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INSURANCE ISSUE DERAILS PLANS FOR MANAGED CAMP

Site near Corvallis BMX Track could have sheltered up to 30 people

An unexpected roadblock has forced organizers to reluctantly scuttle plans to open a managed campsite for people who are unsheltered near the BMX Park in Corvallis.

Officials with Unity Shelter, the Corvallis nonprofit organization that would have operated the managed camp, have been working since December 2020 to line up suitable insurance for the site. Unity Shelter's primary insurer, Nonprofits Insurance Alliance, declined to insure the managed camp, citing "loss trends" for similar operations.

Other attempts to find timely and affordable insurance for the site proved fruitless, so Unity Shelter's board of directors reluctantly decided at a March 9 meeting to stop the BMX plans and shift its focus to extending the season at the Men's Shelter. (The Men's Shelter, which has been operating this year at a greatly reduced capacity due to the pandemic, is scheduled to close at the end of March, per its usual schedule.)

At that meeting, however, board members reaffirmed their belief that managed camping is an essential part of the continuum of services needed to help people who are unsheltered. The managed camp site near the BMX Track would have featured locations for about 25 tents and would have offered shelter for up to 30 people.

Unity Shelter also operates the Men's Shelter, the Room at the Inn shelter for women at the First United Methodist Church, and the SafePlace program, which has built and located microshelters for people who are unsheltered at various locations throughout Corvallis.

At Monday's meeting of the Corvallis City Council, Mayor Biff Traber briefed councilors about how the insurance issue had derailed plans for the managed camp. "This is not good news from any point of view," he said, adding that it raises a question about what it will take to open a managed camp for unsheltered people in Corvallis.

After a suggestion from Ward 3 Councilor Hyatt Lytle, councilors on Monday agreed to return to the issue at their April 5 meeting, with a focus on how to deal with the issue of unsheltered

people now camping throughout the city, including the area around the Men's Shelter. Lytle also said that she hoped the council would pursue a regional strategy to deal with homelessness.

"It really feels like it's hit a tipping point for my housed and unhoused constituents," said Lytle, whose ward is just south of the Men's Shelter.

The Corvallis City Council gave its approval for the managed camp site near the BMX Park at a December meeting. A request in April to allow a managed camp facility in the area was rejected by city staff, but unsheltered people continued to camp in the area, leading to the council's Dec. 7 decision to proceed with a managed camp. **(See the timeline attached to this release for more details.)**

At the December meeting, the council allocated \$125,000 from the federal CARES Act to help pay for infrastructure and other needs at the camp. At that time, guidance from the federal government was that CARES Act money needed to be spent by the end of the year, so an urgent effort to install infrastructure at the site immediately launched, leading to the city issuing an initial floodplain development permit on Dec. 24. In all, about \$87,000 of the federal money was spent to develop the managed camp site. Fencing, platforms for tents and an office structure already have been placed on the site and will be removed.

The hope is to reallocate the remaining money to extend the season at the Men's Shelter beyond its usual closing at the end of March. (A health and hygiene center at the site of the shelter, which opened in March 2020 after the pandemic forced an early end to the shelter's 2019-20 season, will continue to operate outside the shelter. In addition, three microshelters recently were placed on the site and will soon be occupied by residents.)