
From:
Sent: Friday, 17 March 2017 1:25 PM
Subject: Proposed Amendment to City of Melbourne Activities Local Law 2009
Attachments: SHAC-.Sleepless.in.Seaford.Report-.2017.03.17.pdf; SHAC letter to MCC . 2017 03 17.pdf

17 March 2017

Mayor and Councillors

City of Melbourne

Dear Cr Doyle,

Re: Proposed Amendment to City of Melbourne Activities Local Law 2009

The Seaford Housing Action Coalition (SHAC) was formed in early 2014 in response to the escalating problem of homelessness in the general Frankston/Seaford area. It soon became obvious that financial vulnerability and various social issues had put many other local residents at imminent risk of also becoming homeless.

We are concerned about the recent treatment of homeless people in the Melbourne CBD and object vehemently to any proposed By-Law amendment to change the definition of camping, and to confiscate peoples' property.

We believe that the media portrayal of those people was largely unfair and biased, and without real understanding of, or empathy for, the circumstances which may have led them to becoming homeless.

Surely it is the right of every Australian to make a temporary home, when they do not have a permanent one, on the land belonging to the people; public streets and other public land otherwise known as Crown Land.

Not every homeless person is a drug addict, unemployable or otherwise "undesirable" as is often implied - and often perceived by the general public. Those who are still deserve our support and a chance to better themselves. We all, as fellow Australians, have a responsibility to step up and help our fellow man.

The time is long overdue, we submit, for local governments to unite in a cohesive and determined effort to resolve the issue of homelessness as well as the social issues that lead to homelessness.

Every Australian resident should enjoy the basic human rights of food and shelter, yet a general lack of empathy, understanding, commitment and funding has led to the appalling situation in which we now find ourselves, where so many are deprived of those basic rights.

It is simply not good enough.

We refer you to our recent report "Sleepless in Seaford" (attached), which also considers your issue of people sleeping rough, in the Seaford – Frankston area. It explores and proposes a number of measures that might improve the security and well-being of homeless people in the broader community.

If, as is not disputed, there is insufficient 'crisis' or 'emergency' housing for people in need, we believe it is incumbent upon all levels of government to consider all transitional or interim initiatives such as measures to provide a level of safety and minimal amenity to people forced to sleep out. For example, on the Gated (or secure) Car Park model, and lockers for homeless people to store their possessions.

We challenge the Melbourne City Council, and you as Mayor, to listen to the voices of homeless people living in your municipality.

We believe that there are more creative and positive options to treat people sleeping rough than are proposed by the City of Melbourne's proposed amendments to Local Law 2009. We are concerned that this provision might influence other municipalities which are becoming increasingly aware of homelessness in their areas. The City of Melbourne should provide a good model, a standard, for local government in Victoria.

This challenge is also extended to the Federal, State and Local governments of Australia. We acknowledge the recent initiatives of the Victorian State government to respond to this immediate crisis, and we implore the City of Melbourne to take this issue to the leaders of all political parties.

Surely it is the duty of every Australian politician – including those elected to local government – to serve the people, and to uphold, and fight for, the human rights of all.

Yours sincerely,

Seaford Housing Action Coalition

SHAC3198@gmail.com

Attachments:

- SHAC - Sleepless in Seaford Report - 2017.03.17
(first released in December 2016)

this letter

cc

Written submissions to MCC re Proposed Amendment

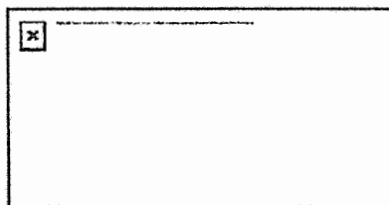
Mailbox

Victorian Commissioner of Police

Municipal Association of Victoria

Mr Tony Nicholson, c/-

Minister for Planning State Government of Victoria



<http://www.seafordcc.org/forum/viewforum.php?f=20>

Solidarity with homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

Coalition Members:

- St. Anne's Parish Social Justice Group
- Seaford Community Committee
- St Vincent de Paul Mt Eliza Conference Social Justice Group
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Residents of the Seaford Beach Cabin Park



SLEEPLESS IN SEAFORD
SLEEPING ROUGH: GATED CAR PARKS AND OTHER RESPONSES
An exploration of Housing Loss & Homelessness

SEAFORD HOUSING ACTION COALITION

17 March 2017

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Coalition Members:

- | | |
|---|---|
| - St. Anne's Parish Social Justice Group | - Seaford Community Committee |
| - St Vincent de Paul Mt Eliza Conference Social Justice Group | - Residents of the Seaford Beach Cabin Park |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- We are unaware of any previous study of people sleeping rough, or of statistics regarding the number of people sleeping in cars locally or otherwise.
- In general however there seem to be two categories of people sleeping in cars: 'longer term homeless', eg mental illness, substance abuse, or rental blacklist issues; and 'recently homeless' people who have suffered a relationship breakdown, domestic violence, or injury, and have few support networks. Having lost their income and consequently their accommodation (particularly given rising housing unaffordability), these people still have their car.
- Another set of people sleep in their cars because their pet makes them ineligible for much rental accommodation.
- Impacts of sleeping in cars include: assault and robbery; chronic sleeplessness and exhaustion associated with discomfort and constant alertness to danger or being 'moved on'; consequent reduction of coping skills, confidence, resourcefulness and mental health; social disenfranchisement through lack of access to basic hygiene (showers, clothes washing), services and education (fixed address, internet), and storage of possessions. Anecdotally, it is likely that many people living in cars would have a very constructive and co-operative attitude to a service such as a Gated Car Park.
- Our initial estimates of the number of people sleeping in their cars provided by local police, caravan park managers and others range from 1-2 to 8-10 per week. Anecdotal information, from people we know, and from our understanding of the low-profile kept by people sleeping in cars (especially women), suggests that these numbers would be a significant underestimation.
- On the one hand, the acute shortage of crisis accommodation in Seaford - Frankston - Mornington Peninsula appears to be acknowledged by all welfare, health and accommodation services in the area. At the same time the message from some in the sector is that no-one needs to sleep rough or in cars.
- While the government appears to be conscious of the issue and is looking to support 'affordable' and 'low-income' social housing initiatives (eg the new Wintringham project in Frankston), we are currently unaware of any project to address the need for 'emergency' or 'crisis' accommodation in our area. The continuing decline in caravan/cabin parks and budget hotels, and the unsuitability of many rooming houses, means that the shortage of emergency housing is dire. The nearest supported emergency accommodation to the Peninsula is at Endeavour Hills, Dandenong and St Kilda.
- If we are unable to provide sufficient emergency accommodation, it should, we submit, be incumbent on all parties to seriously consider transitional or interim initiatives (such as on the Gated Car Park model) that would provide a level of safety and minimal amenity to people forced to sleep rough.
- Amenities that are needed by people sleeping in cars include: safety, shower, clothes washing, access to phone charging and computers, and (especially for those sleeping rough) secure storage for possessions. Additional services that should be provided are support in terms of referral to professional health, welfare, accommodation, (and pet veterinary) services. In addition, on-site case-management, desirable but difficult, might partially be met by regular visits from agencies.

- It is recommended that a plan be developed for a 12-month trial of a facility on the 'Gated Car Park' model in the Seaford/Frankston area. This would include preliminary investigations into: a management model (including security); suitable location; potential funding support from government, community and private sources; potential collaboration with professional support services; and potential community sources of volunteer support.

OVERVIEW

'There is a perception that all homeless people have mental illness, drug and/or alcohol abuse and anti-social behaviour. In reality a relationship breakdown, unsafe home environment or job loss can leave someone in sub-standard accommodation, in a car, on the street, couch surfing or in a rooming house.

Whatever the reason, when a person becomes homeless or is without secure accommodation, it becomes extremely difficult to maintain a job, attend school and manage the simple things in life we take for granted.'

Community Support Frankston: <http://www.frankston.net/erhelp.htm>

It is clear that sleeping rough, including in cars, is uncomfortable, stressful, fraught with danger of assault and robbery, and also of being 'moved on' by authorities. It deprives people of access to good (or even just warm) food, showers, clothes washing, and access to basic communication, such as the internet, and mobile phone charging.

It also worsens social disenfranchisement, reinforcing diminishing confidence and self respect.

Sleeping rough (including in a car) leads to sleep deprivation, which worsens problems with mental health, and weakens coping skills and resourcefulness.

Evidence from elsewhere in Australia seems to suggest that there are two groups of people sleeping in cars: a longer-term group that has chronic issues; and a newer group which has unexpectedly found itself in crisis through unemployment, health breakdown or relationship breakdown. The latter group is especially sensitive to the decreasing affordability of housing and shortage of crisis accommodation. Our primitive survey of people sleeping in cars has found clear evidence of the former group in the local area, but is as yet nowhere near advanced enough to identify the latter group.

At this stage the evidence regarding the number of people who might use a local Gated Car Park is not clear. It does not seem to be high, but significant enough to justify a trial.

The 'Our Backyard' trial at Lake Macquarie suggests that it might be straightforward to establish such a facility. However it has had an extraordinarily supportive church, which provides the site, pays for rent of buildings, funds (through its regional welfare arm) a full-time project co-ordinator, and provides volunteer workers; it has also had the support of local council, media, and community, and its state Member of Parliament. It has not yet had any real security problems, but this possibility, and the issue of liability, would need to be considered and accommodated.

The extent of security required – whether it be merely 'safety in numbers' (without a fence), a fenced and gated car-park, even with a professional security guard as recommended by some – would have significant implications on the number of available local sites, and on the operating cost and viability of a project.

The extent of housing sector and local government support available would be critical for a Gated Car Park trial to succeed. Initial responses from welfare professionals were both positive and negative, because it is not a permanent solution, and because of security issues. Some consider that a 'supported' service, with welfare, housing and health professionals on hand to connect with people, would be more acceptable.

It appears that Royal District Nursing Service is one local group who might be more open to the idea. If it is decided to proceed with the Gated Car Park idea, a first step might be to approach Frankston Emergency Relief Providers with a request to submit and discuss this report at one of its monthly meetings.

There are also other options available to assist those sleeping in cars or sleeping rough, which need to be compared with the Gated Car Park option in terms of effort to develop them, and their potential benefits.

Programs have recently been commenced in Melbourne and around Australia to provide mobile services to homeless people. These services not only provide food and companionship (eg the 'soup vans' which have operated in different localities including our own for decades) but also clothes washing and drying, and showering. A businessman has suggested to SHAC that a local initiative of this sort, which might also include a 'virtual post office' (internet access, mobile phone charging), would likely find support by local business.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that 'safety' is the first concern of all people sleeping rough, particularly women. Apart from the Sleepbus, which is still being trialled in Melbourne, the mobile services would not address this issue. The Sleepbus would also provide a warm and comfortable sleep. Apart from the Sleepbus, a Gated Car Park's ability to provide safety would distinguish it from the other services for people sleeping rough. On the other hand it would not provide for those sleeping rough who don't have a car.

Another alternative course of action for SHAC would be to address the acute shortage of low-income housing and appropriate crisis accommodation. Some of the very few 'shelters' available around Melbourne have a poor reputation amongst many homeless. Options for addressing the issue of crisis accommodation include education, advocacy, or direct provision (with others) of low income or crisis accommodation.

Education: distribution or even publication of concrete, personal stories of homelessness, along the lines of those included in this report, are one potential educational technique that would suit a community group such as ourselves.

