



# City of Culver City

## Staff Report

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**Item #:** A-2.

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**CC - 1) Discussion of the Short-Term Culver City Nighttime Safe Park Permit Program for Unsheltered Individuals Living in their Vehicles During the Coronavirus Respiratory Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic; and 2) Direction to the City Manager as Deemed Appropriate.**

**Meeting Date:** May 11, 2020

**Contact Person/Dept:** Helen Chin/City Manager's Office

**Phone Number:** 310-253-6022

**Fiscal Impact:** Yes  No

**General Fund:** Yes  No

**Public Hearing:**  **Action Item:**  **Attachments:**

**Commission Action Required:** Yes  No  **Date:**

**Public Notification:** (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - City Council (05/06/2020);

**Department Approval:** John Nachbar, City Manager (05/06/2020)

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends the City Council (1) discuss and approve the short-term Culver City Nighttime Safe Park Permit Program for unsheltered individuals living in their vehicles during the COVID-19 pandemic; and (2) provide direction to the City Manager as deemed appropriate.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Culver City Nighttime Safe Park Permit Program (Program) for unsheltered individuals residing in their vehicles offers a safe place to legally park on an overnight basis. In 2019, the Homeless Count found that 236 individuals lived on the street or in their vehicles in Culver City. Of the 236 individuals, 61 lived in cars, 6 lived in vans, and 23 lived in RVs or campers. This represents 38% of the unhoused population in Culver City. These numbers also reflect an increase in the overall numbers of unhoused individuals from the 2018 Homeless Count. The 2018 Homeless Count found 117 unsheltered individuals living in Culver City. Of the 117 individuals, 26 lived in cars, 9 lived in vans and 27 lived in RVs / campers. We can expect to see more people living in their vehicles due to the loss of income from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's (LAHSA) 2019 Homeless Count report noted that 53% of people experiencing homelessness for the first time cited economic hardship as the main reason. Lack of affordable housing units, rising rents, and stagnant wages in Los Angeles are driving low-wage workers out of their homes and into their vehicles. This Program will serve as a baseline stabilization measure, reducing harm and meeting basic human needs. This allows unsheltered individuals to follow Los Angeles County's and Culver City's "Safer at Home" orders during the pandemic. The Program also allows staff and outreach teams to assess and prioritize individuals for services. Participants will have access to nighttime safety and certain health measures such as hygiene facilities.

Individuals residing in their cars present unique needs that are somewhat different from an unsheltered street population. Shelters often do not allow pets, many shelters do not have parking lots, curfew hours may not be suitable for those who are working, and living in close quarters with others may not feel safe, particularly for women and children.

At this time, the Program will serve as a nighttime parking permit program, giving people a safe place to rest at night and access to hygiene facilities. This framework allows the City to build upon the Program and add additional services and resources as those become available. A Safe Park Program is one of the goals in the Updated Plan to Prevent and Combat Homelessness (Plan). In the Plan, Goal 1 (Increase Bridge Housing Option and Number of People Served), Action 1 b is to identify viable sites and implement a safe parking program.

## DISCUSSION

### **SHORT TERM PROGRAM FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS**

#### Size and Capacity of the Short-Term Program

At the April 27, 2020 City Council meeting, the City Council selected Culver City Park Bill Botts Field Parking Lot 4 (Lot 4) for a short-term Program. The Program will serve unsheltered individuals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the length of the Program will be determined by the duration of the local emergency. At a future meeting, City Council can decide to extend the Program beyond the local emergency in the same location, or direct staff to research the suitability of other locations after evaluating the outcomes of this short-term Program.

Allowing one parking space between vehicles, the site can accommodate up to 20 automobiles. At the moment, the site can only accommodate cars, as recreational vehicles (RVs) and campers would require additional facilities to empty tanks. Allowing one parking space between each vehicle allows for emergency vehicle access and maintains space for physical distancing.

