

REPORT FROM

OFFICE OF THE CITY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Date: February 24, 2023

CAO File No.0220-05151-0431
Council File No. 22-1324
Council District: All

To: The City Council

From: Matthew W. Szabo, City Administrative Officer



Reference: CF 22-1324

Subject: PILOT RV-TO-HOME PROGRAM IN COUNCIL DISTRICT 7

SUMMARY

In 2022, Council District 7 collaborated on an innovative pilot RV-To-Home rehousing program in partnership with West Valley Homes YES (WVHY), the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), and LA Family Housing. Utilizing a grant from the Hilton Foundation and funding from former-County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl's office, WVHY placed individuals into housing and facilitated the voluntary relinquishment of RVs. The Council office worked closely with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and Department of Transportation (LADOT) to help facilitate the process of relinquishing vehicles, which, according to the Council office, was particularly challenging. Additionally, WVHY provided participants with voluntary vehicle storage at a local church parking lot, incentives to relinquish their vehicles, including gift cards, case management, housing navigation, and resources that would facilitate voluntary disposal to couple with housing offers that leveraged existing beds.

On December 13, 2022, the City Council instructed this Office to report back with a strategy to scale this pilot program citywide. Additionally, the CAO was directed to ensure the strategy included:

- Procedures outlining role and responsibilities of each agency necessary to execute the model.
- Cost breakdown of program, including staff, incentives, sewage removal, church parking, and towing.

While this report includes recommendations and options, to the extent the City wants to engage in these activities (e.g., private parking lots used for storage, gift cards or other

compensation in exchange for vehicles or compliance), the Council should continue to seek guidance from the City Attorney's office to make sure we are (1) in compliance with existing law, and (2) minimizing liability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the City Council, subject to the approval by the Mayor:

1. INSTRUCT the CAO to report back to Council in 60 days with recommendations for implementing the adopted citywide rehousing strategy for people experiencing RV homelessness in targeted locations across the City based on several factors, such as 2022 Point-in-Time Count RV data, or 2023 Point-in-Time Count RV data if available, needs of the people experiencing RV homelessness, the environmental, health, and safety conditions of the RVs, surrounding roads and other spaces, and public rights of way, concerns from constituents, and Council priorities, and including an updated cost analysis and implementation plan.
2. REQUEST the City Attorney conduct an analysis of the adopted citywide rehousing strategy for people experiencing RV homelessness, as outlined in the report for CF 22-1313 and as further understood here, including an assessment of contracting and procurement options available under the declaration of a local homelessness emergency and subsequent action by the City Council to provide additional relief under the emergency order.
3. INSTRUCT the Planning Department to conduct an analysis of the zoning considerations of implementing RV temporary storage citywide.
4. DIRECT the LAPD and LADOT to report back to Council within 45 days on the feasibility of aligning their internal departmental policies with existing law and clarifying what type of vehicle (or factors relating to said vehicle) are to be considered in determining when a vehicle is in fact abandoned thus making it subject to towing and disposal.
5. REQUEST LAHSA report back to the Council within 45 days with a detailed analysis of RVs being used as dwellings for people experiencing homelessness according to the 2022 and 2023 Point-in-Time Counts, including using and sharing with the City geospatial data to conduct spatial analyses, pattern and hot-spot analyses, and mapping of RVs across the City.

BACKGROUND

Over the last three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of individuals who are homeless and residing in their vehicles. According to the most recent Point-in-Time Count data from LAHSA, nearly 6,500 people experiencing homelessness in the City of Los Angeles were living in approximately 4,000 RVs. This number has increased by 40% since 2018 and represents 22% of the city's total unsheltered homeless population. Many people who are residing in their vehicles prefer to stay there as it provides them with a sense of security and enables them to remain close to the communities they are familiar with and feel comfortable in. Although outreach efforts have been made, many are hesitant to accept anything other than permanent housing or a guaranteed path to permanent housing.

To begin addressing this issue, Council District 7 collaborated with WVHY, LAHSA, and LAFH on a pilot program targeted towards people experiencing RV homelessness. This program was designed to address the unique needs of these individuals by providing appropriate housing, vehicle storage, and incentives for relinquishing their vehicle

CURRENT PROTOCOLS TO ADDRESS RV HOMELESSNESS

Since May 2022, the CAO's outreach team has led and/or helped to coordinate more than 20 large-scale RV outreach operations, in eight separate Council Districts. The CAO worked with all relevant City departments, including and especially LADOT, the City's Bureau of Sanitation (LASAN), and LAPD, along with the City Attorney's office and LAHSA, to develop protocols for streamlining the process for identifying and addressing RVs in the City. The CAO's outreach operations have operated on a referral basis, and included the following elements: (1) homeless outreach and services, (2) addressing debris and hazardous conditions, (3) investigating any ancillary criminal activity, (4) providing advance notice of parking enforcement and impoundment, and (5) impounding vehicle dwellings and abandoned vehicles.

