



CITY OF BEND

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Eric King, City Manager

From: Shelly Smith, Sr. Management Analyst

Re: After-action report regarding Emerson Avenue closure and camp removal

Date: 7/15/2021

The City of Bend closed Emerson Avenue on June 23, 2021, following Council direction in accordance with the Management and Removal of Established Campsites in City Rights-of-Way (Administrative policy 2021-1). As directed by City Council, staff engaged with local service providers who supported impacted individuals to receive feedback on the closure and relocation of the camp at Emerson Avenue.

This memo summarizes City staff evaluation of the Emerson Avenue closure and the feedback received from some providers involved in outreach and service provision to people who had been camping at Emerson. Organizations that provided feedback included: Deschutes County Homeless Outreach Services, REACH, Mosaic Medical, Shepherd's House, and Family Kitchen.

The memo addresses what went well in the closure and camp removal, what could be improved, and suggestions for consideration of future City direction.

What went well:

- City convened coordinated planning and collaboration with service providers.
- City used existing service contract with REACH to assist outreach efforts, including referrals and provision of resources based on the individual needs of people relocating from Emerson.
- City provided clear, consistent, and timely communication as information was available with service providers on the timeline for the closure; which enabled service providers to prepare, plan, and communicate with individuals in the impacted area.
- Service Providers were allowed to assist with sorting, packing and relocating, which was supportive and helpful to those in transition and crisis and reduced the stress on individuals relocating.

- The majority of individuals left before Emerson Avenue officially closed on June 23rd. The morning of the closure, City staff assisted two individuals finish packing and they peacefully departed before the City's vendor began identifying and storing any remaining personal items left on-site.
- Coordination of a nearby location for service providers to be located during the closure so individuals could access service near, but not within, the closure area. Service providers were able to have food, coffee, and water available for people relocating, which helped reduce stress for the campers.
- When issues were identified by service providers during the closure, City staff were quick to respond and reacted appropriately.
- Police officers on-site the day of the closure were calm and professional.
- Service providers were in close and continuing contact with people who relocated, including at their new locations.

What could be improved:

- There is a critical need for more options for lawful, permanent places for people without houses to live, including permanent homes, managed campsites for people who are not ready or do not want to move inside, and continued referral to supportive services.
- Clearly identify location(s) that meet a variety of needs for where people can safely and legally relocate to before dispersing a camp.
- While resources were made available, additional funding for service providers would enable even more support for people who need to relocate.
- Service providers encourage the City to provide clear communication on planned camp clean-ups or closures, if any occur in the future, as far in advance as possible to allow for additional preparation and planning.
- Clarity between established service provider and mutual aid group roles. Established service providers have concerns about interruption or disruption of service connections for people camping, when new or alternate community groups become involved without coordination. The providers feel those with agency mission, training, and existing relationships with campers, are best able to provide consistency and connection to services and resources.
- Clearer communication to people camping where they could access service providers in the nearby, off-site location.
- Avoid changing dates/timelines of closures as it creates confusion.
- Include a weather impact review when making decisions on closures; balance need to not change timeline with weather on planned dates.
- Regular wellness checks by trained and professional medical and mental health providers on-site to mitigate safety or public health concerns (in addition to continued outreach by established service providers).
- Storage for personal items – locker system. People can't leave their camp locations to access services or resources, including overnight shelter options, because their belongings are unsecure.
- Funding for critical resources (phones and minutes; essential items like tents, sleeping bags, and food; and carts, bikes, and cab fare to assist people get to this new locations)

Input on any future engagement by the City of Bend at camps:

- Prioritize building more options for legal places to live, from the existing safe parking program to emergency shelters to supportive housing and permanent affordable housing to safe camping locations. Understanding that people may turn down offers of particular types of resources.
- City needs to continue to balance its obligations to maintain safe roadways; for people camping and other roadway users. First response should be service provision, clean up and trash containment, with camp removal considered only as a last resort if sanitation, public safety or basic environmental health/safety cannot be otherwise achieved. Without more options available, City should make every effort to avoid closing any more roads or removing established campsites.
- Future plans should continue to be clearly and consistently communicated from the City to impacted individuals and service providers.
- Service providers feel a least a 14-day direct notice to individuals in impacted area would be helpful.
- Any notice of closure or clean up should be clear about what is planned (for example: closure & removal versus clean up).
- Recognition that any notice, particularly of closure & removal will be traumatic for individuals and advance notice and continuity and consistency of service will help lessen that trauma and further alienation from services.
- Continued collaboration with the City and between service providers. City convening collaborative meetings should continue.
- If determined to be the only solution, notifications of planned road closures and camp removals should go to a wide list of providers (perhaps through a list serve where any community member could opt in to receive notifications of clean ups and closures/relocations).
- Earlier deployment of dumpsters, hand washing stations, toilets, and hygiene supplies for larger camps.

In the days following the Emerson closure and camp removal, two men experiencing houselessness died at another camp. At least one of these men had previously been camping at Emerson. Service providers say both men were known to them and well-connected to services, both before and after the Emerson closure and camp removal. Their deaths are tragic, and any loss of life is too many. The medical examiner determined their deaths were not heat related, though they died during a historic heat wave. It is unknown whether their deaths were related to the Emerson closure and camp removal.