

Providing for the Unhoused: A Review of Transitional Housing Strategies in Eugene



October 2015

Final Report

Prepared by:
Community Planning Workshop
A Program of the
Community Service Center



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON



Community
Planning
Workshop

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness in Eugene is not a new problem. A 2015 point-in-time survey identified more than 1,473 homeless individuals in Eugene of which the majority (817) were unsheltered. Given the systemic nature of homelessness, it continues to be a challenging problem in our community. If easy solutions existed, the city would have implemented them and solved the problem long ago.

In 2011, the Eugene City Council asked Mayor Piercy to form a task force to develop recommendations regarding the needs of unhoused community members. The first recommendation of the Task Force—which is the subject of this report—focused on finding one or more sites to provide short-term, transitional housing opportunities. Starting in 2013, the City piloted two programs that relate to the siting recommendation: (1) so-called “rest stops” which provide city sanctioned camping areas; and (2) a micro-housing community called Opportunity Village.

In short, the City of Eugene is testing alternative methods of transitioning the unhoused population that are new and relatively unique. As the policies supporting these programs require periodic renewal, providing information on how the programs are functioning is critical to helping city staff and elected officials make decisions regarding their continuation. As such, the goal of this project was to gather information on the performance of the transitional housing strategies to better understand how they work and what impacts they are having on rest stop and Opportunity Village residents and nearby property owners.

Eugene’s Transitional Housing Strategies: Rest Stops and Micro-villages

To address homelessness and some of its negative impacts, the City has established a number of policies and programs to address the issue. Central among these is a citywide prohibition on camping that was adopted in 1983 (city ordinance 4.815).

Such ordinances are common in cities and are intended to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. Illegal camps have been a perennial issue in Eugene and often have significant environmental impacts. The implementation of the ordinance, however, creates a significant limitation on temporary shelter for unhoused individuals. Moreover, not all individuals that camp create negative community impacts.

To address the issue, the City adopted an ordinance that permits camping under specific circumstances. The Permitted Overnight Sleeping Pilot Program or “rest stop” ordinance (Ordinance 20517) establishes a set of prohibited behaviors and

Homelessness in Lane County by the Numbers, 2015

- 1,473 people counted
- 223 family members in homeless households with children; 151 sheltered; and 72 unsheltered
- 210 homeless veterans: 110 sheltered; 100 unsheltered:
- 697 chronically homeless people: 318 sheltered; 379 unsheltered
- 398 people have a mental illness
- 20 people have chronic alcohol/substance abuse issues
- 23 unaccompanied homeless youth (under18)

requires rest stops have a site manager. Eugene City Council has approved six rest stop locations since the ordinance was initially adopted in September 2013. As of September 2015, two Eugene nonprofit organizations are managing four rest stops. Community Supported Shelters (<http://communitysupportedshelters.org/>) manages three rest stops and Nightingale Health Sanctuary (<http://respectexistence.org/>) manages one rest stop.

Key Findings

To gather information and understand the rest stop policy and programmatic context, CPW facilitated two meetings with city staff and rest stop and OVE volunteers. We collected 178 surveys from service providers, rest stop residents, and rest stop neighbors:

- 13 OVE residents
- 37 rest stop residents (at four rest stops)
- 99 neighboring residences and businesses (properties within 500' of a rest stop)
- 28 representatives from service provider organizations

Rest Stops

Rest stops are designated areas within the Eugene city limits where up to 20 people are allowed to sleep in tents, trailers or Conestoga huts. They are intended to provide a temporary, safe, legal option for people experiencing homelessness. Community nonprofits provide site supervision, portable restrooms and trash collection. The organizations must keep a roster of individuals registered to stay at the site and ensure site rules are followed, such as no alcohol or drugs on site and no disorderly behavior. The sites are fenced to control access and promote safety.

The Rest Stop pilot program has had more than 600 applicants and has served more than 210 individuals since its establishment. The program has seen nearly 100 residents transition to alternative housing options and has dismissed 35 residents for violations of the rules. Moreover, of the more than 210 residents served, 13 have been veterans. Police data has shown no considerable increase in reported activity due to the rest stops. The average length of stay is approximately six months.

Following are key findings from our survey research.

- Nearly all of the residents heard about the rest stops through personal networks or someone staying at the camp.
- Rest stop residents reported that it was not difficult to apply to live at the rest stop.
- Residents reported that staying at the camp makes them feel safer, more confident, and more independent.
- Residents report that camp staff were helpful and site rules are effective.

