

## Concrete barricades aim to keep out homeless



City workers place concrete barriers under the Marion Street Bridge in Salem on Wednesday. The barriers will stop the homeless from establishing another encampment. PHOTOS BY MICHAELA ROMÁN/STATESMAN JOURNAL

# Marion St. Bridge meals relocated

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Homeless advocates, who for years served meals under the Marion Street Bridge, aren't optimistic about ever getting to return.

City of Salem workers installed several concrete barricades under the bridge Wednesday, with plans to add trespassing signs and a lockable post to prevent drivers bringing food from getting to the site.

Dan Sheets, who has helped with the meals for 15 years, criticized the move, saying city officials' main purpose is to stop all activity under the bridge.

"They got their goal," Sheets said. For now, volunteers like him are serving meals in the nearby ARCH-ES Project parking lot.

The moves are aimed at stopping volunteers from serving meals under the bridge and preventing the

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**Steve Powers**  
City manager

homeless from establishing another encampment. Rule-breakers could face trespassing charges, according to Salem police.

This comes a day after police and social service providers cleared a homeless camp of an estimated 15 to 30 people from beneath the bridge. The sweep saw city workers haul away an approximately 16

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# Bridge

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dump trucks' worth of garbage.

Along with the barriers being set up, City Manager Steve Powers said at a Salem City Council meeting earlier this week that the city's goal is to figure out if there are "better ways of managing the meal distributions with the site under the bridge no longer being available."

In a statement Wednesday, Powers said last year's pilot project — which brought fences to contain the site and tables to help with the meals — "is over."

"No further decisions have been made at this time," he said. "As I mentioned at the City Council meeting, we are still evaluating the use of the park and will consider input from the Salem Parks and Recreation Board as well as those providing meals under the bridge."

"The goal is to best meet the needs of all Salem residents within available resources," Powers said.

Salem Mayor Chuck Bennett said in an interview the question of what happens with the meals for the homeless "remains unresolved."

Bennett said he hopes for a solution that provides people who want to serve meals to the homeless a safe, appropriate place to do so.

He said he didn't think the question would be resolved until a place is found that meets the needs of the volunteers and the homeless they serve. "My understanding is that's the next step," he said.

Bennett stressed recent actions related to the bridge were "administrative," meaning they were taken by city staff and not the Salem City Council.

Sheets said his problem is that he and others have facilitated the meals for years with few incidents until city officials put in tables and fencing last year.

However, city officials said there were problems before that infrastructure went in. Marion Square Park was being effected by problems such as broken sprinkler heads and having to pick up trash, Powers told reporters last week.

"We have a responsibility to maintain the public's park system," Powers said. "We have a limited, set budget to do that. That budget has to be equitably spent across our park system, and Marion Square Park was taking more and more of that resource."

Before the city's involvement in the meals under the bridge, "there had been recurring issues, and staff time spent on hauling out trash from that same location," said Kristin Retherford. Salem's



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**Jimmy Jones**

Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency

urban development director.

Tuesday's sweep also raised questions about where the homeless who lived under the bridge will go.

Jimmy Jones, executive director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, which operates ARCHES, said downtown is home to the highest-needs homeless population. They're likely to suffer from mental health problems and use substances.

"They will redistribute to other areas in the downtown," Jones said. "It won't be an immediate camp like this. But they will migrate into internal spaces, and then, next winter, this will repeat, and we'll have the same thing again until we can get enough of them housed to begin to draw it down."

On Wednesday, about 10 concrete barriers were being placed under the bridge, with one going alongside the Center Street bridge to limit access.

Six trespassing signs will take four to five working days to install, said Bruce Hildebrandt, public workers services supervisor for street and sidewalk maintenance.

Meanwhile, a lockable post will be placed near Commercial Street NE on the south side of the Marion Street bridge to prevent people from bringing cars into the area, though emergency responders will be able to unlock and remove the post.

At one point, a passerby shouted, "Thank you!"

"You're welcome," Hildebrandt responded.

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