Advocacy: there is also a special place for a community group in reactive and proactive advocacy, to all levels of government, for public, social and crisis housing. However it is uncertain how many would be interested in attending meetings or writing reports. Broader campaigns (perhaps including delegations, public actions/protests, fundraising, writing shorter letters, distribution of flyers etc) might be of interest to more members.

Provision of Accommodation. We have developed a singular understanding of the value and potential of small housing/cabins on the Seaford Beach Cabin Park model. Judging from demand for that service, and social and family trends, there would also appear to be a strong demand for small housing in the future. It may be that a local proposal could be developed, likely in conjunction with government, and an established accommodation provider whether not-for-profit or commercial.

LOCAL STORIES OF PEOPLE SLEEPING ROUGH, AND IN CARS

In 2012-13 it was evident that there were quite a few men 'sleeping rough' on the Seaford foreshore, on Kananook Creek, and other bushland around Seaford.

We also observed homeless people sleeping in secluded and sheltered places such as the foreshore bushland, under bathing boxes, Kananook Creek and other bushland, and football ground coaching boxes, races and grandstands.¹

Many of the people spoken with reported having been assaulted and robbed.

Similarly people sleeping in cars have been attacked at night. The potential need for a secure car park in the area arose as an issue some two years go after a SHAC member who had visited CityLife in Frankston for some 12 months reported that of four men (including a couple) he had met who were sleeping in their cars all but one had been assaulted.

It was felt that a secure night-time (only) car park might provide them with safety and dignity, especially if toilet, basic kitchen facilities, and a power-point, could be provided.

Soon afterwards came the news of a young homeless couple killed while sleeping in their car, which had been parked on a lonely track on the outskirts of Ballarat. The cause was thought to be a butane gas heater they were using to keep warm on a cold winter night. In Ballarat particularly it provoked soul-searching about the 'forgotten people' and increasingly unaffordable housing.²

Despite the risks it is common for people to prefer to sleep in cars, which many feel are safer than Rooming Houses, or Homeless Shelters.

A number of those who sleep in cars do so because of pets, which make finding private rental accommodation very difficult.

The following reports are of local situations. (None of the names used are the real names of the people involved.)

- A SHAC member wrote of several recent (2015) encounters with people he had met at CityLife:
 - "I met Jim and his wife Emma 18 months ago at CityLife church in Frankston, at the time they were living in their car. I met them in Frankston on Friday, and had a yarn. They now rent a 3 bedroom house in Frankston; Jim had his right hand bandaged as he had broken a bone in his hand as a result of a fight a couple of days ago. He is suffering from depression and anxiety. He said he had no reason for living and showed me his right arm where there are marks where he had cut himself trying to commit suicide.

Emma left him 4 weeks ago and had returned yesterday. She came by as we talked, does not look well at all.

I suggested Jim might get work in a restaurant in Red Hill; he said he could not cope with any work right now because of his anxiety."
 - "I met Bill last evening. I asked him how long he had been living in his car, he said about 2 years. I then asked him what he did between 6 and 10 pm of an evening, where did he go. He said he spent a lot of time at McDonalds, sitting, reading and

¹ In May 2012 the *Frankston Leader* ran a number of prominent and well-received stories on Mykal, one of the homeless men living in the Frankston bush. He continues to occasionally appear in articles.

² *The Age*, 26th July 2014, 'Young homeless couple in Ballarat found dead in car from heater'; *The Courier*, 26th July 2014, 'Residents shocked after homeless couple, dog, found dead in car near Ballarat'. This incident may have contributed to the organisation by the Ballarat Interfaith Network of a well-attended forum on homelessness in the city in August 2015.

thinking. He would go to sleep in the car park at the Frankston hospital. He also said quite a number of people who go to breakfast at Citylife spend time in McDonalds in Frankston of an evening. I asked him where he washed himself; he said there are showers somewhere in Mt Eliza and in a couple of other places on the Peninsula.

Bill now has a small unit in Oakleigh and is doing fairly well."

- St Vincent de Paul Society (Mornington). In an attempt to raise awareness of homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula, in 2008 local Vinnies volunteers wrote sketches of some of the people they were assisting.³ Two examples featured people living in cars:

- 'Case 8'

"A blended family group of four adults and five children were living on the beach. Their only accommodation consisted of two cars.

Conference assisted the group with food and other essentials such as towels, bedding, utensils etc. No emergency housing could be found, but eventually a second-hand caravan was provided. This was an improvement, but by no means adequate. During the summer months any possible accommodation is usually rented out to holiday makers.

The search for emergency housing continued unsuccessfully. Finally the families were forced to leave the foreshore in April, and moved from the area."

- 'Case 15'

"Bruce lives in his ute which he parks on various foreshores each night, and says he doesn't get asked to move on by the authorities. He would often pop into the Main Street St Vincent de Paul shop (before it was burnt down), have a cuppa with staff, and we would get a call to see him.

Always polite and extremely grateful, Bruce would tell us about his kids in Queensland, whom he never sees, and all the money he has sent over the years to his ex which has left him broke and owing thousands to Centrelink for 'false claims', which he has tried to dispute in court.

He needs to keep his car on the road and change locations each night for fear of being banned from the foreshore parking areas. He has had to pay for constant roadworthies, gas for his cooking, wet weather gear etc, and of course, petrol.

It is an itinerant, hand to mouth, existence. Last word is he now has a site at an eastern suburb caravan park, which may have given him some sense of belonging somewhere."

- St Vincent de Paul Mt Eliza Conference Social Justice Group (May – July 2016):
 - Two people sleeping rough, the first a lady who tried to sleep at night while hiding, afraid, under beach bathing boxes.
- "The second person was a male who sometimes sleeps in a car park in Frankston. He would drink a lot of alcohol to blot out his fear of sleeping rough and the drink

³ St Vincent de Paul, 'Peninsula Homelessness', 12/7/2008, pp.1-7. Real names were not used in this report.

would keep him warm. His needs were the same as the lady, hot shower, change of clothes or to wash them, mobile phone & phone card, access to charger. People sleeping in cars are a little better off, they have mobile shelter and can move off if an issue arises."

- "We helped a homeless person who was sleeping around the streets of Frankston, in an old unregistered caravan in poor state of repair. This chap had lost his job due to an injury and could not find work due to his medical condition, could not pay rent and ended up on the streets sleeping rough. Six months ago someone offered him an old van.

The day we interviewed him he indicated to us that a women offered him her driveway to park his van and the use of the bathroom, but he could not move the van. We noticed a by-law officer from the council watching. So the next day we arranged to move the van late morning by flat top tow truck to the private driveway.

The day we moved him the council called and advised him they would be removing his van from the street the next day."

- Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre (SPCSIC)
 - The introductory video on its website includes an interview with an unidentified man who relates that:

"After a family breakup I found myself homeless. I was living in my car, and from that time it was a challenge to be housed somewhere long-term. It's not what you expect. People spend their lives in these situations because they feel there's nothing left."

- 'Monica', in her late 40s, attended the second day of the SPCSIC's new 'Spash' program of mobile services on Rosebud foreshore. She presently sleeps on the foreshore camping ground in a Winnebago (RV). She has tertiary qualifications, but can't function during her bouts of depression. She spoke strongly about homeless women being 'invisible' because they so often feel unsafe; for example, unless driven to it by hunger they preferred to avoid homeless services such as free meal services that were attended mainly by men, especially if offensive language and threatening behaviour was not properly enforced by the organisers. She says that homeless women have a good idea of the situation of other women: women sleeping in cars don't go to public car parks or foreshore reserves, but go instead to ordinary suburban streets, where they sink down into the seat and hope that they won't be noticed. In poorer suburbs people seem to be more concerned about who is parked in front of their houses, so she had preferred richer suburbs during the period she had been sleeping in an ordinary vehicle. As well as choosing an inconspicuous street, she said women chose a parking spot that would allow them to drive off (escape) quickly. Bedtime and waking are early; they drive off before the neighbourhood wakes and notices them.

She raised the potential issue in a Gated Car Park of safety for women from the men who might also be staying there. She spoke about being hungry, and how anyone could end up homeless. She remembered with emotion how she had been bashed many years ago. 'Safety', she said, even more than food, is the most important consideration when you are homeless.

- The Salvation Army (Appeal brochure, July 2016)

Includes a story of 'Jodie', who "spent three months living homeless in a tent and car":

"I never thought homelessness would be my story. It all happened so quickly. My body started playing up, and it got worse. My balance is really bad. The pain is excruciating. I was working full-time in two cleaning jobs, but I had to stop. I had no choice. That's how I lost my house.

I've worked hard all my life. And this is where I ended up. I was homeless for three months. I'll never forget the first night on the streets, because it poured down with rain and I didn't know how to set up my swag. It was very cold sleeping rough."

- Seaford Community Centre (evening meals, 2016)
 - "An older man was persuaded by a younger woman sleeping in her car to allow her to park in the front yard of his house. (Many of the people who eat at the Seaford meals service look out for one another.) She told him that she had been sleeping in her car because of a situation with her partner. She disappeared without notice, but things mysteriously kept happening around the car (things put in there, or removed), which remained locked in his front yard. A group of men (one thought to be her partner) eventually turned up without notice and loaded the car onto a tow-truck. By this stage the situation had become a bit distressing for the man."
 - "A couple came into the meal. The man was quite reasonable and level-headed however his partner was very agitated and distressed. I sat with them for a while and then they opened up that their car was parked in the main shopping centre of Dandenong. It was not drivable due to being unregistered and the battery had died. The money for both they did not have and the management had demanded they move the vehicle. It held all their worldly possessions.

I offered to help them and gave them my phone number. However they did not have credit on their phone. I asked them to use a payphone to ring me the next day as I would start working on their problems as soon as I arrived at the office.

I spoke with the man twice on Thursday, once on Friday and again on the Saturday following our meeting on the Wednesday evening.

On Friday I got them to go and see the manager of Frankston Community Centre. He saw them personally to make sure something was done to assist them. When the man rang on Saturday I told them of a position vacant at the Seaford Beach Cabin Park that would be available in a week and that the Manager would like to see them during the following week.

This was the last time I spoke with him and they did not go to see the Seaford Beach Cabin Park manager. I can only hope that they either went to his parents (for whom the lady had no time) or a better offer came up."

It is evident that sleeping in a car, and sleeping rough, is an unstable, testing, undignified and sometimes unsafe lifestyle. It is always insecure and with the constant threat of being 'moved on'. It is easy to envisage how, as the 2008 Mornington Peninsula St Vincent de Paul survey says, homelessness:

- 'robs some of our children of a happy childhood and the ability to learn and achieve'; and
- 'leaves some of our adults without purpose, and sorrowful lives.'

KNOWN EXISTING GATED CAR PARKS

Overseas

Gated Car Parks appear to have originated in California. Around 2008, as foreclosures hit, those who had always struggled with homelessness were joined by senior citizens, women, and formerly middle class people with part-time jobs. By May 2008 a homeless outreach organisation in affluent Santa Barbara had a chain of 12 overnight car park refuges (including one 'women-only') on church and other not-for-profit properties.⁴

As the Global Financial Crisis impacted more widely the model appears to have spread across the USA, with many 'working poor' families forced into temporary accommodation such as private motel rooms, and the overnight 'gated car parks' set up by community groups. This was revealed to Australia in the Four Corners program 'America's Broken Dreams' in February 2013. Around the same time, web searches revealed Gated Car Parks in the UK and India. Recently however many US Walmart stores have reversed 'overnight parking' permissions (apparently used principally by 'Recreational Vehicle' travellers) due to security issues that have arisen.