- Residents report that staying at the rest stop helped them transition to permanent housing; many reported they still face barriers to obtaining permanent housing.
- Service providers identified opportunities to create stronger linkages between the rest stops and service providers.
- Service providers see rest stops as a cost efficient approach to provide transitional housing to the unhoused. Moreover, most service providers think rest stops are a good start, but that more is needed.
- Thirty percent of neighboring residents and businesses indicated they were unaware of the City's rest stop program
- Eighty-four percent of neighboring residents and businesses indicated that they support of the rest stop program.
- Sixty-two percent of neighboring residents and businesses indicated they feel "safe" or "very safe" in their neighborhood.

Opportunity Village

A second transitional housing strategy Eugene is also experimenting with is a micro-housing community called "Opportunity Village" (OVE). In the first 18 months (July 2013-December 2014), OVE served 77 people for various lengths of time—with 27 voluntary transitions and 13 departing due to rule violations. Between January 1 and June 30, 2015, OVE served an additional 34 individuals. OVE consists of up

to 30 micro-homes, community showers, kitchens and other communal areas. OVE residents helped construct the homes, contribute rent, and stay for anywhere from one week to longer than a year.

Like the rest stops, Opportunity Village was approved through a City Council action. The process was initiated by the City Manager at the direction of City Council in 2011. The objective was to find a location to pilot project a low-cost, micro-housing project. The identified location was a one-acre parcel of city-owned land on North Garfield Street.

Unlike the rest stops, Opportunity Village was permitted under Eugene Code 9.2450, which classifies OVE as a "Homeless Shelter." As a homeless shelter, the approval required a conditional use permit based on the I-3 (Heavy Industrial) zoning of the property.

Data provided on the OVE website suggest that the approach is cost effective: Start-up costs were about \$220,000 and funded with around \$98,000 in private cash donations, plus an estimated \$114,000 of in-kind materials and labor. Operating costs are around \$1,200/month. OVE concludes: "If capital costs are amortized over 5 years and similar operating costs are assumed, OVE comes at a cost of just \$3/night/person. Of which, \$1/night is paid or raised by our residents."

Following are key findings from our survey research.

- Nearly 1/3 of the residents heard about OVE through social media networks.

- Residents indicate that it was not difficult to apply to live at OVE.
- Residents indicated that staying at the camp helps them feel secure, safe in their neighborhood, and independent.
- OVE provides a space in which individuals regularly interact with one another and establish community.
- Residents indicate camp staff are helpful and site rules are effective.
- Site rules directly impacted the neighboring residents and businesses level of support for Opportunity Village.
- Residents view the operational structure and rules of Opportunity Village positively.
- Staying at the rest stop helps residents transition to permanent housing; some reported that the still face barriers to obtaining permanent housing.
- While opinions vary on their current connection (some report strong connections, others, weaker connections) with Opportunity Village, many service providers see an opportunity for improvement.
- Neighboring residents and businesses generally felt the neighborhood surrounding Opportunity Village was perceived as safe.
- Eighty percent of neighboring residents and businesses indicated they were aware of OVE.
- Survey results show that nearly 90% of neighboring residents and businesses were supportive of the OVE program.
- Many neighboring residents and businesses reported that they had not noticed any changes since OVE's inception.

Conclusions

Our general conclusion from the review is that the programs are working. Our specific conclusions integrate themes that we identified through the literature review, case studies and surveys.

The lack of affordable housing remains the biggest barrier in providing for the unhoused in Eugene. While this is an obvious point and is perhaps more expansive than the scope of this study intends, it is important to acknowledge the challenge Eugene continues to face in providing housing that is affordable for all residents. In short, though many factors contribute to homelessness, the absence of housing affordable to people with little or no income presents a significant barrier to unhoused individuals that want to transition into permanent housing.

The “Housing First” strategy is a demonstrated transitional housing strategy that is effective and saves money. Housing First is an effective alternative for individuals that are unhoused, particularly those who face substance abuse disorders along with mental and physical health barriers. While the Housing First approach requires key components like vacant land, financial stability, and

collaboration from local, state, and federal agencies, this method is a cost-effective way to mitigating homelessness.

Few individuals residing at Rest Stops or Opportunity Village are homeless by choice. CPW's survey showed that only 8% of Rest Stop residents and no Opportunity Village residents reported they were homeless by choice. Moreover, CPW found that many of the respondents lived in Eugene at the time that they first became unhoused. Our research suggests that the causes of homelessness are as diverse as the homeless population and dispels the myth that all homeless individuals are "chronically" homeless. Nationwide, chronically homeless individuals accounted for 15% of all homeless people. CPW's survey shows that 19% of Rest Stop residents and 8% of OVE residents had been homeless five or more years.

