



Councilmember Cheryl Davila
District 2

ACTION CALENDAR
June 26, 3018

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmembers Cheryl Davila and Kate Harrison and Mayor Arreguin
Subject: Budget Referral for creation of a “vehicle dweller park” in Berkeley

RECOMMENDATION

Direct the City Manager to develop a “vehicle dweller park”, similar to an RV park, for people living in their vehicles to stay without fear of harassment, displacement, fines or confiscation of their vehicles and with sanitation and social service support.

The proposal includes:

- a. Identifying a location – an empty lot or parking lot – that is accessible for RVs and buses, livable and ideally where access to running water already exists.
- b. Providing access to showers and toilets.
- c. Providing access to running, drinkable water.
- d. Encouraging volunteer mechanics who want to help the homeless to provide free maintenance and repair of vehicles.
- e. Encouraging people who have RVs or trailers they are not using to donate them so that they can be used by people who are homeless.
- f. Charging a small permit fee per vehicle (\$2-\$5 per day/\$60-\$150 per month).
- g. Approach other cities to identify locations for additional vehicle dweller parks and the County for funds to support infrastructure and services needed.
- h. Estimating total costs to be considered in the budget process.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

Unknown. Costs include a minimum of two showers, two port-a-potties, trailer pump-out, garbage receptacles and sanitation services, running water, and staffing for issuing of permits and collection of fees, operating nearby bathrooms/showers, cleaning and maintaining facilities, and developing the project.

The City could train and pay someone who lives in the park to fulfill some of these tasks. We have been in discussions with the County and adjacent cities about contributing costs for infrastructure and services and also plan to collect minimal permit fees to off-set costs.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Reduces public health hazards, as well as environmental pollutants and litter entering our waterways due to poor sanitation and/or a lack of sanitation services.

BACKGROUND

City Council and City staff receive consistent requests from housed residents, berthers and businesses to identify a place for people to live in their vehicles that does not block small city streets and for which services are provided to reduce garbage or sanitation issues. Most do not want to see people removed from their vehicles but would like to see a place for them where support is provided. Living in a vehicle is often safer than living on the street. Without truly affordable housing to offer those without shelter, providing a vehicle dweller park is a relatively low-cost, low-impact solution. By expanding affordable housing options in Berkeley, the goal would be to transition people into permanent housing if desired.

Among those living in vehicles in Berkeley are families with young children (many under the age of 5), BUSD elementary, middle-school and high-school students, University students, and people who are employed but cannot afford housing. During the recent eviction of vehicle dwellers from Marina Blvd, five families with children under 5 were evicted – two Latino, two African American, one white; at least one child attends BUSD. There were at least 7 seniors, two of whom are African American, three of whom are Latino and two of whom are white. There were an additional four African American adults, five Latino adults and seven white adults. Among these adults were three graduate students (two Latino and one white). At least three of the people living in their vehicles suffer from chronic and acute illness and several struggle with mental health and other disabilities.

On any given night, an estimated 972 people experience homelessness in the City of Berkeley, and a majority of which are unsheltered (664 people, or 68% live in cars, on the streets, or other places not meant for human habitation). The rate of long-term homelessness in Berkeley underscores the difficulty in the local housing market. Berkeley has a large chronically homeless population (long-term homelessness with a disability), with a rate (27%) almost double the national average (roughly 15%).

Among those who are experiencing their first episode of homelessness, more than a third (35%) had been homeless for a year or more; research has estimated this rate to be only about 20% nationally. And more than half (52%) reported they became homeless because of “money issues” – this was the top response. Since 97% of homeless Berkeleyans reported they would be interested in permanent, affordable housing if it were available, these statistics collectively demonstrate that homelessness is not a “choice” in Berkeley, but rather the direct result of a competitive, expensive, supply-constrained housing market: once people lose housing in Berkeley, gaining new housing on their own is more difficult here than in other parts of the country.

This trend is especially true for people of color. Whereas people identifying as Black or African American constitute less than 10% of Berkeley’s general population, they represent 50% of the homeless population. Similar disproportionalities arise for the

representation of American Indians (.4% general, 4% homeless) and people identifying with two or more races (6.2% general, 17% homeless). African American people are more likely to be unsheltered in Berkeley (48% of the unsheltered population) than any other race—and are more than twice as likely to be unsheltered as white people (23%). This racial injustice is a direct result of decades of housing policy choices that have limited new affordable housing supply and constrained housing access for people of color in Berkeley and the greater Bay Area.

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