Australian Gated Car Park: 'Our Backyard'

'Our Backyard', at Lake Macquarie, NSW, is thought to be the only Gated Car Park in Australia.⁵ It was initiated in early 2014 by local charities, Eastlake Women's Refuge, and Path to Change, in the grounds of The Macquarie Life Church, which also pays \$1000 per month rent for the two demountable buildings for its kitchen and office, and bathroom. Since 2016 has been run by Macquarie Care (a charity arm of the church in Newcastle) and partners.

Our Backyard now has a full-time co-ordinator, and no longer describes itself as a 'pilot' program (<http://www.ourbackyard.info>). It has moved from the original 'case management' to a 'support role' model, providing practical emergency support, and referrals to specialist professional services to make life a little easier for the homeless. It aims to direct people to longer-term community welfare supports, and particularly transition to secure stable accommodation. It is not a long-term solution, but helps people get through a 'sticky wicket'. They regard it as one of many possible responses to the problem.

The church charity, Macquarie Care, now employs a full-time (7 days a week, 365 days a year) overseer. It also provides a team of 20 volunteers.

The People Living in their Cars

As much as generalisations are possible, Our Backyard appears to have identified two groups of people whose lives have been reduced to living in a car:

- Longer term homeless. This group often have more chronic issues such as substance abuse, mental illness, criminal records, and late rent payments to private providers or the Department of Housing. Many are on blacklists with estate agents, the Department of Housing and Centrelink. A few seem

⁴ CNN, 20/5/2008: <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/LIVING/wayoflife/05/19/homeless.mom/>; also *Daily Telegraph* (UK), 21/5/2008: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/2003921/House-prices-force-Americans-to-sleep-in-cars.html>

⁵ 'Our Backyard', Notes to SHAC, MaryAnne Hickmott; Note that an article in *Central Coast Gosford Express Advocate*, 23/7/2013, 'Homeless told to leave the Central Coast if they want affordable public housing', suggests that there were perhaps a number of gated car parks in NSW.

impervious to efforts to get them to help themselves. All have a story, some of which help the volunteers understand why they live the way they do.

- Newly homeless. These have unexpectedly become homeless due to a crisis such as a lost job, a broken marriage, a few weeks missed rent. These problems become a crisis when there are few family or friends to support, and in a time of diminishing availability of crisis housing, and increasing housing unaffordability.⁶

In 2015, not long after the trial commenced, Our Backyard proponents recognised that it was to some extent a response to the changing face of homelessness:

"These aren't the traditionally homeless people – they're people who've not been able to pay their rent because they've lost their job, but they've still got their car.

It's that pocket of people in the community that really aren't recognised as homeless, because they've still got some resources about them."⁷

The present project co-ordinator Peter Di Girolamo states that people using the service are:

- '...women escaping domestic violence ...'
- '...men after relationship breakdown ...'
- '... and couples'.

'Rent affordability and unemployment were major issues that left many people only two or three pays from housing crisis', he said.⁸

Numbers of People using Our Backyard

Numbers fluctuate. Also, different average numbers have been cited at different stages of operation:

- At one (earlier?) stage the present manager is quoted as saying that 50 people were helped in 10 months. Twenty of these were supported into private or public housing. This is an average of only 5 (presumably different) people per month.⁹
- In October up to 5 people slept there each night; in August 20 people stayed, some a few nights.¹⁰

Operation and Security

- There is no gate around the car-park, or security staff.
- The scheme does not disclose the location of the car park on promotional material, primarily to deter perpetrators of domestic violence. The need for exact directions is thought to be a major reason why an overnight security guard is not needed.

⁶ *Newcastle Herald*, editorial, 27/6/2016.

⁷ ABC News, 6/3/2015 'New approach to homelessness offers safe haven for 'car sleepers': <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-06/new-approach-to-homelessness/6284836>.

⁸ Joanne McCarthy, article presumably in *Newcastle Herald* (no date).

⁹ Joanne McCarthy, article presumably in *Newcastle Herald* (no date).

¹⁰ Notes on 'Our Backyard', MaryAnne Hickmott; Julie Melman, telephone conversation, David Moloney, 11/10/2016

- Security cameras (primarily for protection of property) are being considered.
- Intake is 4–6 pm, with project co-ordinator attending. People stay, with free use of the facilities. The co-ordinator is also available 8–10 am. Kitchen closes at 10 am.
- Local charities and community groups (the church, Rotary Club etc) have helped with cleaning, maintenance, food and companionship. The co-ordinator says it is working very well. There are still teething issues, such as with volunteers (responsibility, limits, and training).
- There are rules for those who attend:
 - These are read to those applying to stay, who have to sign that they will comply with them;
 - A record is kept of those staying. They are required to inform whether they have a conviction (and for what), are an alcohol or drug user, or have a mental illness.
 - No drugs or alcohol are allowed to be consumed;
 - Intoxicated persons are not allowed to stay;
 - One only warning is given before a permanent ban.
- There have been no problems to date. The only incident was a man who was banned through arriving drunk but allowed to stay rather than drive off; he returned another time, but left of his own accord when staff arrived.
- Their experience is that all come voluntarily seeking help, and are genuinely appreciative of the service. This is evident in the way they appreciate the staff and volunteers, and respect the cleanliness of the facility.

Services

- Originally, in addition to offering a 'safe haven', the facility also provided 'a hub', with access to a full-time caseworker (funded through the community welfare groups which auspiced the project). A staff member case-managed residents, helping with applications for jobs, housing etc. As it was staffed during the day, the service was open throughout the day (and included a playgroup).
- Maquarie Life Church has now assumed full management of the project and employs a full-time project overseer.
- Information about local services is provided (including RSPCA). They all have mobile phones, and are encouraged to make an appointment with the service they need.
- People are given a toiletry pack.

Political and Housing Sector Support

- The local mayor and Council strongly support the project. The NSW government is not supportive, although the local member is very supportive.
- Camping breaches Council regulations.

Thoughts of Organisers on the Project

- The Macquarie Life church believes that it is worthwhile to spend \$1000 per month on facilities to help 20 people per month.¹¹ Macquarie Care also employs a full-time project co-ordinator.
- The initiative has helped people who slip through the cracks re local crisis accommodation, including couples (who cannot stay in either women's or men's refuges); and those with pets.
- It also helps with issues that contribute to homelessness, including exhaustion: 'you can't really sleep if you're in your car or on the street and watching for problems'.¹²
- Its co-ordinator emphasises that Our Backyard provides more than just a safe place, and facilities for charging a phone or making a cup of coffee. The visitors are called 'guests', not 'clients'. They build 'a sense of community', which honours a person's dignity and value. An important part of the story is responding to real people who 'just want to belong'.¹³
- The church describes it as a 'simple' thing to do. Its co-ordinator encourages us to develop a similar project in Seaford: simply find a spot and set up a meeting with decision makers.

INVESTIGATIONS INTO PEOPLE SLEEPING IN CARS IN SEAFORD, FRANKSTON AND PENINSULA AREAS

Initial SHAC Inquiries

SHAC's idea of a Gated Car Park was discussed at the Frankston Emergency Relief Providers (FERP) meeting of June 2015. The consensus was that there were many sleeping in cars, and that this was definitely worthy of further research. The Royal District Nursing Service representative offered to assist with health services if a Gated Car Park eventuates.

We identified some 14 potential Gated Car Park sites, mainly local churches and not-for-profit depots and stores, in the Seaford area. Some were already fenced, and some had basic facilities. In July 2015 we wrote to the owners inviting them to a discussion about the idea of a Gated Car Park.¹⁴ Disappointingly there was only one response, advising inability to assist. Personal follow-up approaches might have met with more success.

During the course of the present inquiry, two additional potential sites (churches) with gates and toilets were identified in Chelsea. Frankston or Carrum (bigger) Police Station carparks were also suggested.

¹¹ Conversations, MaryAnne Hickmott with, and David Moloney with Julie Melman.

¹² Joanne McCarthy, article presumably in *Newcastle Herald* (no date).

¹³ Eg, a community barbeque of the fish caught by an older male guest who spends his days fishing on Lake Macquarie: a great celebration by both guests and volunteers. (Email, Peter Di Girolamo to David Moloney, 5/12/2016.)

¹⁴ Kevin Vaughan, 'Gated Car Parks: A Proposal', SHAC (no date).

In February 2016 we decided to systematically investigate the idea of a Gated Car Park. A list of questions was drawn up under the headings: 'The Need', 'Other Examples', 'Necessary Facilities', 'Management', 'Potential Supporters', 'Potential Sites', and 'Local Government'.

This report provides the results of our research into the first and most fundamental of these questions: 'Is there a need?'

As well as anecdotes and stories of the people involved, we have sought to estimate the number of people sleeping in their cars in the Seaford-Frankston area.

We are not aware of previous investigations into people sleeping in cars by community groups, or government or not-for-profit welfare services. Just as no services are provided for people sleeping in their cars, no statistics are kept either. Church and community groups provide meals, companionship and other small but important services, and help them to present to specialist agencies that address health, work and accommodation needs.¹⁵ But otherwise it seems to be a case of moving people on.

The following information was obtained from conversations with local groups. These included the local hospital, police, caravan parks, and housing and welfare agencies. Contacts were made with groups including Launch Housing, Peninsula Youth & Family Services/SalvoCare, St Vincent de Paul Mt Eliza Conference Social Justice Group, Centacare, Mental Health Support Group, Royal District Nursing Service (RDNS), Frankston Emergency Relief Providers, WAYSS, Department of Health & Human Services, and Frankston Council.

Various people also attended SHAC meetings to discuss the issue. These included Pastor Bill Nagi, well known in Frankston North for his grass-roots work with poor and marginalised people over many years, and Nycey Stanley, a worker at CityLife. Peter Chappaloni (Spike) of the Homeless Persons Union had been keen to come to meet a community group interested in homelessness, but was a late apology.

Kevin Bain of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group also attended a SHAC meeting opposing the Gated Car Parks idea as it was not a long-term solution, would undermine 'integration', and diminish pressure for governments and politicians to address homelessness. He also inquired whether there was expert welfare sector support for the proposal. Opposing views were put, including: people are in immediate need, and at risk; public housing is not available; the proposal is envisaged as a 'stepping stone'; and some preferred to live on the street despite its problems, including some parents who do not want to notify authorities of their plight for fear of losing children.

It is acknowledged that a Gated Car Park would not be easy to get going without strong connections with community agencies. Potential issues will include: support from local government, the community and the welfare sector; insurance for property owners; and everyday people management and security issues.

It is also recognised that there are alternative options that we might pursue, including political advocacy and community education regarding the need for emergency and social housing, and services to the homeless. There are also other types of direct 'service' provision that SHAC might engage in with others, including mobile services (showers, laundry, food etc), local food pantries, or promotion of 'small housing' (as at cabin parks).

Feedback about the idea was received from the following services.

¹⁵ Eg, the now-closed CityLife at Frankston, the now-closed St Paul's breakfast in Frankston, the St Vincent de Paul visitation services, the food services provided by Community Support Frankston, and Second Bite (through Salvation Army and other churches and community organisations), the John Paul College community soup van, St Aidan's Carrum, St Macartan's Mornington, Mary's Van Rosebud, Vinnies Kitchen Rosebud, SPLASH Rosebud.)

Councils, and Municipal Homeless Services

- Contacts were made with Frankston and Kingston Councils. Generally the need for emergency and permanent low-cost accommodation in the municipalities was recognised, and statistics cited. However, no specific statistics or information relating to people sleeping rough or in cars was available.
- Existing services that helped the homeless included:- Community Support Frankston (which issues sleeping swags and food vouchers); Salvo Care Eastern (which is the first port of call for emergency housing); and the local RDNS which runs a program specifically to tend to the health issues of the homeless.
- A SHAC member has also been attending the Dandenong Rooming House Network, which comprises service providers together with other community groups, and the Council. There are considerable problems with Rooming House accommodation.

