting the program at Mountainview.

According to Russell, the new site will be closely monitored. If something does happen, Lewis



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

The current location of the safe parking program behind the Mountainview Fellowship church in Redmond.

said that neighbors can call the Redmond Police Department or Deschutes County Sheriff's office.

Russell said so far the program has avoided problems. At Mountainview, the parking lot has proven to be a safer, cleaner place with program participants living there overnight.

Before they arrived at the church, Russell said they would find bottles, drug paraphernalia, clothes and other items around their parking lot, he said.

When people started living in the lot, the participant began notifying RSPP if anyone arrived uninvited. According to Russell, even litter disappeared when the program started up.

Russell said the program may seem to invite chaos, but "it turns out to be the opposite."

Many who attended the council were worried not just for their safety — but also for the safety of the people taking part in the program.

"It's not the program," said

Rick Torassa, who lives in the area. "It's the location. The way the program is operating at the church is perfect. It's absolutely perfect."

He argued that the Pershall location is unsafe. It's dark and has wild animals like coyotes, badgers and skunks. It is not connected to services like water and sewer, Torassa said.

He proposed nine different locations around Redmond that he believes could work better, including where the new police

department will be constructed or Homestead Park on NW Canal Blvd.

GUIDELINES/REQUIREMENTS

Participants in the program must agree to numerous rules in order to remain on site.

First, they must sign a "Be Neighborly" agreement with a laundry list of rules, including quiet hours from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m., no tents or improvised camping, no drugs or alcohol, vehicles must remain operable,

pets must be on leashes, all personal property must remain inside vehicles and no dumping of RV or trailer sewage or water is permitted. Additionally, no fires or barbecues are allowed.

Portable toilets will also be included and, if needed, Russell said they can contract with a waste management company to service the site.

"The cleanliness of the site is very important to us," Russell said.

If anyone violates these rules Sierra Hopper, the case manager for the program, said "they will be kicked out."

Additionally, every private entity that decides to host the program will be able to create their own criteria for it. For instance, the current VFW location requests that homeless veterans are prioritized.

Everyone in the program must also work with a case manager to find stable housing.

Russell said they will help participants in any way they can, explaining that if someone doesn't have health insurance that they'll connect them with the Oregon Health Plan. If someone has parking tickets, they'll help them navigate the process.

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Council

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parking lot for about a year. Pastor Rick Russell said it has been successful in helping houseless people gather themselves and takes step toward housing. Mountainview has generally had about four participants in the program at a time.

At the meeting, Redmond Police Chief Devin Lewis said that officers had seen no increase in emergency calls or reported crimes at the Mountainview parking site, or nearby, since the program went into effect.

Yet neighborhood residents said it would be a different story along 19th Street, north of Dry Canyon. They said the dark area — without water, sewer or plumbing — is at the edge

of city limits and would invite non-sanctioned campers to the area and increase crime and pollution.

It is near a popular paved path that is commonly used by bicyclists, jogger and dog walkers. Numerous homes are nearby.

But most focused on the fact that they did not know anything about the project in advance.

Susan Torassa, who lives in the neighborhood, said that "transparency was definitely missing in the sneaky selection and preparation of the public property."

She asked for the property to be reevaluated and relocated to another parcel of city-owned land out of her neighborhood and closer to services.

"If this is such a good idea, where is the transparency?"

The program allows people to live for up to 90 days in RVs or vehicles, as long as they agree to a code of conduct and work to find more secure long-term housing. While using safe parking, participants cannot use drugs or alcohol and must work with a case manager.

echoed resident Dusty Stenkamp. "You guys would have got a lot more compassion from us by doing it differently," said Kirsten Rodin.

Mike Murphy, a builder who has lived in the neighborhood for more than 20 years, agreed that the parking program is "no-ble," but the chosen site is poor.

Yet others were against the program itself, saying it will in-

crease crime and contribute to homelessness and lawlessness.

"You call it safe parking, I call it a homeless camp," said neighbor Tamara Murphy. She noted that she was also worried about the possibility of wildfire starting at the camp and spreading quickly down the canyon.

Neighbor Alan Lawyer said programs like this should not operate near "million-dollar

homes."

Rick Russell, lead pastor at Mountainview Fellowship Church who runs the program, spoke after the public had their say. He said the safe program initiative has been successful at their church, as has one in the VFW parking lot in Redmond.

He said it is highly organized — people cannot just show up and park their vehicle and remain forever. Most of its participants, he said, are people who have recently become homeless due to medical issues or the loss of employment, and they just need some place to be settled and safe while they look for other options.

Russell apologized for not communicating with neighbors about the program, but said he does work to "keep it quiet" in

order for the program to blend into neighborhoods and not bring unwanted attention. He said that works better for the people in the safe parking program, and reduces the chances that others not part of the program will congregate in the area.

When public discussion ended and councilors had their chance to speak, many said they, too, were caught off guard by the program. The city of Redmond had used \$50,000 in ARPA funds to seed the program at Mountainview last year, but multiple councilors said they were not aware about the program's expansions and they should have been better informed about the plan and the use of tax dollars.

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