#### Site Map

Lot 4 is located off Duquesne Avenue just past the Boneyard Dog Park. The site is quiet and nestled in the park, away from residential neighborhoods and office buildings. Several streetlights illuminate the lot at night and the City will also install solar-powered light poles to provide more lighting for the

pathway leading to the restrooms. Public Works Environmental Programs and Operations will provide trash cans and pick up. Several vehicles belonging to the City's contractor West Coast Arborists are parked in the lot but can be moved as the demand for parking spaces increase.

Restroom facilities are located just off a walking path. The City will also provide a portable toilet, an ADA-accessible toilet, and a handwashing station along the perimeter of the lot. Security will be setup by the driveway to check in participants and be accessible to provide assistance. Participants will park in designated parking spaces and have access to some space to stretch their legs and walk theirs pets on leash.

Since this site is a City facility, all guidelines outlined in the Culver City Municipal Code that apply to Parks usage (CCMC Chapter 9.10) will be enforced. This includes no smoking or vaping, and substance use. Also, although pets are not permitted in Parks (except the Dog Park and on Pooch Paths), pets will be permitted on the Program site, as long as they are on-leash. The lot is also located on the hillside within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ), so the site plan and layout will adhere strictly to the state and local laws and regulations that establish safety measures to mitigate such fire risk (CCMC Subchapter 9.02.400).

### Program Hours of Operation

Mirroring other Safe Park programs in Los Angeles County, Culver City's Program will be in operation from 8:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m., Monday through Sunday. An 8:30 p.m. arrival time allows Parks staff to finalize maintenance for the day. This also allows participants to arrive onsite, check in, wash up, and get ready to sleep. Final check ins will take place at 9:30 p.m., when Park Patrol will chain up the entrance to the upper lots. To ensure a comfortable and quiet sleeping environment, entrants should arrive by 9:30 p.m. Participants are able to leave anytime during the night but will not be able to return until the following evening. At the posted 6:30 a.m. departure time, participants will vacate the lot and allow Parks staff to resume planned maintenance and prepare the site for participants to return in the evening.

### Program Rules and Regulations

Culver City's Program will follow many of the same rules and regulations (Code of Conduct) of other Safe Park programs. The Code of Conduct establishes expectations of the Program and holds participants accountable to both the Program and to other participants. These guidelines include specific details about what is allowable on the City site and includes all the laws, rules and regulations that apply to usage of any Parks facilities as well as the fire prevention regulations in accordance with the VHFHSZ designation.

Adherence to the rules also makes for a safe, comfortable, and stabilizing space for people living in their vehicles. The predictability and peace of mind can ease some of the stress of unsheltered living, and support those who are working toward long-term housing goals. As such, if any participant is found to be in violation of the rules and regulations, opportunities will be given to address the issue, or the participant may be at risk of termination from the Program.

### Outreach

While the site can be set up within a few weeks, outreach for participants will take additional time.

The City will work closely with the Culver City Police Department Mental Health Evaluation Team, St. Joseph's Center, and Grace Diner and Culver Palms United Methodist Church to outreach to those who are unhoused and residing in their vehicles.

Even with outreach teams and partners notifying potential participants about the Program, individuals will still need to decide if they want to participate. While completing documents may only take only a few hours, it may take more than one session to complete all documents. Staff recommends that intensive outreach be conducted and a roster of 5-10 participants be enrolled before the Program is launched.

Some programs prioritize individuals who can demonstrate residency within the city where the program is located. Since homelessness is a regional issue and Culver City works closely with our neighboring agencies by sharing resources and solutions, staff recommends that the Culver City Program serves as another resource for the cities on the Westside.

### Screening and Enrollment

**Intake** - All interested participants will complete an intake interview and be onboarded prior to being provided the address and location of the Program. The intake will include any other persons who will also reside in the same vehicle. Eligible guests will be placed on a roster to ensure that staff and security are aware of who will be onsite during any given night. Keeping the **onboarding process** separate from **arrival on site** allows staff and security to streamline the nightly check-in process. Screening, onboarding, and running background checks may take anywhere from several hours to several days depending on the application. People who arrive at the site without prior screening will be asked to complete the intake process on another day and will be referred to an alternative location for the evening.

