



Tents line the sidewalks on both sides of the street in front of the ARCHES building on Commercial Street in Salem last month. In addition to the tents there are shopping carts, bicycles and other items lining the streets.

PHOTOS BY KELLY JORDAN/STATESMAN JOURNAL

City may set aside areas for homeless camping

Rather than ban, councilors opt for designated sites

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Salem city councilors may set aside city property as designated camping sites for the homeless.

Councilors on Monday night were poised to ban camping on public property, public sidewalks and public right of way throughout the city. But in a last-minute move, they pared the ban to create to-be-designated places within the city where camping could be allowed.

The ban that was approved, in a unanimous vote, also bars people from leaving personal items unattended for more than two hours from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. However, councilors delayed enforcement of the ban for two weeks.

"We know we have freezing temperatures outside," said City Councilor Vanessa Nurdyke after proposing the designated camping spaces.

Homeless have few options

People experiencing homelessness have a shrinking list of places to go as



cold weather sets in. They have been barred from camping in city parks, spurned from private land and roused from beneath public bridges.

City officials have attempted to connect the homeless with social services, but that doesn't change the fact that area shelters do not have the capacity to give everyone a place to rest at night. Advocates estimate the homeless population to be approximately 1,800 peo-

ple strong at a given time within the urban growth boundary, while the area only has about 300 emergency shelter beds. Warming shelters opened recently to bolster that number temporarily.

The homeless cannot return to a camp in West Salem's Wallace Marine Park, said homeless advocate Jimmy

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Camping

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Jones. They won't have anywhere to go after the ban becomes effective, the executive director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency said before the new rule passed.

"People will just scatter," Jones said.

What do the new rules mean?

City councilors last week stopped short of barring the homeless from sitting and lying on city sidewalks after lengthy public testimony opposing that ban.

Councilors also opted against a provision that could have let police charge

rule-breakers with trespassing if they broke so-called exclusion orders in north Salem and downtown.

The new rules define a campsite as "any place where there is a tent, or any structure or assembly of materials consisting of a top or roof or any other upper covering and enclosed on one or more sides, that is of sufficient size for a person to fit underneath or inside."

The vote comes after a draft report estimated the City of Salem spends more than \$5.2 million annually dealing with issues related to homelessness, a lion's share of which stems from police work such as cleaning up homeless camps.

A DHM Research study released this year showed 41% of Salem residents considered homelessness and poverty to be the top concern within the city, up



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from 33% in 2018.

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