Rest stops and Opportunity Village residents have more self-confidence, are better able to provide for themselves, and feel as though they're part of a community. Not only do the legal camping programs provide a safe, legal place for the unhoused to sleep, but they appear to help the residents in other ways. Rest stop and Opportunity Village residents indicated that living in the communities increased their self-confidence (69%), made them feel more independent (81%), and gave them a sense of community (92%). Additionally, volunteer site managers expressed similar thoughts about how staying in the rest stops and Opportunity Village benefitted the residents.

The rest stop ordinance is successful at providing a legal place for the unhoused to sleep. More than 70% of rest stop residents indicated that staying at the rest stop is helping them transition into permanent housing. While no formal evaluation of outcomes has been conducted, CSS and NHS collect data on residents. The statistics suggest the rest stop program is helping many residents transition to stable housing. CSS reports that 45 residents transitioned to rental housing), HUD VASH (housing for veterans), Shelter Care, friends or family. While incomplete, these figures suggest the program is having some level of success at transitioning residents into stable housing.

The rest stop ordinance lacks a clear purpose statement. Based on review of the ordinance and other available materials, it is unclear whether the rest stop ordinance has an intent beyond providing the unhoused a temporary, safe, and legal place to sleep. In short, it is unclear whether the city intends the program to have a broader set of outcomes and how it fits in with other efforts in the region to address homelessness.

Opportunity Village appears to be successful in transitioning individuals into more permanent housing. This reinforces the viability of micro-villages as transitional housing and suggests micro-villages as suitable, long-term housing for the unhoused. According to the Opportunity Village quarterly reports, of 47 residents that transitioned, 30 found housing. Fourteen moved into rental housing, 13 moved in with family or friends, and others transitioned into Section 8 housing or other transitional housing. While incomplete, these figures suggest the program is having some level of success at transitioning residents into stable housing.

Neighboring businesses and residents are very supportive of the programs, and experience little to no negative impacts from being located near the facilities. A large majority (83%) of residential or commercial neighbors of the rest stops and Opportunity Village support the programs, often justifying their support with the simple belief that everyone deserves a place to live. What's more, very few of those surveyed reported experiencing any changes in their neighborhoods related to the nearby programs.

The location of rest stops and Opportunity Village present equity issues for residents and neighbors. There is a sense of unfairness among neighboring residents and business owners related to the concentration of the rest stops and Opportunity Village in one part of the City. This sentiment of unfairness was communicated neighbors whom identified two aspects of unfairness with relation to the siting of rest stops: (1) the rest stops were concentrated in one part of the City; and (2) rest stops are sited are in industrial areas near railroad tracks and distant for day-to-day services. Neighbors and business suggested that the siting of rest stops and any future micro-villages should be reconsidered so as to evenly distribute the rest stops and/or micro-villages across the City.

While the City of Eugene has taken significant steps to address homelessness in the community, it lacks a long term, clear vision for addressing the issue. Before expanding on this conclusion, it is necessary to note that the Lane County Human Services Commission is the lead agency in the region for addressing homelessness. Lane County has developed a comprehensive strategy and provides funding for homelessness outreach, emergency and transitional shelters, homelessness prevention and transitions out of homelessness.

The Lane County Poverty and Homeless Board is a collaboration of local governments and nonprofit organizations focused on developing and implementing more holistic programs targeting the unhoused in Lane County and is a good example of regional collaboration among local governments and nonprofit organizations. The Poverty and Homeless Board are actively working to develop and implement a Housing First program. Some progress has been made towards that end; data provided by the County identify eight "Homeless First" programs run by local nonprofit organizations with the capacity to accommodate about 30 families and 130 individuals.

Despite all these efforts, it is unclear what the City role is in implementing the County's 10-year plan or in the Housing First strategy. Effective homeless strategies require partnerships—every case study community that had seen success in their homeless strategies involved all levels of local government, nonprofits, and private businesses.

The Rest Stop program and Opportunity Village are working. This is perhaps the most important conclusion of this work. CPW structured the research as a 360-degree review of the programs and considered the experience of residents, neighbors and program managers. All three groups reported positive experiences with the program. One of the consistent themes we heard was that the programs should be expanded.