The CAO's recent report to Council for CF 22-1313 outlines a more comprehensive strategy for providing support to people experiencing RV homelessness by prioritizing outreach, services and housing, while still addressing conditions around RVs, including health and public safety hazards, as well as vehicle-related violations. This report describes the program in Council District 7, which is compatible with, and indeed is already fully embedded within, the CAO's proposed citywide strategy. However, the citywide process comes with challenges due to the legal considerations/hurdles and limited resources available for this subpopulation.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

WVHY's RV-to-Home program uses a trauma-informed, services-first approach to directly engage RV and car dwellers and provide them with interim and permanent housing solutions, as well as connections to supportive services. The program emphasizes individual choice and avoids coercion by allowing individuals to return to their vehicles if they chose to exit the program. In order to engage and have individuals accept housing, WVHY provided temporary storage for their vehicle. The option of storage lots for RVs provided individuals with a way to ensure that they are comfortable with their current housing placement before taking necessary steps to secure permanent housing. WVHY faced many barriers when working with individuals dwelling in vehicles, particularly in regards to demonstrating vehicle ownership. To address this issue, the program developed a process to ensure that the proper and legal steps were taken when a vehicle was towed and dismantled.

The program's specific objectives were to engage with uninhabitable RV and car dwellers, discuss interim and permanent housing options, and offer incentives for participants who accepted both housing placement and were willing to dispose or sell their vehicle (to non-homeless individuals). Temporary vehicle storage was provided to participants while they acclimated to their placement in housing, allowing them to make the choice to move forward with permanent housing without the risk of losing their RV, which they often consider "home." WVHY also provided support with obtaining proper documentation, such as vehicle registration and obtaining a license or identification, as well as vehicle service repairs to bring the RV into a sellable condition. Additionally, food outreach, and other supportive services were provided to reduce food insecurity, build trust and rapport with RV and car dwellers, and connect participants with critical resources. The program also offered ongoing engagement with, and advocacy for, participants, when possible, to prevent a return to living on the streets.

The ultimate goal of the program is to provide a proven solution to address RV homelessness. WVHY prioritizes individual choice, safe storage for vehicles, and incentives for participants who accept both housing placement and are willing to dispose of or sell their vehicle. This system moves people from living in their vehicles into interim and permanent housing, ultimately decreasing the number of people living in uninhabitable vehicles across Los Angeles.

PILOT LOCATION

Two locations were identified for this pilot. These two locations were selected based on PIT Count data; complaints from constituents and businesses; the volume and condition of RVs; safety concerns; and conditions of the roadway and public right of way, including

the volume of trash and debris, within the surrounding area. The first location selected had about 50 RVs, while the second location was much smaller with fewer than 10. In most cases, the RVs were deemed uninhabitable.

ENGAGEMENT AND RAPPORT BUILDING

WVHY allocated two full-time staff members to the pilot program with the primary objective of reaching out and engaging with people experiencing homelessness at the designated locations. The staff focused on developing relationships and building trust with the participants by providing services, prioritizing their autonomy, and offering assistance when participants hesitated to enroll in the program. Applicants completed an "Application for Enrollment" to help them understand the program and make informed decisions about their housing choices.

WVHY provided food, water, and support to assist with transitioning into housing. Staff also assisted participants in establishing ownership of their vehicles and registering their vehicles with the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Waste pumping services were provided to safely store the RV in a private storage lot when participants were ready to move indoors.

HOUSING

Offering short-term and permanent housing was a critical element of this program, and it's why the vast majority of individuals engaged were willing to store or relinquish their vehicles. Individuals residing in their vehicles are often reluctant to accept offers of interim housing, and particularly congregate shelter. Therefore, the program prioritized placing individuals in the Council office's Project Homekey site in Sylmar. In some cases where participants were ready to move into housing but had not yet secured a bed, WVHY would make arrangements for them to temporarily stay in a motel until they could move into the interim housing site.

When transitioning to interim housing, WVHY program staff assisted participants in sorting their personal belongings to ensure they did not exceed the allotted amount. Staff also provided assistance with storing their personal belongings, if needed. Once participants were housed, WVHY continued to engage with them and provide a type of "retention" services to ensure they acclimated to their environment and did not return to the streets. Outreach staff checked in regularly with them until a warm hand off could be made to a case manager.