*Frankston Police.*¹⁶

- Estimate that the number of homeless people encountered per week on night shift ranges from 5-15, with the great majority of these sleeping in cars. Sleeping in cars is a far worse problem in Frankston than Moorabbin. However it doesn't appear to have become worse over the past 6 years.
- Very difficult to know how many are assaulted or robbed as these are rarely reported to police. Older heroin addicts are particularly vulnerable.
- "By far the majority" have drug or alcohol dependencies and have fallen out with their families. Many have criminal records, perhaps unregistered cars. A few have mental health issues. Some have pets. Very few are backpackers, travellers etc sleeping in vans or recreational vehicles.
- The police officer's experience was that it is very much a temporary issue for people; it's rare to see the same face twice. They might move on to couch surfing, or find better accommodation.
- Very few domestic violence victims sleep in cars; if these contact police, they are referred to a crisis agency (eg womens shelter, Salvos) for immediate accommodation.¹⁷ This is only for a few nights as police usually remove the perpetrator from the family home and restore the victims there.
- Locations in which people sleep in cars:
 - Secluded unlit areas off main roads, with toilets (& showers if possible), are preferred.
 - Beach car parks are popular: from the bottom of Oliver's Hill northwards up Nepean Highway.

¹⁶ Interview, Senior Constable Kolivas, with David Moloney, 13/4/2016. (It was reported that the Dandenong police also generally concurred with the information contained in the report of this interview.)

¹⁷ While this applies to women who have suffered domestic violence, and perhaps women with children, our own knowledge suggests that it does not apply to single women who are homeless; social workers assess the needs of each individual case.

- Frankston North and Seaford the focus of the problem. Popular places include:
 - Car park at entrance to Pines Forest Reserve at south end of Excelsior Drive
 - Car park in Forest Drive/Monterey Boulevard reserve, with toilet
 - The Seaford North Reserve (Railway Parade, near station), with toilet.
- Sleeping in cars is not a crime. But it usually contravenes Council by-laws, and Council sometimes ring police during the day to ask them to move people on if they think nuisance or trouble might brew.
- If a Gated Car Park was to be established, the police officer wouldn't recommend one in a residential area given the incidence of crime associated with many of the people.

Carrum Downs Police

- The Police deal with the occasional homeless person but not on every shift. These are people who are sleeping rough rather than in cars.

Frankston Salvation Army (formerly Peninsula Youth and Family Services, now SalvoCare) & WAYSS (Westernport Accommodation and Youth Support Services Inc):¹⁸

- People who live in cars do not often visit SalvoCare or similar services.
- People who live in cars are often those who have become 'recently' homeless. Most likely, they have experienced a family break-down and are generally looking for permanent accommodation and would prefer not to sleep in their car.
- A high proportion of people who sleep in cars, do so because they have a pet and have found finding a private rental difficult.
- Other reasons for people living in cars include mental health issues. These might prefer the solitude of parking on a residential street.
- Other thoughts on the Gated Car Park idea:
 - Not a long-term solution to housing;
 - Likely difficulties regarding funding and council permits;
 - Security: potential users might see a Gated Car Park as a place where they can be "stood-over", robbed, etc, and be cautious of placing themselves in such a vulnerable situation. To succeed, it would need security and this will be expensive and potentially make the project unviable;
 - A gated car park could work if there is access to social worker support.

¹⁸ Six crisis workers were contacted at Frankston SalvoCare and WAYSS, and a meeting of Dandenong WAYSS (on Rooming Houses) was attended.

- In 2014 a Salvation Army officer was reported as saying that, throughout Victoria, 'more and more' people are resorting to living in their cars, or in summer sleeping on the beach, 'because of lack of affordable accommodation options.'¹⁹

Launch Housing

- 'Launch Housing', a recent merging of Homeground (property) and Hanover (welfare) services, is one of Victoria's largest providers of housing and homelessness support services. It provides emergency housing, homelessness support services and advocacy, and research into homelessness that provides positive change in the community.
- Its crisis workers focus on early intervention, and thus strongly oppose the Gated Car Park idea, thinking it might encourage people to live in cars. They advise that these people should instead be referred to those who would to help them find better housing.

Frankston Hospital:

- The hospital security officer reported that in his experience people who sleep in cars like to be somewhere quiet where they won't be disturbed.
- They occasionally have a run of people sleeping in cars, but the car-parks are patrolled & compliance officers will book those who exceed time limits or don't pay. Due to expense of parking, sleeping in cars 'is not a big problem'.
- An area of free parking near the Botanical Gardens is also patrolled and anyone seen in a car is checked to ensure they are ok.

Seaford Beach Cabin Park

- The manager and owner have previously reported very high numbers of inquiries for accommodation at the park (up to ten a day), of which around three a week may have been living in their cars. Frankston hospital also regularly inquires to the Cabin Park seeking accommodation for people who have presented to it.
- However statistics (as far as is possible without being intrusive to inquirers) regarding how many accommodation seekers might have been living in their car, or sleeping rough, are only beginning to be kept. In six weeks (June-July 2016) there were only two (possibly) applicants known to have been sleeping in cars. In four weeks (September - October 2016) there was approximately one inquiry per week from people (3 men, 1 woman) who said that they were sleeping in a car.
- However these figures are very likely to underestimate the demand:
 - While there are many inquiries for accommodation (including people asking residents rather than management about vacancies), the manager believes that 'people may not be disclosing that they are living on the street'. This likelihood is confirmed by the experience of cabin park residents, who advise that people are unlikely to admit to landlords that they are living on the street when applying for accommodation. As well as the embarrassment and shame of admitting to homelessness, most landlords want proof that rent can be afforded, and information about previous accommodation.

¹⁹ *The Age*, 26/7/2014

- A 'no vacancy' sign has been displayed outside the cabin park

Chelsea Holiday Park (100 Broadway Street, Bonbeach)

- A minimum of 2 requests for temporary accommodation per day from people who are on the street or living in cars. In the last month requests from 4 people who were living in hotels and 2 in cars.
- Some residents who would normally be on the street are supported by charity and government groups. They are turning some of their tourist cabins into residential accommodation due to the high demand.
- They feel that there is a great need for more programs to assist the homeless and far more temporary and long-term accommodation needed in the electorate.

Pastor Bill Nagi

- In his 45 years working in welfare he has seen a steady cutback of government funding for youth support schemes, unskilled and semi-skilled jobs taken off-shore, and an increase in 'victim blaming' (eg 'unmotivated' youth).
- He worries that the \$550 million new funding for domestic violence might be at the expense of public housing.
- In his experience in Frankston North, police often 'hassle' people sleeping in cars, moving them on.

(Former) Frankston CityLife

Nycey (former worker)

- People living in swags are often bashed and assaulted on the foreshore, and need to get a new swag and CentreLink card. They live a very transient lifestyle.
- Initial inquiries at CityLife revealed three or four people living in cars. Most of the people there are used to doing things for themselves, and going their own way. (Perhaps the majority who use such facilities aren't the "newly homeless" who might be attracted to Gated Car Parks.)
- There were mixed reactions from the two respondents who provided feedback to the idea of a Gated Car Park. One thought it a good idea, but wasn't sure if he would use it regularly. The other initially thought it might be a good idea, but then thought that there may be trouble between the users. The CityLife security guard also anticipated the need for security at any Gated Car Park. Nycey also would want to be assured regarding security, and how the secure gate would work.
- She thought that it would be a transient population that would stay for some nights, but move around.
- She thought cabins might be a better way to go but that if a Gated Car Park could be set up cheaply it would be worth a trial to see how the needy responded.

'Albert' (former volunteer; long experience in community work)

- He is opposed to Gated Car Park idea due to potential problems, particularly liability; it wouldn't resolve the problem, but could create more problems.

Seaford Housing Action Coalition

- Putting strangers together in a confined space would be asking for trouble. Would have to pay for a security guard; would one guard be enough if a fight broke out?
- If someone was injured could operators or property owner be sued?
- Where would it be situated? Residential neighbours could be expected to object;
- SHAC would be better trying to house people or helping them in other ways.

'Splash': Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre mobile laundry, shower and food service, Rosebud Foreshore.

- After the first two weeks of operation the SPCSIC advised that of the 7 who had come along, 3 had been sleeping in cars.
- SPCSIC is developing a data-base of people coming seeking help. As yet information is broadly-based, with no categories as yet for 'sleeping in car' 'couch surfing' etc.

Figures available for the first six months of 2016 show that some 19.5% of visitors - 248 individual clients - identified their accommodation as 'boarding / lodging (including boarding houses)', 'homeless', or 'living in a caravan park'. Of these, 74 (an average of about three different people a week) stated they were 'homeless'.

Of the 74 'homeless' people, 47 were male and 27 female. Of the 'homeless', 26 were on the Disability Support Pension, 24 on Newstart, 7 on Parenting Payment, and 5 on Youth Allowance. Twelve had no government payment.²⁰

- The RDNS support service to the program said that in her (the nurse's) experience sleeping in cars was often intermittent, maybe over weeks or a month, between more 'permanent' accommodations. One woman was known to drive at nights to the street where she had lived in happier times. In addition to family breakdown, many had mental health or drug abuse issues.

The nurse thought the root cause of the issue was vanishing 'affordable' housing and crisis accommodation. At the most recent Peninsula regional 'Emergency Relief Providers' meeting it was advised that the nearest crisis accommodation is presently Endeavour Hills, with other options at Dandenong and St Kilda. There are some bad and overcrowded rooming houses, and the preferred caravan park accommodation is rapidly disappearing on the Peninsula.²¹ Two that are still available for homeless people are: the Bella Vista on Trumans Road which has also been sold for some holiday development and is in the process of closing down (only 6 of its 40 cabins available); and the Sundowner Willows on Eastbourne Road, which requires photo identification, and a bond, both of which eliminate some homeless people.

DISCUSSION

Housing Affordability and Homelessness in Frankston

Homelessness and affordable housing are significant problems in the Frankston area. The scope of these issues is only beginning to be understood.

²⁰ Email, R Coughlin to D Moloney, 17th October 2016.

²¹ As SHAC is aware through the Seaford Beach Cabin Park. They include seaside holiday parks now used for permanent low-income accommodation. The sites are unusually large and well-located and in demand for higher return uses, eg apartments, nursing homes.

Anecdotally we are all aware that the prices of both houses and rental accommodation have soared. When it is difficult for many employed people to find independent accommodation, those on the edges fare very badly. As prospective homeowners unable to purchase in the heated property market remain as renters, vulnerable low-income earners are forced further down the property ladder, sometimes into homelessness.

The decreasing affordability of Frankston's housing is intensified by the relative vulnerability of the municipality's population, which has a high proportion of low-income earners, and approximately 25% of people dependent on pensions and benefits.

