



City of Yakima

# **News Release**

**Subject: Unauthorized Camping Ordinance**

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## **Camping Ordinance Designed to Protect Entire Community**

Since it was passed by the Yakima City Council on July 19<sup>th</sup>, an ordinance that prohibits unauthorized camping on public or private property (City of Yakima Ordinance No. 2016-012) has generated questions and comments from community members.

"In the absence of restrooms, trash cans, and other sanitation facilities, unauthorized camping sites pose considerable risks for campers, neighborhoods and the entire community," said Communications & Public Affairs Director Randy Beehler. "This ordinance provides the City with at least one mechanism to ensure that if camping sites are established, they are safe for the people living there and for the people living and working in the surrounding area. When we provide that kind of explanation, most people's questions are answered," said Beehler.

Nothing in the ordinance prohibits the creation of homeless encampments on public or private property as long as appropriate sanitation facilities are available to those living in an encampment. The City currently operates an authorized homeless encampment on City-owned property near the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Walnut Street complete with restrooms, sanitary wash stations, and trash bins.

"In addition to the health and safety advantages authorized campgrounds offer, service providers are able to more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of campground residents if they are in one location versus spread throughout the community," said Beehler. "The City's intent is to make it possible for people who need a campground alternative in the short term to be able to do so with dignity, safety, and security."

The ordinance also prohibits the long-term use of recreational vehicles as alternatives to housing for the same reasons that unauthorized campgrounds are not allowed.

Beehler said that the City does not plan to be heavy handed in enforcing the ordinance. Rather, he said, City staff will continue efforts to point people in need to available services and to organizations that specifically address issues such as homelessness.

"For instance, the Yakima Police Department has been complimented by a lot people for its respectful treatment of our community's homeless," said Beehler. "That approach will continue to be used because the ultimate goal is to make available necessary services and permanent housing options to those who need them. This ordinance is one small part of that effort," said Beehler. "To be truly effective in addressing the complex and challenging issues surrounding homelessness, our entire community needs to be actively involved."

Click on the following link to see the complete text of City of Yakima Ordinance No. 2016-012 - <http://bit.ly/2aiwCip>