VEHICLE PROCESSING AND STORAGE

Once a participant was matched, accepted, and placed into housing, WVHY offered the option of limited-time storage or immediate dismantling and removal of an RV. To ensure that participants were voluntarily relinquishing their vehicles, WVHY videotaped the participants' consent.

The storing of RVs was crucial in building participants' trust. WVHY partnered with a local church and a private company to use their parking lots for temporary storage. There were two lots, with one lot providing storage for up to 25 RVs at a flat rate of \$1500 per month, and the second lot providing space for up to 10 RVs at a rate of \$100 per space per month. WVHY agreed to store a vehicle once the participant was enrolled in the program and matched with and accepted housing. Participants were not allowed to visit their RV while it was in storage, but they were allowed to store limited personal belongings. Storage was on a month-to-month basis, and the duration was determined based on an individual's plan.

To store the RV temporarily, participants had to demonstrate ownership of the vehicle. Outreach workers assisted participants in obtaining the necessary documentation to establish ownership with the DMV, if needed. WVHY staff also helped participants to sell their RV or camper, and participants received 100% of the profits if the vehicle was successfully sold. For RVs or campers that were worth less than \$500, WVHY worked to have the RV dismantled or sold. However, they found that most of the RVs were not in good enough condition to be sold and were therefore dismantled after being stored for a short period.

If an individual was unable to establish ownership of the vehicle and accepted housing, WVHY notified Council office staff with a photograph and information about the relinquished vehicle. The Council office then coordinated with LAPD's Mission Division to verify abandonment and process the vehicle.

INCENTIVES

One of the key components of the program was providing incentives to the participants after the vehicle was relinquished, scrapped, or sold. Many individuals residing in their vehicles are reluctant to accept housing resources since they would have to give up their RVs/vehicles. Therefore, in addition to providing temporary storage for their vehicle, WVHY incorporated a \$500 Visa Card incentive as a means to ensure that the RVs would not be returning back to the streets. This incentive, referred to as the "Program Completion Bonus," was given only after the vehicle was scrapped, sold, or impounded.

WVHY explained they chose this incentive amount to strike a balance between offering enough to motivate individuals to give up their vehicles, which often had little value due to their poor condition, while avoiding offering an excessive amount.

The CAO's proposed citywide rehousing strategy for people experiencing RV homelessness recommended an incentive range of \$250-\$500 after a vehicle has been relinquished, scrapped, or sold. The CAO's office arrived at this amount after discussions with officials from the County's Vehicular Homeless Outreach Program (VHOP). The VHOP program operates in West Los Angeles by St. Joseph Center. This specialized team conducts outreach to people experiencing vehicular homelessness in the County's Second Supervisorial District and provides administrative support in towing vehicles that have been red tagged by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST). According to VHOP staff, it costs the program an average of \$500 to dismantle an RV. Accordingly, the CAO believes its recommended range of \$250-\$500 is still reasonable, depending on the condition of the RV, and is only offered after a vehicle has been relinquished, scrapped, or sold.

DEPARTMENT/AGENCY ROLES

The program featured close collaboration between both City and non-City partners. The City primarily became involved in (1) identifying problem areas for WVHY, which WVHY could, but was not obligated to focus on, and (2) towing and impounding abandoned vehicles (e.g., vehicles that the occupant did not want, but no ownership could be established so consent could not be obtained for WVHY's buy back of said vehicle). Each partner's role is discussed in more detail below.

Non-City Partners

LAFH: served as the contract administrator.

WVHY: WVHY's outreach staff was responsible for engaging with vehicle dwellers to discuss the program and available housing resources. While waiting for housing resources and/or individuals expressing interest in the program, the staff continued to engage and support them with other matters, including assisting with obtaining proper documentation (e.g., vehicle registration, valid identification, license, etc.), vehicle repairs, storage, and any additional support needed.

LAHSA: LAHSA played a role in ensuring that services were not duplicated by conducting a warm hand-off of any eligible individuals they were already engaging with to this program.

City Partners

Council District 7: The Council office's role was to provide support by coordinating with city departments to address the vehicles that were abandoned, scheduling of bulky item pick-up, and any other matters in which City departments would be able to support.