Staff will intake and onboard applicants in person to verify the identity of the individual with their driver's license, gather information (name, age, address, birthdate), check insurance, obtain consent for background check (warrants, sex offender status, probation or parole status), and check operational status of vehicle. The application process also includes reviewing expectations of the Program and what is allowable onsite. To participate, participants must agree to supply all the requested information and sign all required documents.

Once all documents are completed, staff will forward names of participants to the Culver City Police Department (CCPD). CCPD will run the information through the National Crime Information Center database to check for violent felonies, probation, parole, active warrants and sex offender registration. Once participant passes background check, staff will confirm participant's eligibility to participate. They will be then issued a parking permit for the Program and be given the address to the Program site.

Note about background checks: As a point of reference, staff is using the same criteria and requirements as those for the current Housing programs. This includes bans on felony convictions in the last three years, convictions for methamphetamine production, and registration as a sex offender. CCPD will run a check through the NCIC database and the Housing Division uses the National Credit Reporting database. City Council can decide on whether to apply these standards for screening applicants for the Program.

**Arrival on site** - Eligible participants will be placed on a roster and given the address to the Program location. Staff and/or security will check participants into the program for the evening, provide the parking permit to be displayed in the vehicle, provide a brief reminder of the guidelines, and orient guests to the parking spaces and onsite facilities. A Fire Department Paramedic will also be onsite during check-in to assess for COVID-19 symptoms and CCPD will also be onsite to check for sobriety and drug use.

One of the rules of the Program will be that Participants may not invite people who have not completed the intake and onboarding process. Anyone who is not on the guest list will be referred to other shelters with parking lots and to the City's Program contact number or to a service provider like St. Josephs' Center to be screened for the Culver City Program. The Program will only allow those who are on the roster to spend the night. This provides for security and privacy for all guests, allows the Program to operate according to the agreed upon rules and regulations, and maintains a safe place for participants to return each night.

**Nightly protocol** - The site will be monitored by a security guard throughout the night. Security will be available to address issues and, if needed, will call 911 for emergencies or the CCPD watch commander for non-emergency issues.

As the first steps of the Program are implemented, staff will remain vigilant of any input from participants, City departments including the Housing Division, CCPD, Fire Department, PRCS, Public Works, St. Joseph's Center, and the community. Such input, recommendations, and concerns can inform changes and adjustments to the Program that may take place to improve the services offered to support the participants.

### Environmental Analysis

Staff has reviewed the Program under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and has determined it to be exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15269(c), as a short-term emergency project necessary to prevent and mitigate health and safety impacts on persons experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL CITY SERVICES**

**St Joseph's Center Outreach Program** - The City currently contracts with St Joseph's Center (SJC), the lead provider to the Coordinated Entry System (CES) to the LAHSA in Service Provider Area 5. SJC performs street outreach and assesses individuals for homeless services and resources.

Staff will work with SJC to identify individuals who may already be connected to LAHSA programs through the CES. The Program will serve as another resource for SJC as part of their ongoing outreach efforts. Since this is a short-term program during the duration of the local public health emergency, staff will work with SJC to provide referral services.

**Meals** - The Feed Culver program in Culver City has been providing hot meals to those impacted by COVID-19. CCPD has been an integral part of delivering the meals from Culver City restaurants to

those in need. Meals will be provided based on the numbers of expected guests each evening.

**Showers** - The Showers of Hope Program is an additional service that the City can look to include. The recommendation is that a shower program be included in a long-term program that supports an ongoing group of Program participants.

### FISCAL ANALYSIS

For a short-term program, using a 5-week cost estimate, the costs for security, rental of hygiene facilities, power washing, and trash removal will add up to about \$16,775. Of these costs, \$12,800 is reimbursable by FEMA. A 10-week program would cost about \$32,050. FEMA reimbursement is less likely for expenditures occurring outside of the declaration of the local emergency. The long-term annual program would cost \$70,000, operated by a provider such as Safe Park LA and funded by the California Community Foundation.

### ATTACHMENTS

1. Culver City Park Lot 4 Site Plan

### MOTION

That the City Council:

1. Discuss the Culver City Nighttime Safe Park Permit Program for unsheltered individuals living in their vehicles during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
2. Provide direction to the City Manager as deemed appropriate.