Some glimpses into the situation:

- In the ten years between 2001 and 2010 the percentage of 'affordable' rental housing in the City of Frankston plummeted from approximately 70% to approximately 20%.²²
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census figures showed a 35% increase in 'homelessness' in the Frankston electorate between 2006 and 2011. In the 2011 census 360 people were 'homeless' in Frankston. (While most of these did have a roof of some sort over their head, they were without a home.) Local welfare agency Community Services Frankston expects that the 2016 census will show a big increase in this number.
- Among the growing 'cohorts' of Frankston homeless are mothers with children, and older people.
- We understand that Dunkley is currently the sixth highest Centrelink district in Victoria for issuing extension payments for homelessness.
- In 2010 mortgage repayments for houses were 49% of the average annual household income in the municipality, and 40% for rental accommodation.²³ Housing in the City of Frankston is becoming less affordable.
- ABS analysis shows that 31% of Frankston tenants are experiencing 'rent stress', wherein a high percentage of their income is consumed by rent. The Council to Homeless Persons describes this situation as 'causing stress, anxiety and contributing to family breakdown'.²⁴
- Some of those evicted as a consequence of being unable to meet rental payments will seek public housing. Yet despite steadily increasing population and a growing public housing waiting list in the Frankston area (1979 people in 2011), the number of public housing units in the area is stagnant (perhaps even in decline).
- In 2014 there were 30 registered Rooming Houses in Frankston, and an estimated 30 more operating without registration.
- The 2013 annual report of Community Support Frankston tells that there were 6000 calls on its emergency relief program in 2013, which included a 35% increase from people living in caravans, and a 55% increase from people living in shared accommodation (rooming houses). The 2015 annual report shows that the three big needs of visitors seeking assistance related to health, income, and accommodation.

²² *ibid*, pp.29-30

²³ City of Frankston Housing Strategy, Final Report, 2013, p.74

²⁴ Council to Homeless Persons, 'Low income families crushed by rent in outer suburbs', 8th October 2014

- The range of affordable housing types in the municipality – public housing, social housing, rooming houses and caravan parks – 'are generally operating at capacity.'²⁵
- The large tracts of land occupied by caravan parks in urban areas are valuable, and presently under pressure nationally for redevelopment as aged-care and higher value accommodation. In Frankston 'many' caravan parks have recently been purchased for residential development. In 2013 it was reported that between 619-743 persons were permanently housed in Frankston caravan parks.²⁶ We know of numerous large parks that have recently been or will soon be closed in the Frankston area.²⁷
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to find emergency accommodation for those seeking help. The only crisis housing options in Frankston now appear to be the Beach Motor Inn, rooming houses (some of which are unsuitable), and the Log Cabin caravan park at Langwarrin. Otherwise the nearest 'supported' crisis accommodation is run by the Hanover Centre at Dandenong. Also further afield are caravan parks at Dandenong (Shawlands) and Rosebud (Sundowner Willows).

Reasons for Sleeping Rough

Information (not conclusive) suggests that there are more people sleeping in cars in beach and poorer suburbs such as Frankston, Seaford, and Dandenong. Reasons people sleep in their cars, or sleep rough, include:

- Lack of affordable accommodation, including rental accommodation. This has increased greatly over past decade.
- The poor reputation of Rooming Houses in terms of safety.
- Impossibility of finding rental accommodation without a job, or employment record, or letters of references and credit rating.
- Council for Homeless Persons reports plummeting percentage of affordable rental housing over last ten years (eg in Ballarat, from 80% to 25%)
- Associated increase in rent, which is beyond most people on welfare (Newstart or Youth Allowance).
- Public Housing sold off over previous decades. It is now grossly insufficient and those eligible for public housing are confronted with impossibly long waiting lists for all but most urgent cases (primarily domestic abuse victims, but probably also women with children).²⁸
- Some public housing in poor condition is being left vacant for long periods, and in the meantime is being trashed (Ballarat)
- Indifference and lack of compassion in the community (eg offering spare blankets, jackets, accommodation)

²⁵ Frankston Housing Strategy, *op cit*, p.74

²⁶ *ibid*, p.82

²⁷ *ibid*, p.82; Karren Walker, Southern Housing & Support Services Network, 5/12/2013;

²⁸ One SHAC member was told six years ago that the waiting time for public housing was 25-30 years; more recently she has been told that the wait is now 'indefinite'. In the past four years she has twice had to complete a renewal of her application, in default of which she would have been removed from the waiting list. A letter accompanying the renewal form advised that public waiting lists had been closed and no new applications would be accepted. Such reports suggest that authorities no longer want people on the public housing waiting list.

- Circumstances of the people themselves, including:
 - Unemployment or under-employment
 - Marriage or relationship break-up
 - Physical health problems or disability (including unexpected injury preventing work)
 - Domestic violence
 - Mental health problems (including unexpected breakdown, or depression, chronic anxiety)
 - Dependency on alcohol or drugs
 - Financial management difficulties (eg unexpected tax bill, gambling problem, generally poor money skills)
- Also:
- The working poor, and single income families
 - Older women retiring without adequate funds

Attitudes of the Welfare, Health and Housing Sectors to a Gated Car Park

- Most welfare professionals don't favour volunteer Gated Car Parks on the grounds that it is not a solution to the problem, and because of potential security problems. Some think that if support services could be obtained as part of the project it would be worth a trial.
- The trend in the welfare/homelessness sector appears to be towards supported services and supported residences. However it is evident that homeless services and accommodation are already insufficient to cope with demand, and that many people are obliged to sleep rough.²⁹

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

We realised from the outset that not everyone would support the idea, including those in the welfare and housing sectors, as it is not a permanent or tidy solution to homelessness.

Our original proposal was simply for a safe place with basic amenities. We had given no thought to possibilities for professional services to help people into work or accommodation, or social integration or rehabilitation, although this survey suggests that such services might well be a necessary part of any successful initiative.

During our investigations we also considered potential difficulties around security (eg, mixing stressed or troubled people together, mixing men and women), and alternative

²⁹ A housing sector expert on ABC 774 Radio program on homelessness (11 am – midday, 20th July 2016) responded to the phone call of a Hastings man living in his car because of family breakdown, advising him simply that he 'didn't need to live in his car', and should ring 1800 825 955 to be informed of his closest homelessness service. I rang that number (the St Kilda Crisis Centre) and was referred to SalvoCare Eastern, which is the government sanctioned 'Housing Entry Point' for the Frankston - Mornington Peninsula region. It is well known that there is no crisis accommodation in this region, although SalvoCare works to find suitable accommodation outside this region (eg the city, or Dandenong) if these are options for individuals.

possible options (eg mobile 'gated' car parks, mobile sleeping/washing/showering facilities). Some of these are noted below.

Other Possible Secure Parking Arrangements

Non-Gated Car Parks.

- The Our Backyard scheme relies for security on the establishment of facilities, secrecy regarding its location, and, at night, the 'safety in numbers' of those sleeping in their cars.
- The success of this model suggests a big increase the number of potential Gated Car Park sites in the Frankston area, as fencing and gating would not be required.

Safe Car Parks with Services

- This was the original Our Backyard model. It is also the one strongly favoured by social workers.
- It would require teaming up with a professional service provider (eg RDNS, or SalvoCare) or other funded community groups. This would presumably ease the passage of the proposal through regulatory authorities, and also provide access to funding and grants.

Changing Gated Car Park locations.

- Different Safe Spots/Gated Car Parks might be rotated regularly, with only people who live in their cars knowing the location of the current Safe Spot. This would reduce victimisation and assaults.
- Police would hopefully be happy to know where the homeless were and agreeable to not moving them on if they were parked in a Safe Spot.
- It would also share the load on the community or local/parish churches, which would be asked to volunteer to provide and manage the facilities, provide sandwiches etc.
- Such a scheme might lead to the donation of a Gated Car Park or property and/or facilities that were more permanent;

Mobile Services for the Homeless

Another alternative to the proposed Gated Car Park would be provision of mobile services. These would be similar in terms of practical support.

In the last two years three initiatives for people sleeping rough have been developed in Australia:

- 'Orange Sky Laundry': Clothes Washing. In late 2014 young Brisbane friends Lucas Patchett and Nicholas Marchesi, who had spent many hours meeting homeless as part of a secondary school program, noticed the dirty clothes that had been discarded in parks. They initiated, with their own money, a mobile clothes-washing service to homeless people. Many similar vans have now been built and operated by volunteers of the not-for-profit charity, which is run purely by sponsors and donors.

It has been very successful, not least for the convivial chats and coffees that are part of the process.³⁰

- 'One Voice': Showering. In 2014 another young man, Josh Wilkins, launched a pilot mobile shower for homeless people opposite Crown Casino in Melbourne. The success of this led to partnerships with organisations, and a world first, a Mobile Shower Bus. The full-size bus has two private shower cubicles, and a consulting room for health checks. One Voice states that there is a 'genuine and overwhelming need for access to safe and clean shower facilities.' In 2015 email contact with Josh revealed he had been showcasing the bus in Frankston, and met with Council. He advised that many groups were interested in working with One Voice, and that the first move locally would be to team up with the RDNS.
- 'SleepBus'. Once homeless himself, businessman Simon Rowe has attracted money from the corporate sector and crowdfunding, and skills from tradesmen, to convert a bus with multiple secure sleep pods, pet kennels, lockers, toilets, and an overnight caretaker. A 90 day trial in Melbourne was scheduled to begin 1st June. The bus is said to be a world first. If successful he envisages individuals and communities getting together to provide more of the (expensive) buses (apparently 319 buses that would house the 6,314 people sleeping rough around Australia).³¹
- 'Project Homeless.'

Local businessman and manager of Seaford Beach Cabin Park Michael Hibbert has recently proposed to SHAC the idea of a van or trailer fitted out to provide mobile showers and/or clothes washing, some food/refreshments, as well as a virtual post office (an internet computer facility) for homeless. The van could be moved around the car parks as well as bushland known to be frequented by the homeless. Michael considers that local businesses might provide a customised trailer for the purpose. It would require links with business people and a business plan, volunteers, and possibly, partnership with other professional welfare services.

- *SPLASH (Southern Peninsula Laundry and Shower).*

A similar idea has recently been initiated by the Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre:

- The Rosebud-Rye section of the foreshore in particular attracts people sleeping in their cars because of its camping facilities and nearby community services (eg free weekday meals provided by Rosebud 'Vinnies Kitchen', Salvos Breakfast and 'Mary's Van'). After consulting with local welfare and housing groups it was estimated that about 30 people sleep rough in that strip every night.
- The service operates 12 – 4 pm every Thursday, on the foreshore opposite Third Avenue Rosebud. It provides shower, laundry, a basic lunch (soup & rolls at present, probably barbeque over warmer months), as well as all-day tea/coffee. A marquee, tables and chairs, and electric heating are provided. A power-point is provided for charging batteries. The Royal District Nursing Service attends on alternate weeks to connect people with health services.

³⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21/5/2016 'Two of us: Lucas Patchett and Nicholas Marchesi'; also: <http://www.caspa.edu.au/blog/young-australians-of-the-year-began-their-ministry-at-brisbane-catholic-college>

³¹ <http://www.sleepbus.org>; *The Age*, 22/4/2016, 'Former homeless man raises \$58,000 to buy a 'Sleep Bus'; <https://www.gofundme.com/sleepbus>; <http://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2016/03/melbourne-entrepreneur-to-launch-sleepbus/>

- SPCSIC is a long-established service-provider, and also has the unique advantage of being able to capitalise on existing foreshore camping facilities. Advocacy by Mornington Peninsula Youth Services has resulted in support from Mornington Council, enabling access to the camping ground showers, washing facilities and power.
- At its first opening on 7th July five people attended. Upon opening it had been expected that word of mouth and community promotion might see it attract 10-15 people, 20 maximum. Just three months later it is regularly attracting 8 people on average (minimum 4, maximum 12). Community service agencies are now promoting it, and knowledge of it is growing amongst the homeless (some of whom are presently coming for an initial 'look').
- It is estimated that about 90% of those who attend are sleeping rough, on the foreshore, in their cars, or in a hidden caravan. At present most are older men. Some stay all afternoon. About three quarters are regulars; some come for a few weeks, and return again later; some come once only (a few have reported back that their circumstances have improved). Some men known to be living on the foreshore do not engage with the service at all.
- Conducted in conjunction with Mornington Shire Youth Services, SPLASH attracts a few younger people. These tend to be in a crisis (dispute with family) or recently moved to the area.
- The laundry attracts all age groups; perhaps 2-3 use it each Thursday. A few of these have been local older women who come down in winter to use the dryer, and enjoy soup and a chat to relieve their isolation. Only one camping-ground washing machine and dryer is available at present, and they are slow. The volunteer-run Orange Sky service has been invited to complement this facility. It recently ran a 6-week trial service at Rosebud, but its resources are stretched at present.
- Others, mostly men, come for a shower and shave. A few younger women (accompanied by partners) also come for a shower.
- Some come to recharge mobile phones and shavers on the power-point that is made available.
- Some have been connected to local services. The RDNS attends on alternate weeks. A few who have attended SPLASH have gone on to visit, for the first time, the nearby SPCSIC Centre at Rosebud for personal assistance with other issues. SPLASH is canvassing other agencies for advice, or possible involvement in the scheme.
- Some of those who attend are known to have occasional outings (bus travel) to the Frankston area, where they have options regarding meal services, or short-stays with friends.
- There are different 'demographics' at play in the area. The Vinnies evening meal, and laundry service (as yet little promoted and patronised), mainly attracts men in 35-60 age group. The local Salvos breakfast attracts a broader demographic that Splash also wishes to serve.
- Splash is being fully resourced by the local community. SPCSIC only has to co-ordinate the input; there are no other costs. Eg the Youth Services provide and set-up the cooking facilities; local businesses provide clean towels, shampoos,

food etc and the 'Work for the Dole' trailers in and sets up the marquees and chairs.

- SPLASH is now convinced of the need for this service. However it is very unusual amongst providers of similar services in its outdoor, makeshift nature.
- It is anticipated that the service will have to close when the summer campers arrive; it is hoped that this would only be for four weeks. Options being considered include the Orange Sky laundry service, and perhaps the use of a local football club's showers over this period.

'Buildings' rather than 'Mobile Services'

- Another proposal is that a Council (or perhaps welfare agency or church) building might be a better solution than mobile services, as:
 - It would provide more comfort and relaxation for people, with space, electricity, water, sewerage, gas, phone, internet, television.
 - Mobile phones and other devices could be charged, and perhaps computer internet access provided.
 - It could provide locker storage to secure personal items.
 - It might provide people with an address (on their CentreLink card).
- Potential difficulties: would require staff as well as premises (and maintenance); might be seen as a 'homeless shelter', which have a poor reputation in some homeless quarters.
- It is possible that schools (under the State Government's new 'Shared Facilities' program) might make their hall (which usually incorporate toilets and kitchens) or perhaps sporting facilities (which might also include showers) available for overnight accommodation.
- Alternatively, these could be drop-in centres at staffed Council Community Centres, where people could relax and get access refreshments, power for charging phones, internet etc. Until recently Frankston has had two vital church-run drop-in centres (St Pauls, and CityLife) but both have recently closed due to security and tenancy difficulties.

In response to community concerns Frankston City Council has arranged temporary meal services centres.³² Two of these do in fact utilise Council neighbourhood and service centres (at Frankton North, and Seaford) in a manner not unlike this proposal. Another venue is at the Frankston Community Support, and the other is the Frankston station car park (hosted by Lifegate).

- Sporting club facilities usually include showers as well as toilets and kitchen facilities. On Crown land, and usually built with substantial local government support (such as the new football grandstand and facilities at Frankston Park), a way might be found for these to be utilised for overnight accommodation. Our survey has identified that many homeless already choose to sleep in coaches boxes, players' races etc at football grounds.

³² Until a permanent solution is found

Advocacy on Behalf of People Sleeping Rough

There are numerous alternative tasks that we might undertake to help the local homeless sleeping in their cars. These include advocacy and lobbying. For example:

- for reduction of state and local government restrictions on building housing (granny flats, caravans etc) in backyards;
- against cuts to funding of service providers such as Community Support Frankston;
- for regulations to "put empty houses to better use";³³
- for use of vacant government buildings (civic halls, schools etc) for crisis accommodation;
- for increased Council involvement with low-income housing (including perhaps providing shelters);
- for increased government provision or support of public, social and crisis housing;
- for small housing, perhaps on the cabin park model, or co-operative model;
- for 'inclusive zoning', to ensure a percentage of affordable housing especially in subdivision of former government land;
- improvements to rooming house, tenancy etc regulations;
- provision of homeless shelters.

Education

In addition there is also a strong need to educate the general public, local government, and politicians regarding the extent and need to address homelessness. (Including perhaps, widespread distribution of 'directory' information with services for homeless and at-risk-of-homelessness people.)

CONCLUSIONS

Options for action include:

1. Continuing Investigation.

The evidence we have at present is not conclusive as to either numbers, or the preferences, of those sleeping rough. Further evidence could continue to be obtained from:

- Conversation with those sleeping in cars: their needs, knowledge, and preferences:

³³ Catherine Cashmore, *Speculative Vacancies 8 Report*, Prosper Australia, December 2015; also editorials of some suburban Leader papers (eg Knox, Whittlesea), 1st March 2016

- continuing contact with homeless or at risk of homelessness people at local services, particularly the temporary meal service presently being provided in Seaford on Wednesday nights;
- while our request to go out with Frankston police to meet people was denied, we have prepared a flyer and the police have advised that we could visit known car-parks and make contact ourselves;
- Continuing to monitor numbers seeking crisis accommodation at Seaford Beach Cabin Park, Frankston SalvoCare, Chelsea Holiday Park;
- Dialogue with influential local community groups and agencies, including those who might presently oppose this idea;
- Contact with other groups which may have an interest, eg, Frankston Emergency Relief Providers (FERP), women's groups which address homelessness;
- Conversations with relevant state and local government departments, to gauge their initial views;
- Contact (letters, media etc) with the wider public, including local politicians, would help gauge community interest in assisting people living in their cars. A short description of possible Gated Car Park schemes would need to be prepared as part of this process.

2. Trial of a Gated Car Park

- While present research is inconclusive regarding potential numbers and further research is possible, the information presently available suggests that there would be demand for a Gated Car Park in the Frankston area.
- There is opposition to the idea from some local welfare and housing agency workers. Support from some of these groups would be important in order to proceed.

FERP, which originally received this idea positively, might be able to offer constructive comments or assistance.

- If there is some support in the local welfare, housing, or health sectors, and liability issues can be resolved, and a local venue can be obtained, a trial might be made.

This would need to be as simple as possible, perhaps without security personnel, but with some minimal professional co-ordination, and volunteer involvement.

It would need to operate for a minimum period (say a year) for it to be promoted and become known amongst the homeless.

3. Other Alternatives

- 'Watching Brief'. Keeping a live interest in people sleeping rough in the area, providing moral support, assessing their needs, and working with Council and police regarding the issue of 'moving on' people sleeping in cars.
- 'Mobile Services'. Provision (with others) of mobile services, which offer more than a Gated Car Park, such as clothes washing, showering, food (eg soup van model), although some of these might also be incorporated into a Gated Car Park. Such

mobile facilities have the advantage of servicing all those sleeping rough, rather than only those with cars.

However mobile services would not address the critical safe sleeping issue (unless a SleepBus was provided). Neither would they deliver the evening toilet or kitchen facilities that it might be possible to provide in a Gated Car Park.

Other than providing permanent crisis housing in the Frankston area, the SleepBus is the only option that would provide comfortable, as well as safe, sleeping for homeless people.

Provision of internet access and access to power to charge phones have also been suggested as useful services, and a way might be found to incorporate these services into either a 'Project Homeless' mobile service, or a Gated Car Park.

- 'Advocacy' in support of emergency and social housing, and existing welfare and homeless services.
- 'Education' of public and politicians at all levels regarding the extent of homelessness, affordable housing, needs of homeless, and options for personal compassion.
- 'Small Housing'. With others, investigation of options for low-income housing, either in suburban backyards, or in estates (eg, on the Seaford Beach Cabin Park, or 'Carry On Victoria', or other models). The State government is presently proposing to identify unused land, and provide financial assistance to local community initiatives for affordable social housing. Some of this could perhaps provide crisis accommodation to serve people sleeping rough.
- 'Support of Existing Services'. SHAC members might also personally support 'hands-on' established services, or join with others to support new community services, such as drop-in centres or food pantries. SHAC might also lobby in support of and promote such facilities in the local area.

APPENDIX 1:

SOME RECENT STORIES OF PEOPLE IN HOMELESSNESS OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

These additional stories have been collected recently by SHAC members. While not relating specifically to people sleeping in cars, these stories have been included in order to develop understanding in the community of homeless people. Any names used are not the real names of those involved.

Most stories have been collected over recent months at the Wednesday evening meal service provided at the Seaford Community Centre by the Victorian Government and Frankston City Council after the closure of CityLife Frankston.

One

I went to the city yesterday and met a homeless man. I wasn't more than five minutes out of the train station. I stopped and asked him if he was alright which might sound like a silly question but I wasn't asking about the obvious that he was homeless, but that he was shaking and visibly in distress. He seemed like an intelligent person and tried to tell me his story though it was hard to hear what he was saying, as it was noisy on Elizabeth Street. He told me he had been on the street for two and a half years. He said he had cerebral palsy (he had callipers nearby) and epilepsy. I could see that he had a problem with one of his hands and he had difficulty speaking both emotionally and it also seemed physically.

He said that he had a case worker who had put him on a list for a room but he had to come up with some money upfront which he needed to get as soon as he could otherwise they would give the room to someone else and he would go to the bottom of the list to wait again. He couldn't get Centrelink payments without a room and he couldn't get a room without money from Centrelink.

He said that he had been sleeping in a disabled toilet but a security guard had poured a bucketful of cold water over him and it was only that the toilet had a hand dryer that saved him from freezing. It took him four hours he said to get dry again. He was half crying and at the end of his tether. Able-bodied people were given preference to people with disabilities has been his experience. He looked to be in a bad way physically and in utter despair. I did what little I could for him and left.

Two

I met a young woman at the meal. She opened up that she was living with an abusive father. She had tried to stay at home to help her mother and younger brother but the situation had become so unbearable she felt she had to leave and find accommodation as soon as possible.

I gave her my phone number and asked her to ring me on the Friday as I would seek to get help for her as soon as I got to work on Thursday after the meal.

I contacted Frankston Community Centre and found she was well known there as she had been trying for sometime to get assistance. However up until this encounter she had not been prepared to leave home. Community Services Frankston said they could assist with bond money for her if I could find her accommodation.

Again I contacted Andrew at the Seaford Beach Cabin Park and as the couple I originally had set up the accommodation for had not arrived, the position was open for this young woman.

I called her and left a message. I did not hear from her for a week and then I received a message that she had been in hospital for a week and she had been unable to contact me. I instantly rang her but again it went to message bank so I told her of the accommodation and the bond money and asked her to call me.

Again I have not heard from her since. I am concerned that something may have happened and she is once again obliged to remain at home for her mother and brother's sake. However short of knocking on her door which may or may not lead to further complications for her, I leave a message once a week to see if she will get back to me.

Three

A young man attended the meal with a rucksack. It contained all his worldly goods.

He had come up from Melbourne to attend meals being offered on the Tuesday in Frankston and Chelsea.

