

The Oregonian

Springwater Corridor homeless sweep: 'There is no place to tell them to go'

By Brad Schmidt

September 1, 2016

As many as 100 homeless campers voluntarily left a notorious stretch of the Springwater Corridor on Thursday as Portland's mayor authorized the largest coordinated sweep in a tenure that will be remembered for a swelling homeless crisis but too few shelter beds.

Sweeps began after daybreak on a large grass-and-dirt field in Southeast Portland and ended before 3 p.m. with no arrests and only a handful of campers remaining.

Aides for Mayor Charlie Hales declared the first day all but a success. Crews will return to portions of Portland's 14-mile trail segment Friday and will work through the weekend, with no end in sight.

"Everything went super smoothly," mayoral spokeswoman Sara Hottman said at an afternoon news conference at City Hall. "Everything was quiet and went according to plan."

The city has hired cleanup workers. Social service agencies are at the ready. And Portland police are on standby.

While that may be true of Thursday's monumental sweep, Portland's overarching efforts to combat homelessness have been in an utter state of flux in the 11 months since the City Council declared a formal housing emergency.

Acknowledging the city needed a more humane approach, Hales unilaterally began allowing tent camping across Portland but didn't deal with enforcement issues until a lawsuit loomed and problems ballooned.

In the end, a mayor who said he wanted to stop playing whack-a-mole with the homeless ended up shooing dozens of campers somewhere else.

"Where do you tell them to go?" said Sgt. Pete Simpson, a police spokesman. "There is no place to tell them to go. We know that. We can't pretend we can tell them there's a place to go."

Among those displaced was Vic Sielski, who said he'd lived on the Springwater Corridor for seven years, the past four months at the Lambert Field encampment near Southeast 82nd Avenue.

The sprawling campsite, about an acre in size, had developed into a community with its own unofficial rules. It felt like home, he said, and leaving that stability "hurts."

"Now, instead, I'll just be going to a tent or a campsite," said Sielski, who lived at the field with his wife in three tents covered by tarps.

Sielski was among 11 homeless people who fought Hales' initial plan to sweep the Springwater Corridor beginning Aug. 1. Represented by the Oregon Law Center, campers earned a one-month reprieve that launched at about 6 a.m. Thursday with the arrival of homeless advocates.

Seven park rangers and scores of social-service providers, government employees, mental health specialists and volunteers turned out to help clear one of the city's most well-known hot spots for the homeless.

They focused exclusively on Lambert Field, directly south of the Springwater Corridor, and a small stretch of pathway to the east heading toward Southeast Flavel Street.

Unlike the high-stakes, police-heavy eviction of campers who took over three downtown parks during the 2011 Occupy Portland movement, Thursday's sweep was utterly uneventful.

"I was very impressed and pleased with the amount of care and thoughtfulness and compassion that everybody who was out there was able to do in this very difficult day," said Tera Pierce, Hales' chief of staff.

Pierce visited the site and fed regular updates via text message to Hales, who was vacationing with his wife on his sailboat.

The biggest fireworks came not from a confrontation between authorities and a homeless camper, officials said, but from anxiety caused by an overhead television-news helicopter.

At one point mid-morning, crisis managers converged on a man with a machete in the midst of a mental health crisis. Counselors talked to the man and de-escalated the situation, helping him leave safely.

"They're allowing us advocates to do what we do," said Steve Kimes, a pastor who's spent 20 years working with homeless people. "Actually, it couldn't be much better."

City officials were unable to say, however, how many displaced campers were provided options for overnight shelter. Nor could they say where the campers would be sleeping Thursday night, although some will likely move into more visible portions of the surrounding Lents neighborhood.

Although Multnomah County and city officials have opened or have plans to open 475 shelter beds, they acknowledged there aren't enough slots to accommodate everyone.

"The reality is, again, we simply don't have enough shelter space," said Hottman, the mayor's spokeswoman.

With an estimated 1,900 people sleeping on the streets across Multnomah County, city officials acknowledged it may feel as though the problem gets worse until shelter beds are added. In reality, the mayor's chief of staff said, officials never really stopped playing whack-a-mole and everybody – especially those living near the corridor – "needs to tap into their compassion right now."

"There's no simple answer and there's no answer that anybody's going to be happy with at this point," Pierce said. "People are probably going to be in neighborhoods."

Fallout could take days or even weeks to fully materialize, said Debra Mason, executive director of the Clackamas Service Center, which is providing resources to the campers.

Because sweeps fell on the first of the month, some people may have just received government assistance checks, which could tide them over for the time being, she said. But when that money runs out, people with few resources could find themselves in dire situations.

"Is it going to be tonight? Tomorrow?" she asked. "But there are going to be some issues. As people relocate, because they have to go somewhere, there are going to be some problems."

Police urged neighbors to call if they see fighting or drug use. But officers will use discretion, as is standard procedure, for low-impact camping.

"We don't want to take enforcement action," said Simpson, the police spokesman.

It's not clear how long the Springwater sweeps will continue, although officials estimate they'll spend between \$150,000 and \$400,000.

Chad Stover, Hales' policy director for livability issues, said a smaller crew will return to the same location Friday and efforts will continue over the weekend. But he was reluctant to put a timeframe on completion.

"The goal is to do this right. The goal is to do this with compassion," he said. "So we're going to take as much time as we need to do it that way."

Others wish they had more time.

Along the corridor Thursday morning, Mary Lou, 53, took inventory of her things inside an elaborate fort made of tents and tarps, where she'd lived since January.