LAPD: If the City received a report that a vehicle might be abandoned from WVHY, a constituent, or another source, the City, primarily, LAPD and LADOT, would then do its own independent investigation to confirm that the vehicle was actually abandoned in a manner consistent with existing law. LAPD would then check the VIN numbers to identify the registered owner, tow abandoned vehicles, and coordinate with the Commission Investigation Division (CID) for vehicle storage. LAPD's role was less the City and WVHY working together, and more WVHY operating this program as a private entity, and the City towing and impounding abandoned vehicles pursuant to its own policies once notified by WVHY and/or another third-party.

LADOT: In cases where a participant was not able to obtain proof of ownership or no longer wanted the RV/vehicle and had accepted housing, LADOT would be contacted to respond and enforce any vehicle related violations. In most cases, LADOT would cite vehicles under the 72-hour rule. The city's ability to *tow and impound* vehicles, including the ability to tow and impound vehicles for violating the City's 72 Hour ordinance, has been challenged and is currently being litigated. For more information, please consult with the City Attorney's office. The City's ability to *cite* vehicles for violation of the City's 72 hour ordinance is, however, not being challenged, and thus said vehicles are immediately subject to being cited.

METRICS

By February 16, 2023, a total of 70 individuals had been served by the WVHY program. Of these, 39 were placed in interim housing, 5 were moved into permanent housing, and only 2 returned to homelessness, resulting in a 95% success rate. WVHY is still engaging and supporting the remaining 26 individuals enrolled in the program until they secure housing. Additionally, 34 RVs have been removed from the streets, with 24 RVs/trailers scrapped, 7 awaiting disposal, and 3 pending sale.

As this was a pilot program, there were some important lessons learned. One of the challenges encountered by outreach was the need for thorough data collection. Due to limited funds, they were unable to have a designated data staff member, and therefore, recommend including data staff to ensure the success of the citywide strategy going forward.

CHALLENGES

One of the primary challenges identified in the WVHY pilot program was staffing. With only two staff members assigned to the program, additional staff and housing navigation services were needed to provide ongoing case management. Participants placed in interim housing require support to attend scheduled appointments, such as medical and DMV appointments, as well as obtain necessary documentation for future appointments and employment needs. Providing this support is integral to keeping clients motivated and meeting their goals.

Participants in RVs also differ from those in tent encampments in important ways. Without consistent and frequent communication from dedicated program staff providing ongoing case management, they may lose hope of reaching permanent housing and are more likely to return to their RV.

Securing parking lots poses challenges due to limited capacity within the city and the need to vet public storage lots to ensure efficacy and security. Public lots must have locked facilities and 24-hour security to store vehicles, and costs vary across different zip codes, which presents challenges for council districts.

Finally, the vehicle registration process for renters who are not the registered owner poses a significant challenge, as they may be ineligible to participate in the program.

Importantly, to the extent the City wants to engage in these activities (e.g., private parking lots used for storage, gift cards or other compensation in exchange for vehicles or compliance), they need to be reviewed by the City Attorney's Office in order to limit liability. A private party (e.g., a charitable or non-profit organization) can do whatever it wants (as long as the City is not directing that organization what to do), without creating liability for the City. However, just because a private organization does something does not mean the City can do the same thing. For more information Council should consult with the City Attorney's Office.

EXPANSION

The program's success was a large reason why this Office embedded its lessons and elements into its proposed citywide strategy, as well as the program's alignment best practices and the City's Street Engagement Strategy. To further demonstrate the success of this approach, Council should adopt the citywide strategy, as well as the above recommendation to implement the strategy in targeted locations across the City. Further, Council should consult the City Attorney's office before implementing any new policies or procedures to limit liability.

COST BREAKDOWN

As noted above, LAFH sub-contracted with WVHY to operate the RV-to-Home Pilot with a budget of \$320,000. However, additional resources were needed and WVHY secured a \$90,000 grant from former-Supervisor Sheila Kuehl’s office. The budget below shows the costs associated with this program.

Table 1. RV-to-Home Program Budget

Program Categories	Cost
Motels	\$13,000.00
DMV Requirements	\$10,000.00
RV Maintenance and Services ¹	\$42,000.00
RV Storage	\$55,000.00
Financial Incentives	\$20,000.00
Supportive Services ²	\$14,500.00
Vehicle Leasing	\$15,700.00
Supplies and Equipment	\$1,300.00
Staffing and Administrative	\$238,518.00
Total	\$410,018.00
1 Includes costs for RV pump services, towing, repairs, demolition, and smog tests	
2 Includes costs for client needs and cleaning service	

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Approval of the recommendations in this report will not have an immediate impact on the General Fund as funding recommendations will be provided in a future report.

FINANCIAL POLICIES STATEMENT

The recommendations in this report comply with the City’s Financial Policies