

The Oregonian

Homeless camp at Steel Bridge's west end cleared by police

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

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Portland police on Thursday cleared the homeless group that has been camped at the west end of the Steel Bridge.

Phillip Ogle, who has lived in the homeless camp for two months, said officers arrived just after 8 a.m. and asked everyone to leave. Ogle said police had notified the camp, which recently had as many as 60 occupants, on Friday that the evacuation would occur at some point.

"We didn't expect it right now," he said. "We thought possibly next week."

Police tape surrounded the area along Southwest Naito Parkway at the bridge and into Tom McCall Waterfront Park. Ogle said officers told him they were clearing the camp because weapons had been found in some of the tents.

"We are assisting for public safety reasons due to the criminal element that exists," said Sgt. Pete Simpson, spokesman, who referred questions to the mayor's office.

Sara Hottman, a spokeswoman for Mayor Charlie Hales, said the city received 49 complaints about the camp within a month. The complaints were filed through the city's One Point of Contact Campsite Reporting system, which allows community members to raise issues with the city.

The move comes more than two weeks after Hales unveiled a four-pronged strategy to grapple with the city's homelessness, including new plans for legalized outdoor camps and overnight tent camping in certain locations.

Josh Alpert, Hales' chief of staff, emphasized at the time that the approach is experimental. "We're going to try this for six months," he said. "We will continue to tinker with it daily."

Hottman said outreach workers had notified campers about the need to clear tents to clean the area, then warnings to vacate were posted nearby.

The fliers found Thursday, dated Feb. 25, 2016, warned that the camp would be cleared no sooner than 24 hours and no later than seven days. Hottman said those fliers replaced fliers that had been posted at the same location and dated Feb. 19.

City officials counted 22 tents that had been set up for extended periods of time, Hottman said. People can sleep underneath the Steel Bridge but they cannot leave assembled tents during the day.

"We are educating people who are sleeping outside," Hottman said. "We're working with service providers on the guidelines of sleeping outside."

Tents at the bridge can be assembled after 9 p.m. and should be taken down by 7 a.m., she said.

Campers Amanda Shephard and her boyfriend William Tillman said they had met with Alpert and other mayoral staff. They said they feel betrayed and that they never received any warning. Police officers gave them 15 minutes to vacate their site on Thursday morning.

What they couldn't take with them was thrown in the trash, they said.

Shephard said she's tried to work with the mayor's office about maintaining the campsite. The couple said they did not believe guns were found at the site and that it's the latest excuse given by officials to force the homeless out.

Multnomah County jail inmates in orange clothing were seen cleaning the site Thursday afternoon, while other officials were seen going into leftover tents. Dead rats lay on the grass just a few feet from where the tents previously stood.

Simpson later said in an email that authorities recovered several items they suspect are stolen property, primarily computers and tablets, and hauled away five trailer loads of garbage. Fifty people were staying at the site, Simpson said, and hundreds of needles and multiple bottles of feces and urine were found there.

One man, 50-year-old Robert Lee West, was arrested pending second-degree disorderly conduct charges, Simpson said. West wasn't camping at the site, Simpson said, and was booked into the Multnomah County Jail and later released.

The site sits next to a recently installed 52-foot, retrofitted cargo container designed for homeless people to store their belongings during the day. The container also has two bathrooms and secure trash bins for needles and information kiosks.

Earlier this month at the Broadway Bridge, one bridge to the north, an argument between two homeless men led one of them to fire several shots at the other man.

Both men left the scene, police said, and officers weren't able to obtain a description of the suspect. No injuries were reported in the incident.

Alpert has taken the lead on rethinking the city's approach to homeless sweeps. The city's old strategy of conducting 15 to 20 daily sweeps hasn't been effective, he said earlier this month. By offering the homeless clear options on where they can sleep each night, police should be able to conduct more targeted enforcement when necessary, he added.

The Portland Mercury

Here's What A City-County Homelessness Office Could Look Like

*By Dirk VanderHart
February 25, 2016*

Multnomah County and the City of Portland do very similar things when it comes to homelessness—just for different populations.

According to rules enshrined at some point in the last several decades, it's been the city's job to contract with "single-service providers" like JOIN and Central City Concern—that is, to steer

funds toward services that will help single men and women over the age of 24, and couples. The county, as part of this bargain, is tasked with doing the same thing for families, kids, and domestic violence victims.