Personal hygiene items, decorative mementos, clothing, stuffed animals and trash covered the interior. Feeling overwhelmed by the task, she said she wasn't sure how she'd move her belongings, where she'd take them or where she'd sleep.

"I gotta be out tonight," she said. "I know."

Most people she knew planned on moving east along the corridor, until the sweeps catch up, but exactly where was unknown.

"Maybe I can muster up a voucher for a hotel," she said, "or I'll be pitching a tent under a tree somewhere."

Portland could have just \$31,813 left for Right 2 Dream Too move

*By Brad Schmidt
September 1, 2016*

The city of Portland could have as little as \$31,813 left to find a new home for the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp.

That's the worst-case scenario outlined in a new report tracking a nearly \$1.1 million budget for the camp's planned – but now scuttled – move to the Central Eastside.

Portland has already spent about \$610,000 in anticipation of moving campers from their current home on private property at Northwest Fourth Avenue and Burnside Street. The city is also under contract for about \$436,000 more because they expected to open the new campsite, at Southeast Third Avenue and Harrison Street, by October.

But that plan appears impossible because a state land-use board ruled Tuesday the move violates local zoning regulations. A homeless camp can't be established on industrial property.

Two days after the ruling, Mayor Charlie Hales has yet to articulate a Plan B – although the most likely scenario has Right 2 Dream Too staying put.

Officials are now trying to find out if they can shut down work or cancel orders for the Central Eastside project – and how much they could potentially recoup. Will officials have any luck?

"They're just beginning to talk to contractors," Jen Clodius, a city spokeswoman, said Thursday. "So ask me again in a week."

Portland could find itself with more money if a few things go officials' way.

Right now, the city has about \$468,000 in reserve – but nearly all of that money has been promised to a construction company performing work at the Central Eastside site and separately to a company for a trailer featuring bathrooms and showers.

If Portland does end up paying for the bathroom-and-shower trailer, it could be used elsewhere or sold off.

"Obviously if they can't get out of it, they're going to try to find a way to use it," Clodius said.

Officials also spent \$254,044 buying the Central Eastside property for the campsite. The land holds some resale value.

"Long term they're confident they can sell it, and get some of the cost of the improvements back, too," Clodius said.

Officials also have more money at stake through the Portland Development Commission, the city's urban renewal agency.

The development commission agreed to buy the existing campsite in Northwest Portland for \$1.2 million, plus \$300,000 made in 30 monthly payments of \$10,000.

The commission has already paid \$240,000, and officials are supposed to close on the property by April 7.

The commission is supposed to get the property free of campers, and could potentially recoup its monthly payments if that condition isn't met.

But it would be politically impractical to force that issue, because city officials are directly responsible for failing to find a new site for the campers.

As it stands, the agency has no plans to relinquish its purchase rights, spokesman Shawn Uhlman said.

Asked whether the development commission plans to go forward with the sale on schedule, Uhlman said only: "It is perhaps too early to say."

Willamette Week

Portland Housing Bureau: Scofflaw Short-Term Rentals Have Cost City 1,000 Affordable Homes

By Rachel Monahan

September 1, 2016

Portland has lost 1,000 previously affordable homes to short term rentals operating outside city rules, according to an estimate from the Portland Housing Bureau.

"One area of special concern of mine is the number of units that have been converted from month-to-month rentals to short-term rentals," bureau director Kurt Creager told the City Council in testimony Wednesday.

"There are some 2,700 whole homes offered on the short term rental market in Portland. We think about 1,000 of those had been herteofore affordable month-to-month available rentals."

He put the value of those homes at \$380 million. "It would cost that much to replace a 1,000 units," he says.

Last week, WW reported that an Airbnb manager was among the estimated 1,718 people breaking city rules by renting whole homes for more than nine months a year, according to data from the website Inside Airbnb.

The city has fined individual Portlanders, but not the company itself.

The Portland Business Journal

City moves close to 100 homeless out of the Springwater Corridor on first day of sweep

By Jon Bell

September 1, 2016

The first day of the city's effort to clear the Springwater Corridor of the homeless population who had taken up residence there appeared to come off without much conflict.

The sweep involved a range of social service providers, park rangers, volunteers, police officers and others helping to clean up and move people out of an area of the corridor between Southeast 82nd Avenue and Southeast Flavel Street.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales' office issued a fact sheet about the sweep this afternoon and what the first day of it accomplished. According to that, between 70 and 100 people were moved out of the area, a 40-yard dumpster was filled, 500 needles were found and nine gallons of urine were cleaned up.

According to the Oregonian, there were no arrests during Thursday's activities and the sweep was largely peaceful. Many of the homeless campers reported that they weren't sure where they would go next, though city officials suspected some would find new places to camp.

In the six weeks leading up to the sweep, the city reported that more than 200 people in the area had been provided with non-housing support and services, such as transportation, personal care and storage. In addition, at least 80 people had been screened for housing programs and at least 70 were moved off the trail and into shelters, motel rooms and permanent housing situations.

The city also made arrangements to reserve spaces at several area shelters that should accommodate another 60 people as cleanup work continues.

Advance costs related to those early outreach efforts are estimated to have been between \$75,000 and \$90,000. The city estimates that the larger cleanup and sweep of the corridor will cost between \$150,000 and \$400,000. In advance of Thursday's sweep, the city of Portland provided the area with dumpsters, garbage bags, portable toilets and biohazard cleanup services.

The sweep is expected to continue on Friday and likely through the weekend and into next week.