

CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS

Office of the City Auditor Policy and Research Division

Safe Outdoor Spaces for People Experiencing Homelessness

Introduction:

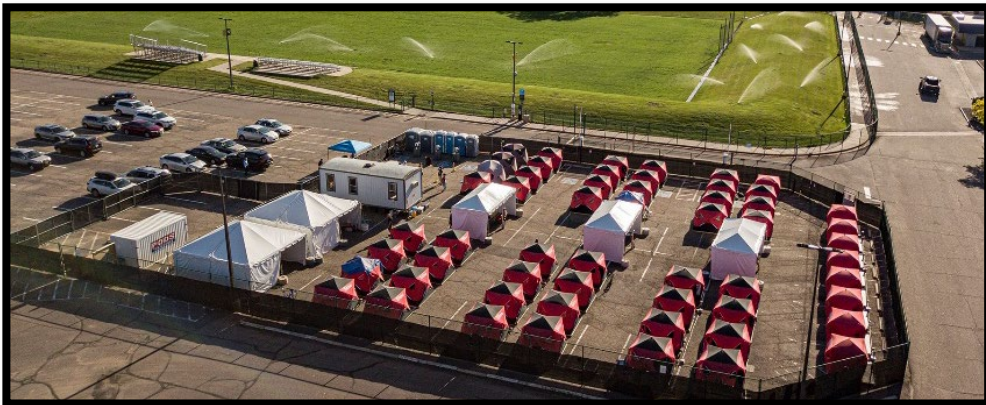
At the May 14, 2024, meeting of the City Council, Business, Housing & Zoning Committee the City Auditor's Policy, and Research Division (PAR) was directed to:

1. Conduct a landscape analysis of municipalities with safe outdoor spaces for people experiencing homelessness. Analysis should include: the scope of services provided; overview of the zoning and regulatory measures adopted; estimates of relative success; challenges, barriers, and lessons learned.
2. Engage with city administration and partners to identify changes in regulation, zoning or service provision that may be necessary to enable safe outdoor spaces in Minneapolis. Assess costs and opportunities of options. Identify challenges, resource-needs, opportunity costs etc.

Safe Outdoor Spaces: Report Process

Desk research and interviews with
7 cities, selected based on:

- Time initiative has been in place
- Relative climate similarities



US Cities with Safe Outdoor Spaces** (*not exhaustive*)

Fayetteville, AR	Denver, CO*	Portland, OR*
	Aurora, CO	Ashland, OR
Phoenix, AZ	Grand Velley, CO	Beacon Village, OR
Los Angeles, CA	Athens, GA	Austin, TX
Modesto, CA		Dallas, TX
Oakland, CA	Maui, HI	San Antonio, TX
Redondo, CA		
Sacramento, CA	Duluth, MN*	Seattle, WA*
San Francisco, CA		Bellevue, WA
San Jose, CA	St Louis, MO	Burlington, WA
Santa Barbara, CA		Tacoma, WA*
Santa Fe, CA	Albuquerque, NM	Olympia, WA
Santa Cruz, CA		Vancouver, WA*
Sonoma County, CA	Las Cruces, NV	
Tarzana, CA		Madison, WI*

*Interviewed for this Report

**Spaces populated with portable shelter structures, tents, and/or safe parking

Range of Shelter Spaces:

Congregate Shelters: Traditional emergency shelter programs where living situations are like group-living dormitories.

Non-Congregate Shelters: Private living situations, such as motel rooms, rooms.

Safe Outdoor Spaces: Temporary shelter using portable shelter structures, outdoor tents, trailers, or safe parking lots, which allow those living in vehicles to park overnight.

Warming & Respite Centers: Locations where people can temporarily escape the elements, meet basic needs and sleep.



Findings: Features of Safe Outdoor Spaces

All researched safe outdoor spaces:

- Are envisioned as part of an interim solution designed to help meet the needs of the unhoused, while the city invests in permanent solutions.
- Take a low barrier and harm reduction approach, that “meet people where they are” (like Minneapolis’ Avivo Village).
- Meet basic needs, while emphasizing rehabilitation and re-housing.
- Are limited to adults experiencing homelessness.
- Have coordinated placement, whereby outreach teams identify clients for whom traditional shelter may not be an option.