At the heart of this is the same basic planning and contract management work. On the county side, a handful of employees at the Department of County Human Services steer funds and contracts. On the city side, it's another handful of employees at the Portland Housing Bureau.

There was a good deal of exclaiming last week, when nascent plans to merge those two efforts became public. Under a plan being explored by County Chair Deborah Kafoury and Housing Commissioner Dan Saltzman, the handfuls of employees I described would be brought under one roof—and rolled into A Home For Everyone, the coalition that's forming up plans to meaningfully address homelessness in Portland in coming years.

Here's an organizational chart officials have worked up for what's being called either the "Homeless Services Lead Agency" or the "Joint City-County Office of Homeless Services." (And [here's a higher-resolution version.](#))

It's a draft framework, right now. But it's clearly something officials have put some thought into. Under this layout, Marc Jolin, who's already paid by both the city and county to direct A Home For Everyone, would be something of a Portland homelessness czar, supervising staffers working on homelessness issues.

Jolin would answer directly to Kafoury, but he'd also be answerable to the Home For Everyone Executive Committee, which includes Mayor Charlie Hales and Saltzman. And both governments would continue to fund efforts to ease homelessness, as they are now.

Again, all this is in early stages. "It's a living, breathing thing," county spokesperson David Austin says. "It's still moving around."

In a letter Saltzman and Kafoury sent out last week, they argued a consolidation would improve efficiency, reduce duplicative efforts, and create more consistency in contracts between local governments and service providers.

But there's a big chunk of Portland's homelessness efforts that's not addressed in that letter: Hales' current policy of eased restrictions on homeless camping within the city.

Under an ongoing pilot project, the mayor's office is inking user agreements with organized campsites—including well-regarded Right 2 Dream Too and two newer encampments—via the Office of Management and Finance (OMF), which Hales controls. OMF also is the agency responsible for day storage sites for the homeless, and a contract with a local security firm that carries out camp sweeps around town—something that might ramp up as the new camping policy kicks in.

OMF's fast-increasing role in addressing the city's homelessness problem has been a sticking point for some. It was one reason, among several, that Commissioner Nick Fish lodged the sole "no" vote Wednesday on a resolution to move R2DToo to a city-owned plot on the Central Eastside.

"This proposal is not aligned with the Housing Bureau, a Home for Everyone, the county or our ending homelessness initiative," Fish said at the hearing. "It does not include clear accountability measures, benchmarks for success, or even a budget."

Whether OMFs new responsibilities are folded into the new agency officials are contemplating remains to be seen. Kafoury and Saltzman have created a steering committee to better suss out the office's role.

"There are still questions that are unanswered," Kafoury says. "That's one of them."

Portland Business Journal

After council approves homeless camp move, opponents consider appeals

By Jon Bell

February 25, 2016

First things first: Brad Malsin, head of Beam Development and also the current president of the Central Eastside Industrial Council, is a supporter of the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp and the services it provides.

What Malsin and other Central Eastside business owners do not support, however, is the city council's vote yesterday to move the camp from its current location in Old Town Chinatown to a city-owned lot at Southeast Third and Harrison.

"I'm very much in favor of Right 2 Dream Too, but I feel that that location, and the plans the city has for it, is inadequate and unacceptable to us on the east side," Malsin said.

The city council voted 4 to 1 yesterday to move the camp. Commissioner Nick Fish was the only dissenter, saying that the zoning for the new site, which is industrial, does not permit that kind of use. Malsin, too, said that there is concern among eastside businesses that the site, which sits next to East Side Plating, a manufacturing company that uses "corrosive chemistry" in its processes, is not the kind of place where people should be camping.

"With its proximity to a chemical plating company, I mean, wow, could you find a less appropriate place for it?" Malsin said. He added as well that the mayor's new camping provisions, which allow people to sleep overnight on various city properties and sidewalks, have already led to a "blossoming" of campers on the eastside.

Malsin that opponents have a two-week window to appeal the city's decision. One option could include filing an appeal with the state Land Use Board of Appeals, which is something that Malsin said is under consideration.

"We are exploring all our options," he said. "We support the camp, but this plan does not meet the minimum requirements for people living on the streets."