

## 2023 Timelines and Efforts to Address the Homeless Crisis

Here is a recap of what has happened this past year:

- January and February - Council began discussing goals for 2023, including updating the unauthorized camping code. An update to the unauthorized camping code was necessary for compliance with a federal court decision that held it was unconstitutional for cities to arrest people for camping in public when there was no overnight shelter available.
- March 1<sup>st</sup> of this year the Council adopted its 2023 Goals and Priorities. One of the priorities was for the Council to pass an ordinance updating the Bremerton Municipal Code section on “Unauthorized Camping.”
- May 1<sup>st</sup> the Salvation Army closed after serving as a year-round shelter for three years.
- June 26<sup>th</sup> the Council held its first Study Session to discuss the update to “Unauthorized Camping” code. The Council basically had three options: (1) repeal the code section in its entirety so that camping would be legal, (2) keep a city-wide prohibition on camping and add language that enforcement is suspended if overnight shelter is unavailable, (3) amend the code to add time, place, and/or manner restrictions on camping. The Council worked on the ordinance for several months including additional Study Sessions on July 12<sup>th</sup>, July 26<sup>th</sup>, August 9<sup>th</sup>, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, and September 13<sup>th</sup>. Public comment on the update was received at the Council Meetings on July 5<sup>th</sup>, July 19<sup>th</sup>, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, August 16<sup>th</sup>, September 6<sup>th</sup>, and September 20<sup>th</sup>.
- Through the beginning of September, the Council was focused on adopting an ordinance that prohibited camping at all times in specific areas like City sidewalk planting strips, and developed public property and suspended enforcement in other areas such as on undeveloped City properties when there was no overnight shelter available.
- When Council requested maps from Public Works that showed the locations of undeveloped City properties scattered throughout the City, there was record setting public opposition to allowing unregulated camping on undeveloped City properties when no overnight shelter is available. The community consensus was clear – Bremertonians did not want unregulated encampments anywhere in the City. The Council changed course.
- September 20<sup>th</sup> the Council adopted an ordinance amending Bremerton Municipal Code 9.32 that kept a city-wide ban on camping on public property, added language that enforcement would be suspended if overnight shelter is unavailable, and made unauthorized camping a misdemeanor on the first offense. This “all or nothing” approach made shelter availability necessary for any regulation of camping on public property. The new ordinance had no protections for certain places like previous versions the Council had considered. The Council was clear that it was the responsibility of the Mayor to ensure there was shelter space available so the ordinance could be enforced.
- At the time the ordinance passed there was no shelter available, so enforcement of the unauthorized camping ordinance was suspended. There were approximately 40 people living in tents along several streets surrounding the Salvation Army including in planting strips in front of residences, and abutting the Marvin Williams Community Center, and businesses. The Salvation Army shelter was scheduled to reopen November 1.
- In anticipation of the Salvation Army reopening, Bremerton Police Department prepared fliers, and police officers and behavioral health navigators contacted the people living on the

surrounding streets advising them that the shelter was opening, and the unauthorized camping ordinance would be enforced.

- October 11<sup>th</sup> and October 25<sup>th</sup> my staff and I presented Council with very preliminary information on shelter development ideas and the suitability of a City parcel North of the Oyster Bay Public Works Facility. This parcel was purchased in 2019 for the future expansion of the Public Works Facility so any clearing and grading of the site is forward compatible with future uses. These presentations are available on the project website at the [City's Public Works & Utilities Department Project Website](#).
- November 1<sup>st</sup> the Salvation Army shelter reopened. Bremerton police again contacted people living on the street in the surrounding area once the ordinance was enforceable. No one was taken to jail. The area was posted with a notice and Public Works returned in 72 hours to clean the area and store any personal property left behind. There are no encampments in the area currently.
- The Salvation Army shelter now has an average of 60 people each night, with a high of 77 people. It operates all day and shelter users are not required to leave during the day except for brief cleaning periods in the morning and afternoon.
- The Salvation Army plans to close its shelter again on May 1, 2024, and has no interest in operating a year-round shelter facility at the location on Sixth Street.
- December 13<sup>th</sup> at the Council Study Session my staff and I presented my proposal for a homeless shelter concept to be located at the Oyster Bay facility. You can learn more about the proposal at the [City's Public Works & Utilities Department Project Website](#).
- The City Council will discuss the proposal again at the Study Session on January 10<sup>th</sup> and a decision is anticipated at the Council meeting on January 17<sup>th</sup>.
- The 2024 adopted City budget includes \$2,000,000 to develop a homeless shelter; additional funding is necessary for both construction and operations.
- January 20, 2024 is the last day for the City to submit a request to the State for a legislative appropriation necessary to move the project forward.