I asked him if there was anything I could do for him but he had called ahead to a boarding house in the City as he had acquired enough funds to enable him to stay the night.

After the meal he set off on the train back to Melbourne. He was unhappy that similar accommodation was not available in or around Frankston as if they had he would have stayed there instead of going back to Melbourne.

A point to remember is that the cheapest accommodation in Melbourne is \$30 a night. The other boarding houses range from \$50 to \$60 per night. Without the funds no one can stay. The reason most folk are begging in the City is to raise the required amount to spend a night out of the cold and off the pavement.

Four

An older lady attends the meal regularly. She attends all the meals offered by the State Government through Frankston City Council. She has accommodation but it is private not social housing. Once her rent is paid from her pension she has little else to pay bills and food comes a very bad last in the list of what has to be paid. This week she did not have the money to pay for continence pads and was waiting for her pension to be able to purchase some. I offered to go to the Pharmacy across the road and buy them for her but her pride would not allow it. I was able to give her some toothpaste, soap, hair shampoo and a handkerchief with which she was delighted. It never ceases to amaze me how many things we all take for granted but cannot be taken that way for these folk.

Five

A young man came to the meal. He had accommodation but it was sleeping on the floor of a friend's flat. He was tired and I realised that he had not taken his medication, which may have been due to not having the money to pay for it.

We had been talking for a while and then his conversation became erratic and then he became abusive. It was not him but the lack of medication and that I was not able to tell him exactly where the Friday night meal was being served. He had attended but not found the van giving out hot dogs.

Unfortunately I found out later that the charity had not attended that Friday as they did not have enough volunteers to do the work.

I spoke to some of the older men to see if they knew the young man. Two did and also understood his circumstances. I asked if they would be prepared to look out for him. It was

a delight to hear them just this week speaking in front of the young man and telling us all that they were his mentors. This pleased the young man immensely and you could see the camaraderie was having an effect on this young man's mental attitude.

Six

An elderly man from overseas has lived in Australia for several years but is not entitled to government benefits because he is not a permanent resident. He applied for that years ago and was told that they're only processing about 10 per year. Despite being at risk of homelessness, he has not been prioritized. [People who marry Australian residents get it through in a few months.]

Seven

A man in about his 40's. Has a serious medical condition and other health issues. Was living in the family home until several months ago when a family situation arose and he was forced to leave. Tried to retrieve his possessions but was not able to do so and they have now all been disposed of. Another family member moved their parents to a retirement home, sold the house and kept all the money. He is now destitute and has nothing but the clothes he wears. He said that Legal Aid refused to assist him, as did local police who were also rude and dismissive towards him.

Eight

A woman in about her 60's. A widow for many years, reliant on CityLife for a long time. Shares a private rental home with 2 other people and is currently dealing with a stressful situation at home, where she is bullied and unable to sleep. She said she has nowhere else to go. This has led to mental health issues and possibly risk of suicide ideation. After paying rent and bills she has barely enough money to live on. She said she has been in some terrible situations and seen some terrible things in recent years.

From:
Sent: Friday, 17 March 2017 1:55 PM
To: CoM Meetings
Cc:
Subject: Frontyard submission re proposed Activities (Public Amenity and Security) Local Law 2017
Attachments: Frontyard CoM proposed activities Local Laws 2017.pdf

To the Manager, Governance and Legal, Melbourne City Council,

Please find attached a formal submission from Frontyard Youth Services, providing feedback on the proposed *Activities (Public Amenity and Security) Local Law 2017*.

Should Councillors or Council officers seek further information about the issues raised in this submission, Frontyard would be pleased to assist. I can be contacted via email or mobile

Thank you for considering our feedback.

Intensive Youth Support
Homelessness and Justice Division
Melbourne City Mission



 **Please consider the environment before printing this email**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Melbourne City Mission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our services are located. We honour the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay our respects to all Elders, past and present.



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Manager, Governance and Legal
Melbourne City Council
Via email: com.meetings@melbourne.vic.gov.au

16 March 2017

To the Manager, Governance and Legal

Re proposed Activities (Public Amenity and Security) Local Law 2017

Frontyard Integrated Youth Services is a cornerstone of the Victorian homelessness service system and a 'flagship' service providing multi-disciplinary support to young people experiencing – or at risk of – homelessness in the City of Melbourne.

It comprises a collection of co-located specialist organisations (including lead agency Melbourne City Mission, YouthLaw, the Royal Children's Hospital Young Persons' Health Clinic and Centrelink) which work together in an integrated way to meet the physical, emotional and social needs of young people seeking support.

There are 13 main programs spanning housing information and referral, counselling, family mediation, legal advice, income support and material aid, health (primary health, allied health, mental health) and youth-led advocacy/capacity building. Last year, Frontyard had 7,211 visits from young people, provided 10,272 periods of face-to-face support, and responded to 65,000 phone calls from across Victoria.

A key focus for Frontyard's work is assertive outreach to – and case management for – street-attached young people under the age of 25, who have multiple and complex needs, including:

- a history of abuse, trauma and self-harm.
- extensive periods in the out-of-home care system
- high levels of engagement with the youth justice system
- co-occurring substance abuse, cognitive impairment, and often other disabilities
- high rates of mental illness.

We currently estimate that 50 to 75 young people with these characteristics are experiencing homelessness in Melbourne at any one time, and are ricocheting through the health and justice systems, as well as the homelessness system.

frontyard youth services

19 king street, melbourne, vic 3000

t 03 9611 2411 f 03 9614 3622 w melbournecitymission.org.au

ABN 56 161 846 149

This is a group that Frontyard is particularly concerned would be adversely impacted by the introduction of the new local law. We know that key characteristics of this group are a mistrust of 'the system' and ad hoc engagement with services. Frontyard currently has a team of workers doing street-based assertive outreach to find, engage and connect 'hard to reach' individuals with supports that will not only respond to immediate needs, but work to identify and ameliorate the root causes of their homelessness.

While we know that this is not Council's intentions, we are extremely concerned that an unintended consequence of the proposed new local law would be to undermine this assertive outreach/client-seeking work, and push young people out of the city where they are less visible to the services at Frontyard.

We need to ensure that these young people do not disengage. We know that young people who disengage from services often discharge into dangerous situations, and are likely to be exposed to situations which may increase their trauma and reduce their capacity to exit homelessness.

We also know that many young people who come to Frontyard are in poor financial health, struggling to cover the costs of daily living. Nearly 50 per cent have fines or debts – in some cases, totalling thousands of dollars because they have travelled on public transport without a valid Myki or concession card. Rather than effect behaviour change, these laws are just making it harder for young people to break out of the cycle of homelessness.

For these reasons, we believe a law and order framework is counterproductive. We urge Council not to vote to introduce the new local law, which essentially criminalises homelessness and does not help to end homelessness in the world's most liveable city.

Instead, we would welcome the opportunity to build on the fantastic work Council has already established through the Street Count, Rough Sleepers Service Coordination Project and other Council-community sector partnership activity. We believe that our collective focus must be on boundary-spanning work in which we identify and implement effective service pathways and partnerships across different jurisdictions, as documented in the 'Proposed Framework for Responding to Homelessness in the City of Melbourne', which Justice Connect will be submitting to Council on behalf of an alliance of the City's leading legal, health, homelessness, housing, mental health, and family violence organisations.

Should Councillors or Council officers seek further information about this Proposed Framework – or any other aspects of our submission objecting to the introduction of this new local law – Frontyard services would be pleased to assist. In the first instance, this can be arranged via email u or mobile

Yours sincerely,

Melbourne City Mission
on behalf of all Frontyard services.

frontyard youth services

19 king street, melbourne, vic 3000
t 03 9611 2411 f 03 9614 3622 w melbournecitymission.org.au
ABN 56 161 846 149

From:
Sent: Friday, 17 March 2017 2:36 PM
To: CoM Meetings
Subject: Submission from Freedom from Poverty on the proposed Activities (Public Amenity and Security) Local Law 2017
Attachments: Submission_FreedomfromPoverty_ActivitiesPublicAmenityandSecurityLocalLaw2017_170317.pdf

Submission from Freedom from Poverty on the proposed Activities (Public Amenity and Security) Local Law 2017

To the Manager of Governance and Legal, Melbourne City Council

Attached is our submission from Freedom from Poverty on the proposed Activities (Public Amenity and Security) Local Law 2017. We wish to be heard in support of this submission at the Council Submissions Committee meeting on the 30th of March, and will have one of our people attend to speak on behalf of our group. We also wish to speak at any other opportunities available to the public regarding the Council's work and plans relating to homelessness and poverty.

Please confirm the receipt and inclusion of this formal submission, and advise of any other steps we need to follow in order to be heard by Council in support of our submission. If there are any issues with opening or reading the attached document, please let us know. If you wish to speak with us by phone, you can call me) on

Kind regards

—
Human Rights Activists
Freedom from Poverty
www.freedomfrompoverty.org
hello@freedomfrompoverty.org



Submission on the proposed Activities (Public Amenity and Security) Local Law 2017
Formally submitted by Freedom from Poverty on 17 March 2017

Dear City of Melbourne Councillors

On the 19th of January 2017, the City of Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle proclaimed *"There are cities around the world where they simply bundle homeless people up and ship them out. I'd hate to think that we were ever that sort of city. We need to address the problem, not just do a cosmetic clean up."*

Less than 3 weeks later on the 7th of February, the City of Melbourne Council voted 5-4 to ban people from sleeping rough in the city and granting Council powers to take away their possessions if unattended, with Mayor Doyle and four elected Team Doyle Councillors voting in favour of these amended bylaws.

We are a group called Freedom from Poverty and we write to you today calling for #NoHomelessBan in Melbourne.

Bullying homeless people out of the CBD is not "assertive outreach". We have a serious problem, and it's not those sleeping rough. These actions to criminalise people facing homelessness have failed the people of Melbourne. They've failed the people suffering in our streets. They've failed everyone who might ever find themselves facing poverty in this city. They've failed the hundreds who have protested and spoken out against the ban, and while the voices of powerful interests have driven these bylaws, it seems like the people are being ignored, with the Council only taking "submissions" from the public with no promise of action.

Well, we don't just submit. We demand.

We demand that the Council reverse these bylaws that criminalise people for being homeless.

We demand that Lord Mayor Robert Doyle either step up and protect his people or step aside and resign.

No more band-aids and bans – we demand housing for all. Another winter is coming and failure to act guarantees more human suffering.

The City of Melbourne Council must work with State and Federal Parliaments to:

1. Stop the attacks – both policy and political
2. Provide emergency funding – guarantee safe housing and universal services
3. Fix our safety nets – they must be liveable, accessible and unconditional
4. Make a national plan to end poverty – with the people, not just for the people
5. Protect our universal human rights – make them legal rights in Australia

We wish to be heard in support of this submission at the Council Submissions Committee meeting on the 30th of March, and will have one of our people attend to speak on behalf of Freedom from Poverty.

Below are the names of people across Australia who have signed in support of these collective demands and this submission. Surnames have been excluded to protect their privacy.

