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Editorials

# In the region’s homelessness effort, helping RV campers is hardest lift, yet among the most urgent

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An alley in SODO is inhabited by people living in RVs. The city and county are working on providing a better place for them to park. (Steve Ringman / The Seattle Times, File)

By [The Seattle Times editorial board](#)

Among all the efforts to tackle homelessness, finding housing for the roughly 2,700 people around King County who sleep in RVs, cars and other vehicles represents a singular failure.

In recent years, the city of Seattle set up safe lots for long-term parking that included human services and closed after several months. Among the reasons were high costs, neighborhood concerns about crime, and little success moving people to permanent housing.

After the Seattle City Council announced it had dedicated \$500,000 of federal COVID-19 relief money to set up an RV safe lot in 2021, the Human Services Department now says that is mission impossible. Instead, the city punted to the King County Regional Homelessness Authority to do something next year.

This deferment comes after the state Supreme Court issued a [ruling](#) on Aug. 12 that likely eliminates the ability of cities to tow RVs and other vehicles, even if they are parked along streets for weeks, or months.

Our community needs to make better progress with this subset of the homeless population, particularly as private businesses are increasingly taking the law into their own hands.

To block RVs from parking in front of their establishments, some business owners have placed concrete blocks — boulders, in some cases — on sidewalks and streets, particularly in Georgetown, Ballard, and Sodo. The Seattle Department of Transportation recently contacted property owners to issue warnings and explain consequences if they continue illegally obstructing public sidewalks and streets.

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Considering the blocks weigh 1 to 2 tons apiece and aren’t easy to move, they might be around for a while.

The city has no plan for vehicle campers, and can’t find one elsewhere around the country.

In an Aug. 11 letter to the City Council, Human Services Department Interim Deputy Director Tess Colby wrote, “no other city has developed an effective response addressing RV dwellers.”

As a result, the agency hasn’t yet developed an appropriate model for long-term parkers, many of whom live in vermin-invested, unhealthy and unsafe campers, cars, and trucks.

More time is needed, according to Colby, to talk to people living in RVs to better understand how to help them.

HSD’s message: We can do this work quickly and fail, or we can do it thoroughly and succeed.

This is a false choice.

RV and car camping has been an issue for years. Given all the alternatives, safe lots make the most sense. Responsible officials — either at the city or Regional Homelessness Authority — must quickly and effectively move forward to get these vehicles off the streets, connect people to services, and make public safety a top priority in our industrial neighborhoods.

That is the only way to make the kind of progress that everyone languishing in the terrible status quo deserves.

***The Seattle Times editorial board** members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Luis Carrasco, Alex Fryer, Jennifer Hemmingsen, Mark Higgins, Derrick Nunnally and William K. Blethen (emeritus).*

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