



# DISTRICT 5 NEWS

FROM COUNCILWOMAN **AMANDA SAWYER**

Denver City Council

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## Neighborhood Update

### Camping Ban FAQs

Dear Neighbors,

Recently, our office has received a number of inquiries regarding homelessness and the City's Camping Ban. We have put together the following FAQs to share with the community. Please feel free to be in touch with questions or concerns about this issue or any other that we might be able to assist with.

Gratefully,

Councilwoman Amanda Sawyer, District 5

#### **When did Denver's Unauthorized Camping Ordinance start?**

The City Council approved Denver's prohibition on camping in 2012. In 2019, by a margin of 81% to 19%, voters rejected Initiative 300, which would have repealed the camping ban.

#### **What does the Unauthorized Camping Ordinance do?**

Section 38-36.2 of the Denver Revised Municipal Code prohibits people from camping on public or private property except with the express consent of the owner or agency. This includes public “right-of-way” such as sidewalks, tree lawns or open space, and private property owned by homeowners’ associations. Camping is also prohibited in City parks under a separate section of City code.

### **Is the City’s camping ban illegal?**

While there have been several legal challenges to the ordinance, the Ordinance continues to be upheld. The City’s approach to camping calls for:

- Multiple efforts to connect those who are camping and may be experiencing homelessness with services and shelter
- Sufficient shelter space (hundreds of beds are available every night)
- Free locker and storage space for people’s belongings for up to 60 days
- 7-days’ notice in the event a large encampment must be addressed due to public health or safety risks

### **How has the City improved services for people experiencing homelessness?**

With a citywide homeless population of 4,000 people, including 1,000 living unsheltered on our streets, Mayor Hancock created the Department of Housing Stability (HOST) in 2019 to oversee, enhance and expand all sheltering and housing needs in Denver:

- Denver’s shelter system now operates on a 24/7/365 basis, allowing maximum flexibility for guests to come and go as needed
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City and its nonprofit partners increased shelter capacity by 60%, in part by securing 800 hotel and motel rooms, to allow for social distancing
- In May, the City opened a 46-bed crisis-stabilization center for people experiencing a behavioral-health emergency, including our unhoused neighbors
- In June, the City will be opening a new homeless shelter capable of serving hundreds of guests
- The City is in the process of purchasing a 95-room motel to serve initially as a homeless shelter and ultimately as supportive housing
- In 2020, the City launched a new alternative-response program called Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) to provide non-police aid to unhoused residents
- The City has invested tens of millions of dollars in new affordable housing projects, many of which prioritize the highest-need population of residents

### **What are Safe Outdoor Spaces and why are they allowed?**

Currently, two City-approved Safe Outdoor Spaces are operating on private property in Denver. A nonprofit organization, the Colorado Village Collaborative, manages the sites and provides supportive services to the residents of the sites. There are currently no SOS sites on City-owned property.

### **What should I do if an unhoused resident is camping on property I own?**

You can choose to allow that person to stay, or you can ask them to leave. If they refuse to leave, please contact the City by calling 3-1-1. The Denver Police Department (DPD) will ask you to sign paperwork acknowledging that the unhoused resident is trespassing on your property. You must sign this paperwork or DPD cannot take any action.

### **How do I report an encampment?**

The best way to report an encampment is to call 3-1-1.

### **What happens when I report an encampment to 3-1-1?**

The information is relayed from 3-1-1 to outreach, engagement and enforcement teams to respond. They will visit the site to offer support, services and alternative sheltering and housing options. Services offered include medical care, mental-health and substance-misuse treatment, SNAP benefits, voluntary and free property storage, and connections to case managers. Other City agencies will also visit the site to determine if there are any public health or safety risks posed by encampment conditions and steps will be taken to clean the area if deemed necessary.

### **What if I need to report a life-threatening emergency or a crime in progress such as drug dealing?**

As always, please call 9-1-1.

### **Does Denver have enough shelter and hotel beds?**

Every night, Denver has hundreds of available beds to serve people experiencing homelessness. However, there are many reasons why people living unsheltered on our streets do not access our shelters or hotel rooms. Denver is working hard to expand its sheltering offerings and reduce the number of people living outdoors.



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