Kate (Sunbury, Victoria)
Duncan (Geelong, Victoria)
Dave (Parramatta, NSW)
Kirni
Katy
Bill
Lizzy (Victoria)
Winnie
Shannen (Parkdale, Victoria)
Maria (Victoria)
Nicolette
Li
Tara
Maddy (Preston, Victoria)
Kimberley (Victoria)
David
James (ACT)
Samira
David
Catherine
Naomi (Preston, Victoria)
Tyler
Rhiannon
Joshua (Carlton, Victoria)
Julia
Sophie
Riley (Victoria)
Brett
Vinay

Kelly
Erik
Cheryl (Essendon, Victoria)
Beck
Suzanne
Marian
Annette
Bridget (Shepparton, Victoria)
Alex
Mitchell
Oliver
Jazz
Pm
Leah
Ian
Julia (Balwyn, Victoria)
Elliot
Monica
Keir (Fitzroy North, Victoria)
Preethi
Kiara
Erin (Emu Heights, NSW)
Geoff (Gisborne, Victoria)
Mel (Tweed Heads, NSW)
Lachlan (Princes Hill, Victoria)
Rochelle (Coburg North, Victoria)
Sarah
Skye (Seddon, Victoria)
Bronwyn (Coleraine, Victoria)
Karrie (Victoria)
Sarah
David (Dianella, WA)
Luigia (Smithfield, Queensland)
Flick (Victoria)
Melissa (Victoria)
Gary
Daniel (Hamilton, Victoria)
Joshua
Kim (Ballarat, Victoria)
Susannah (Melbourne, Victoria)
Ellen
Karen
Jennifer

Jo-Anne
Margaret (Kensington, Melbourne, Victoria)
Linda
Gwynnyth
Michelle
R. A. (Port Augusta, South Australia)
Roz (Hawthorn East, Victoria)
Alice
Michelle (Adelaide, South Australia)
Jilly
Jo (Kew, Victoria)
Kirke
Leni
Sue
Seth
Annabeth
Tim (Moyhu, Victoria)
Jasmin
D. L. (Strathmore, Victoria)
Toneka
Sarah
Sandra
Corey
Ruby
Justine (Upwey, Victoria)
Christine (West End, Queensland)
Georgia
Sasha
Madeleine
Christy
Suzanne
Shirley (Upwey, Victoria)
Claire
Mikhala
D. S.
Anthony
Ben
Anna
Monique (Victoria)
Louisa (Brunswick, Victoria)
Alden
Oliver (Preston, Victoria)
Tayla (Melbourne, Victoria)

Ilona
Paddy
Cora
Kara
Camilla
Christi
Benjamin (Preston, Victoria)
Karen
Lee (Hadfield, Victoria)
Adrian (Victoria)
Daniel (Frankston South, Victoria)
Natalya
Janet (Wagga Wagga, NSW)
Elise (Parramatta, NSW)

In addition to signing their name to these collective demands, many people added their own statements, which we have included below, unfiltered and uncensored. We acknowledge that some Councillors may find these comments offensive, but we believe these statements should go on public record to show the anger and frustration felt when the human rights of our most vulnerable people are violated.

"Address the real issue and treat homeless people with respect. Bullying them and trying to hide them from society is NOT the answer. I am lucky and thankful that I have never been homeless.. can't even begin to imagine what some people go through."

-

"And I'd lay money down you lot claim to be Christians! Our country is becoming cruel and heartless"

-

"As a citizen of Melbourne it saddens and angers me that we would even consider such an approach toward the homeless people of Melbourne. Please do not pass this legislation as it will only make things tougher for those who are most vulnerable in our community."

-

"Being homeless is punishment enough! Why make it harder for people who literally have run out of options? We have homes to keep our most treasured possessions, and all the crap we don't need. These people are in a position where they have nothing left, nowhere safe for them to go, and you're going to take the rug out from under their feet. When there are others who are less fortunate than us, we should build a longer table, not a taller fence."

-

"Being marginalized by a system that prioritizes the extravagances of the few ahead of the

fundamental human rights of many is heartbreaking. Persecuting those same people is disgusting. We are better than this."

-

"Compassion in society goes a long way"

-

"Criminalising homelessness will do nothing to stop people living on the streets. How about putting the minefield and effort it will take to police this 'project' into providing VIABLE, AFFORDABLE, housing options IN CONSULTATION with people sleeping rough? Just a thought, you know, recognise their humanity."

-

"Denying people a right to being in a public place, especially if they are homeless, is fascist and sick, especially at Flinders St Station, which was the only semi safe place they had"

-

"Everyone is one step away from the potential of unemployment, devastating illness or trauma that leads us into homelessness. HELP find a way to re-institute services for mental health and housing for the people who need it most. DO NOT turn your back on the homeless in Melbourne and in Victoria. Lord Mayor Doyle, you should be working closely with Premier Daniel Andrews to help find a resolution for this travesty of so many people sleeping in the street in our affluent society of Melbourne Victoria Australia.

#letsfindsolutionsthatbenefitallofourcommunities "

-

"Fix the underlying problems, don't hide them. Out of sight out of mind attitude makes us a very unlivable city"

-

"Fuck Robert Doyle."

-

"Homeless need compassion & a safe place not to be made criminals"

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"Homeless people are HUMANS who had a life before they were forced to the street. If they aren't in prison, they don't deserve to have their rights stripped from them. They deserve a second chance at being part of a community! We house & fund refugees. This upsets me too much. What happened to supporting our own?!"

-

"Homelessness a choice??? Now it will be banned and possessions confiscated???...Make more cheaper housing available and stop victimizing the victims...Help them.."

-

"Homelessness is NOT a crime. Council must respect the human rights of 'rough sleepers'. A City of Melbourne councillor stated at the council meeting tonight that the numbers of rough sleepers on Melbourne streets has increased by 78% over the past couple of years. When will we see a comparable increase in public housing availability to enable 'rough sleepers' to sleep and live in a safe environment?"

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"Housing is a human right. Tax the Rich"

-

"Housing is a human right. This ban won't help the situation just make the city look pretty and poverty isn't pretty."

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"I completely agree with these demands and find it appalling and disgusting that this is the approach we are taking with the homeless. Rather than helping or assisting in any way we are simply trying to brush them aside which is not the right way to treat fellow Australians and fellow human beings."

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"It's well past time that governments at all levels stepped in to help those who have fallen victim to the housing crisis rather than continuing to focus on profits from an unsustainable property boom! There needs to be serious investment in quality new public housing projects and no further sales of existing public housing properties. The private rental market has failed Australia's most vulnerable residents; local, state and federal governments need to build more public housing. Scapegoating the most visible victims of the housing crisis is not going to solve homelessness. Time for real solutions not police violence and bans on homelessness!"

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"Leave the homeless alone taking away the only things they have left could push them over the edge."

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"Leave these people alone!"

-

"Meaningful dialogue with the homeless to support them to have long term housing."

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"Melbourne City Council will be responsible for increasing the amount of theft and assault cases when the desperate try to get by, after the council have confiscated their belongings. What a heartless mob of thugs. Sack the lot of them as they don't deserve their jobs"

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"Melbourne has a reputation as the most progressive city in the country. You are destroying it with this cruel act."

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"Pathetic puppets"

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"People do not choose to sleep on the street. They are rough sleepers not by choice, but because they are homeless!! The council should find housing for them instead of demonising them! Where is your duty of care???? We the people demand houses for the homeless! It's the only humane thing to do!!"

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"Please change this, as it is inhumane and utterly distressing. Imagine how you would feel if you were in a homeless (situation) person's shoes."

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"Repeal this criminal legislation immediately"

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"Stop making criminals of vulnerable people. They are already hit rock bottom and to take the last few items they have in this world is disgraceful . Help them don't hurt them! Time to start caring politicians."
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"Stop supporting the rich!"
-
"The homeless need help, not criminalising. Housing is way cheaper than prisons and policing. Shelter and safety are human rights."
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"The people are gathering in the city for safety in numbers. If you're going to ban them you need to find them all a home. It's not illegal to be homeless."
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"The proposed changes are nonsensical and inhumane and do not reflect the desires of the people of Melbourne."
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"There has got to be a better way to deal with a social issue - homelessness is not, nor should it ever be, a criminal issue."
-
"These are people who've had a rougher time then you can probably even imagine in most cases! Have a little compassion and help them in their time of need. They're not vermin, they're humans!"
-
"These laws criminalise some of the most vulnerable people in our city, and rather than fixing the problem, they aim to sweep it under the rug."
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"This action is callous and inhumane. I will never want to go to VIC and support such a barbaric state."
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"This is a crisis. Please assist the homeless not harass and criminalise them."
-
"This is absolute garbage, you people are absolutely BARBARIC. Housing not punishment!"
-
"This is disgraceful to treat people like this. We demand that you reverse your cruel bylaw and address the real issues of homelessness. Shame on you Melbourne. Shame on the council."
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"This is disgusting."
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"This law is bullshit"
-
"This will not stand!"
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"Those life long pensions of politicians/CEOs/Property Developers etc...must be shamed with this absurd attack on those in crisis/homeless"

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"What a disgusting thing to do. Melbourne should be ashamed of this."

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"What are you trying to achieve. These people have so very little. What more are trying to take from them. They will die with no protection whatsoever. Maybe this is your goal. Let's kill off the problem. At least you streets will "look beautiful. You are an absolute disgrace with no social or moral conscience."

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"With skyrocketing rents there will be more and more homeless people. Be part of the solution, stop being part of the problem....."

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"You heartless bastards."

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"You rich greedy heartless bastards....the homeless aren't the issue you and your psychopathy is....now stop we see you...houses for the homeless and hopefully a one way ticket outta town for the parasite councilors...grow a heart and some compassion- your bottom line is sunk in the filthiest mud and you will have to pay the piper for your hatred of the vulnerable..."

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"Today I am ashamed to be part of this city. When the council, mayor, media and police pursue political campaigns to demonise our city's unhoused people, we see people bashed, robbed and murdered on our streets. You are failing the people of Melbourne and the blood is on your hands. The United Nations have condemned you. Australians have condemned you. The people of Melbourne have condemned you for your heartless, cold and callous actions. You have the power to change all of this... to continue down this path will guarantee that your legacy is one of cruelty, apathy and abuse of your most vulnerable citizens. This city belongs to it's people - not you."

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"Human rights are not optional. They are not there for Governments to pick and choose as we please. Yet these proposed bylaws violate the human rights of vulnerable people at a time when we need to be tackling the poverty crisis that drives them to sleeping rough. Safe, long term accommodation is not available to all who need it, and trying to push people into (at best) insecure or unaffordable short-term accommodation succeeds only in taking them away from the safety and networks they have found with others who share their experiences seeking refuge in our streets. Please, work with us to figure out a way to end this crisis. If you're willing, we'll stand side by side with you for our human rights, taking this to the steps of Victorian Parliament and all the way to Canberra - but this has to start with #NoHomelessBan."

Councillors, it is clear that people are angry and frustrated at these proposed bylaws. We understand that coping the brunt of those frustrations may not be pleasant for you, but the most vulnerable in our society are coping the brunt of constant public attacks and proposed bylaws that ban them from our streets and limit them to owning only possessions that they can carry with them. The unpleasantness you may be feeling right now is nowhere near the unpleasantness of having nowhere safe to sleep tonight.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha, released a public statement to say this about the proposed bylaws: "The criminalization of homelessness is deeply concerning and violates international human rights law. It's bad enough that homeless people are being swept off the streets by city officials. The proposed law goes further and is discriminatory – stopping people from engaging in life sustaining activities, and penalizing them because they are poor and have no place to live."

We understand that you would rather see people sleeping in homes than on the streets, but the reality is that there isn't enough safe, long term housing available to everyone who needs it, and our social safety nets are broken. We can't fix this crisis by making life even harder for people. We fix it by working together on a local, state and federal level - politicians and the people coming together to figure out a path to making freedom from poverty a reality for all. This is bigger than one council. This is bigger than Melbourne. This is about how we as a society treat our fellow human beings and their human rights, and the world is watching - so what are you going to do next?

Sincerely

Human Rights Activists

Freedom from Poverty

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