Findings: Rationale for Safe Outdoor Spaces

Advocates and operators of safe outdoor spaces suggest that they:

- Allow for basic and rehabilitative needs to be met more efficiently, reducing costs of policing and medical care for the unhoused.
- Can meet the needs of unhoused persons for whom congregate shelter is not an option.
 - All 8 interviewed spaces (except Duluth) reported being at capacity, with waitlists.
- Allow for more stability and autonomy than traditional (congregate) shelter.
- Are conducive to a harm reduction approach, whereby people with addiction(s) can use in private settings, receive treatment.
- Interviewees mentioned 'Safe Parking' represents an early intervention model, as most clients were recently unhoused.

Findings: Cautions and Limitations

- Safe outdoor spaces are not a solution to homelessness.
- Space limitations and requirements exclude people from outdoor spaces just as indoor shelters do.
- Creating spaces can be costly in money, time, and effort.
- Safe outdoor spaces can be difficult to manage and maintain.
 - Operators balance need for voice & autonomy with safety & rehabilitation.
 - Operators had to overcome difficulties working with the police, including to enforce codes of conduct, respond to complaints.
 - Operators incentivize, encourage or mandate participation in case management.
- Programs may prove difficult to close.

Findings: Challenges & Trends

- Interviewees noted substantial initial resistance from communities that neighbor safe outdoor spaces, including lawsuits. In response, cities:
 - Invested in community outreach & engagement
 - Facilitated (or mandated) agreements between site operator and neighborhood associations
- Once in operation, cities reported that opposition waned, as anticipated increases in crime (or other fears) did not manifest.
- Cities assumed liability and insurance for sites on their land (most interviewed).
- Among sites researched, there is a move away from populating spaces with tents, and towards portable shelters or tiny houses.

Findings: Services & Amenities

All sites provided for on-site case management and peer support.

All (non-parking) sites were staffed 24/7 and included:

- Shelters with electricity, heating, and air-conditioning (except for Denver's tent spaces, in which electric heaters and fans are provided).
- Communal bathrooms, showers, laundry and office space (most in heated trailers).
- Cots, toiletries, and bedding provided to clients at entry.
- Regular medical care available on site (most through weekly site visits).
- 1-3 meals provided daily (usually through donations or food partnerships).

Findings: Efficacy of Safe Outdoor Spaces

- All interviewees reported relying on established Continuum of Care criteria to prioritize clients for re-housing.
- Among 7 safe outdoor spaces providing data, the average number of clients “placed or transitioned” to permanent housing was 43%.
- Seattle reported that of the 331 clients exiting its Tiny Villages in 2023, less than 2% returned to homelessness.
- Duluth reported that 85% of those who used its safe parking space over the summer of 2023, engaged in case management.

Findings: Estimated Costs

Start-up costs vary significantly. Madison, WI reported that initial start up and operational costs for the first year (for a space typically accommodating 45 people) was \$1.1 million

Based on reported annual operating costs:

- Denver, Safe outdoor spaces: \$22,000 / year per client
- Madison, Mission camp: \$17,780 / year per client
- Seattle, Tiny Villages: \$15,325 / year per client
- Vancouver, Safe Stay Communities: \$25,000 / year per client

Some cities reported purchasing or leasing land, significantly increasing costs. The addition of a building on site, also increased costs.

Findings: Zoning and Regulations

- All researched cities with (non parking) safe outdoor spaces had ordinances governing and granting permitted use of space for their type(s) of safe outdoor space.
- All were written to anticipate risks posed by safe outdoor spaces.
- Most wrote operational parameters into the codified permitting requirements.
 - For example, the Tacoma Municipal Code authorizes the Director of Planning and Development Services to issue permits “only upon demonstration that all public health and safety considerations have been adequately addressed”.
 - Duluth requires any operator to provide evidence of liability insurance acceptable by the City Attorney and regularly renew their permit.
 - Madison requires “Mission Camps” to have a management plan, include no more than 30 shelter units, and obtain a State campground license.

Questions?

