

## **Renton council delays camping ban over services requirement**

The Renton City Council delayed final adoption of an ordinance criminalizing camping on city property Monday night, sending the measure back to committee after members could not agree on whether the city must provide services to the people it might displace.

The council voted 6-0 to refer Ordinance 6199 to its Committee of the Whole for further discussion. No date has been set, while enforcement was set to begin Jan. 1. Council President Ruth Pérez was absent, leaving six of seven members present. Members said they wanted the full council seated for the discussion.

The dispute centered on the requirement of services; the version before the council Monday differed from the one members advanced Aug. 17. Following a council motion at that meeting, the ordinance's outreach provision was revised to say authorized officials “are required to refer persons to available services before or in addition to enforcement,” replacing language that said officials were “encouraged” to do so.

Councilmember James Alberson Jr. moved to send the measure back. “Information about the consequences... of changing that word has come to light,” he said. The ordinance does not specify what officers must do when no services are available.

Councilmember Kim-Khánh Văn said the requirement should stand. “I believe that we need to have a requirement of our officers to provide the services,” she said. Councilmember Carmen Rivera opposed the ordinance outright, saying that the ordinance itself is not effective and that it will only move the problem around.

As drafted, Ordinance 6199 would make knowingly camping on city property a misdemeanor punishable by up to 90 days in jail, a \$1,000 fine, or both. The same penalties

would apply to unauthorized property storage, shopping cart possession and violating a trespass order.

The ordinance defines camping as using city property as a temporary or permanent dwelling. Erecting a tent or shelter, storing property or building a fire counts as evidence of camping when done for habitation. The prohibition reaches beyond parks to trails, open spaces, parking lots, transit facilities, rights-of-way and undeveloped parcels.

It would also create a unified trespass order system with geographic zones. An authorized official could issue an order on probable cause that someone committed a violation on city property. Exclusions would run 30 days for a first offense, 90 days after one prior violation, 180 days after two, and up to a year after three or more.

Renton does not operate its own resource center. Nonprofit and county-run services operate in the area, but the city has no facility of its own to which officers can direct people. The council was still considering a separate proposal Monday night to acquire a 3-acre property at 2500 East Valley Highway S. for \$8.5 million to house one.

Councilmember Valerie O'Halloran, the finance committee chair, said at an Aug. 10 meeting that the purchase would shave a year or possibly two off the time needed to open the center, according to the Renton Reporter. Mayor Armondo Pavone estimated the savings closer to three or four years.

Residents raised the same gap during public comment. "There is an important difference between offering someone a service and having an appropriate placement actually available for them," one speaker told the council, adding that a referral does not mean the provider has somewhere for that person to stay.

Another questioned the timing. “The enforcement goes into effect January 1st, but it sounds like we can't expect those services to be available and written at that time,” the speaker said.

A third said the council was moving to criminalize homelessness in front of a room of opponents and without its full membership seated.

Renton is modeling its approach on Auburn, which adopted a camping ordinance in 2021. The city hired Auburn's former human services director, Kent Hay, to rebuild its outreach program.

The Committee of the Whole will take up the ordinance at a future meeting.