SquareOne Villages is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating tiny home communities for people in need of housing.



🌐 www.squareonevillages.org
✉ info@squareonevillages.org



Bridging the Gap

It's our belief that everyone deserves a safe and stable place to call home. We seek to bridge the often insurmountable gap between the street and conventional housing with a variety of simple, cost-effective housing options.



Sustainable Footprint

The American home has more than doubled in size since 1950, even as fewer people are living in them. SquareOne returns to compact, low-impact alternatives. In doing so, we believe we can not only address the housing gap, but also embody a vision for a more sustainable future.



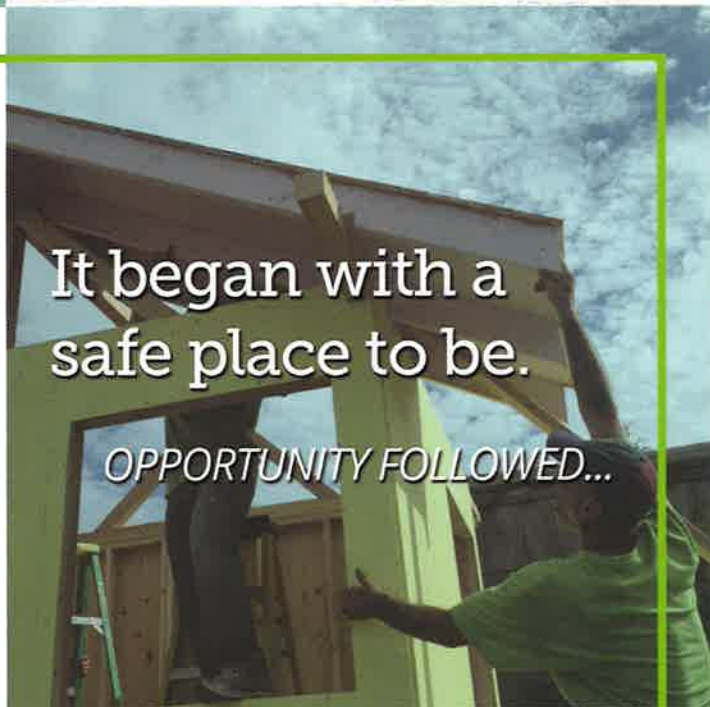
Community Building

We go beyond building individual tiny houses. SquareOne builds democratic communities in which each person has a voice in shaping how their community is operated and managed—creating a foundational sense of ownership on which the village thrives.



Collaborative Initiatives

Our initiatives engage and involve a multitude of local partnerships. This broad collaboration demonstrates what's possible when a community comes together. By utilizing the existing resources around us, we can quickly create more housing opportunities for those in need.



Learn more about
our village model:
squareonevillages.org/toolbox



Opportunity Village

A Transitional Tiny House Community

Goal: To stabilize people who are unhoused and help them transition to more permanent housing.



- Opportunity Village opened in August 2013 as a "transitional micro-housing" pilot project on city-owned land.
- Tiny homes of 60-80sf in size are supported by common cooking, restroom, and gathering areas.
- It serves 30 otherwise homeless individuals and couples at a time. Over 100 people called it home for varying lengths of time during the first 3 years of operation.
- "Opportunity Village was the stepping stone of my transition into society. After only a few months of living there my girlfriend and I now are living a life where we are able to sustain a home on our own after being homeless for two years." — Sam (former resident)

Emerald Village

An Affordable Tiny House Community

Goal: To provide permanent, affordable housing to people with extremely low-incomes.



- Emerald Village is a 22-unit affordable tiny house community scheduled to break ground in spring 2017.
- Local architects, builders, and students have teamed up to build a variety of designs between 160-300sf, each with a bathroom and kitchenette. A common building will provide a larger kitchen, gathering area, and laundry.
- Residents will be members of a housing cooperative, and will build a financial share in their community.
- "No one ever imagines they're going to find themselves homeless at age 65, especially when you've worked almost all your adult life. That's why I'm so excited about Emerald Village, because I can afford it." — Alice (future resident)



I'd like to make a tax-deductible donation!

- For Opportunity Village, to help people transition out of homelessness
- For Emerald Village, to prevent homelessness with innovative affordable housing
- Where needed most

Enclosed is my donation of: _____ make it monthly (we'll contact you to set this up)

I'd like to donate skills or materials: _____

Please return to:
SquareOne Villages
458 Blair Blvd.
Eugene, OR 97402

Name: _____ Email: _____ Phone: _____